



KADİR HAS UNIVERSITY
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES
COMMUNICATION STUDIES

**MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE REPRESENTATION OF
MUSLIM WOMEN**

**HOW IT INFLUENCES THE SELF-REPRESENTATIONS OF YOUNG MUSLIM
WOMEN IN ISTANBUL AND BREMEN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY**

SIRIN DUREIDI

SUPERVISOR: PROF. DR. ASKER KARTARI

MASTER'S THESIS

ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 2020

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Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Kadir Has University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master's in the Discipline Area of Communication Studies under the Double Degree Program of Intercultural/Transcultural Communication.

ISTANBUL, SEPTEMBER 2020

I, SIRIN DUREIDI;

Hereby declare that this Master's Thesis is my own original work and that due references have been appropriately provided on all supporting literature and resources.

Sirin Dureidi

A small, square, pixelated image of a handwritten signature in black ink on a white background. The signature is stylized and appears to be the name 'Sirin Dureidi'.

SEPTEMBER 1, 2020

ACCEPTANCE AND APPROVAL

This work entitled **MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE REPRESENTATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN** prepared by **SIRIN DUREIDI** has been judged to be successful at the defense exam held on **1st of September** and accepted by our jury as a **MASTER'S THESIS**.

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I certify that the above signatures belong to the faculty members named above.

SIGNATURE:

Dean
School of Graduate Studies

DATE OF APPROVAL:



“Against the Current”

**Güneş Terkol
2013**

Photographed by Sirin Dureidi as found in Istanbul Museum of Modern Art, this inspirational embroidery artwork was created at a workshop the Turkish artist organized together with women on Women’s Day at the Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna. It portrays women in black, ironically symbolizing dress codes while holding banners at a protest about a variety of subjects such as feminism, women’s rights, and inequalities in the world of business. A closer look at the banners reveals the struggles of women who persevere in defending their rights despite problems, injustices, and hardships.

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ABSTRACT

DUREIDI; SIRIN. *MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE REPRESENTATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN*, MASTER'S THESIS, Istanbul, 2020.

Since the turn of the century, Muslim women have been represented negatively in Western notions, as one and the same; a diverse womankind reduced to one universal image: oppressed victims who need to be saved from their religion and culture. On one hand, this thesis shows how this unfairly simplified image has a complex consequence for how Muslim women are perceived in German society and how it terrorizes their sense of belonging and influences their self-representations. On the other hand, it aims to compare that to how Muslim women in Turkey represent themselves. However, this thesis is not about headscarves and national intolerance; it is about how young Muslim women are shattering stereotypes and redefining their place in society through deconstructing notions of feminism, womanhood, religion and culture. This ethnographic research is done through the lens of young Muslim women with different cultural and religious identities, and based on data from a two semester field research conducted in Bremen and Istanbul. The theoretical framework is based on the foundations of cultural, religious and feminist anthropology. The empirical research allows these young women in both cities to voice their experiences and narrate their own realities.

Keywords: representation, multiculturalism, religiosity, individualization, saviour behaviour.

ÖZET

DUREIDI; SIRIN. *MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE REPRESENTATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN*, MASTER'S THESIS, Istanbul, 2020.

Yeni yüzyılın başından itibaren müslüman kadınlar batı uluslarında olumsuz bir şekilde ve tek tip olarak temsil edilmiştir. Çok çeşitli olan bu kadın topluluğu, tek tip bir evrensel imaja indirgenmiştir: Dininden ve kültüründen kurtarılması gereken, ezilen mağdurlar. Bu tez, bir yandan haksız şekilde basitleştirilmiş bu görüntünün, Müslüman kadınların Alman toplumunda nasıl algılandığı, aidiyet duygularının nasıl terörize edildiği ve kendilerini temsil etmelerini nasıl etkilediği konusunda kompleks sonuçlara sahip olduğunu göstermektedir. Diğer yandan ise, Türkiye'deki Müslüman kadınların kendilerini nasıl temsil ettiklerini karşılaştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Ancak bu tez, başörtüsü ve ulusal hoşgörüsüzlükle ilgili değil; genç Müslüman kadınların feminizm, kadınlık, din ve kültür kavramlarını yapılandırarak klişe yargıları parçalayıp toplumdaki yerlerini nasıl yeniden tanımladıklarıyla ilgilidir. Bu araştırma, farklı kültürel ve dini kimliklere sahip olan genç Müslüman kadınların objektifinden hazırlanmış ve Bremen ve İstanbul'da yapılan iki dönemlik bir alan araştırmasından elde edilen verilere dayanmaktadır. Teorik çerçeve ise kültürel, dini ve feminist antropolojinin temellerine dayandırılmıştır. Bu deneysel araştırma, her iki şehirdeki bu genç kadınların deneyimlerini dile getirmelerine ve kendi gerçekliklerini anlatmalarına olanak sağlıyor.

Anahtar Sözcükler: temsil, çokkültürcülük, dindarlık, kurtarıcı davranış.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Having lived in various multiethnic, multicultural and multireligious societies, I have observed how the diversity enriches society on one hand, but leads to conflicts on the other, which awoke my interest in studying cultures and religions. Soon realizing the shameful narrative representing Muslim women in Germany, I have taken it upon myself to rewrite this narrative. German, among other Western notions, claim there is a “clash” of civilizations or cultures, an unbridgeable chasm between the West and the “Rest” — “cultures in which first ladies give speeches versus others in which women shuffle around silently in burqas”. (c. Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 32) The expository tenets of this narrative are “that Islam was innately and immutably oppressive to women, that the veil and segregation epitomized the fundamental reasons for the general and comprehensive backwardness of Islamic societies”. (Kahf, 2002, p. 1) The core narrative and common axis undergirding a wide variety of Western representations whittled to one sentence is that the Muslim woman is an “oppressed victim”. She may be a willing accomplice, or she may be escaping her victimization, but she “is victimized nonetheless”. (ibid.)

As Edward Said argues, Islam, purely the religion, defines a small proportion of what actually takes place in “the Islamic world”, which numbers a billion people, and includes dozens of countries, societies, traditions and languages, making it simply false and ignorant to trace every aspect of its culture back to Islam. It is an unacceptable and irresponsible generalization that would never be used for any other religious, cultural, or demographic group on earth. (Said, 1997, p. xvi)

What we expect from the serious study of Western societies, with its complex theories, enormously variegated analyses of social structures, histories, cultural formations, and sophisticated languages of investigation, we should also expect from the study and discussion of Islamic societies in the West (ibid.).

The reason why I focus on women in this research is because Western notions of the lives of women in Muslim societies is far hazier and even more coloured by stereotypes than those of Muslim men. (El Solh, 1994) Although numerous scholars have problematized issues of representation affecting women with an Islamic background, little attention has been paid to their responses to the matter. This discrepancy in scholarly attention is remarkable, especially since scholars and activists have for a long time criticized the lack

of voice given to these women. The real problem is that while Western representations circulate about how Muslim women need to be saved from their religion, culture and male counterparts, what they really need to be saved of is this exact Western narration, as it is indeed the most victimizing. While I do not deny that there are many Muslim women that are oppressed, my criticism lies in the generalization of this stigma on all women with an Islamic background, despite their geographical, ethnic, cultural, educational, economic, social and religious differences. In religiousness itself, Muslim women may believe in the same God, but they vary in their sectors, beliefs, values, levels of religiosity and identification with Islam.

Because a load of the research focuses on second and third generation Muslim women in Germany, meaning they grew up as at least bicultural, I study multiculturalism and religiosity as two out of many levels on which they need to be individualized. As the matters of representation, multiculturalism and religiosity have been discussed often already, I started to search for a link between them, and found little to no studies done in a political manner, despite the unlimited sources on each of these topics by itself. There are also no studies that have questioned views on religious, feminist and representational issues especially from multicultural individuals' perspectives. This research would therefore fill a gap in the anthropological, cultural, religious, as well as feminist study fields and contributed to the their linking.

My research aims to study the emotional impact and influence of these representations on young Muslim women in Bremen one hand, and on the other to compare that to how young Muslim women in Istanbul represent themselves. This will be seen from the perspectives of women from different cultures and religiosity levels. The importance and relevance of this subject to my studies is that by erasing stereotypes, prejudices and the stigmas they bequeath in society, it highlights the concept of transculturality through eliminating "them" and "us". Individualizing rather than generalizing ideas about individuals with an Islamic background furthers intercultural communication, through eliminating prejudices and other obstacles that stand in the way of the communication between cultures and nations.

As a disclaimer, I write this thesis from multiple positions. I write it as an Arab, Muslim woman of color, subject to splashes of racism and sexism every day, but I also

write it as a German, enjoying the many privileges, the title and passport gift me. I involve myself in a critique of privilege: my own privileges of class, gender, and belonging are examined. I stand in a frustrating and awkward position and on no solid ground. I do not wish to criticize Germans, because I am one myself. But the way most of German media and other means represent Muslim women upsets and angers me, because again, I am one myself. I feel personally attacked from all angles. I may not be a good writer, I might not do this debate justice but I am sensitive to the power of narratives and I fear the danger of a single story. Because this is an ethnographic research subjective and biased by default, as it concerns German-born Muslim women as myself, I state my opinion in multiple spots throughout this thesis and give examples and flashbacks of my own experiences. With the help of nine interviewees, this thesis is written through the lens of ten different women, who all narrate their own realities in hope they cause no harm or conflict but instead bring the world a step closer to justice.

1.2 The Literature Review

The impact of the representations and othering of Muslim women on the self-image of young Muslim women can be investigated from multiple academic fields such as sociology, psychology, politics and others. However, in this thesis, I restrict the theoretical foundation and framework of my research on concepts observed through ethnographic lenses. In the following, I hint at the works and authors that inspired the research, and because it discusses three separate yet intertwined theoretical frameworks: multiculturalism, religiosity, and representation, the bases behind each topic are grouped separately:

For the chapter discussing the cultural identity, I found the work of Maya A. Yampolsky, Assistant professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Laval University in Canada, of top relevance. Yampolsky obtained her doctorate in social and cultural psychology and focused on identity complexity of multicultural individuals. (Université Laval Website, 2020) She inspired my research especially with her article *Multicultural identity integration and well-being* (2013), in which she discusses the complexity of multicultural identification and its consequence on well-being. She introduces multiple models, of different criteria, that study and help understand how individuals manage their multicultural identity. For my own research, I have adopted two of those to help me

understand my research participants. Furthermore, Asker Kartarı, now a professor at Kadir Has University, who obtained his PhD in Intercultural Communication at Ludwig-Maximilian University of Munich and introduced intercultural communication as a study field in higher education in Turkey, served as a great source of knowledge as well. Attending his seminars *Ethnographic and Qualitative Analysis of Culture* and *Intercultural Communication* taught me the importance of understanding the collective and individual aspects of culture to avoid generalizations and prejudices.

For the chapter about the religious identity, Gritt Klinkhammer, professor of religion studies at the University of Bremen, with focus on empirical research on religion offered a strong base for studying the religiosity levels. Out of her many publications on Muslims in Germany, *Modern Constructions of Islamic Identity: The Case of Second Generation Muslim Women in Germany* was very fruitful for my understanding of the religiosity of second and third generation Muslim women in Germany. So were the numerous works of Synnøve Bendixsen, Associate Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Bergen in Norway, focusing on Muslim women in Berlin where she spent years researching. Concepts introduced and discussed by these authors were fundamental for this research.

For the third and largest topic of this thesis, representation of Muslim women, Lila Abu-Lughod inspired not only many chapters, but also the shift in focus in my study and career. Abu-Lughod is a Palestinian-American anthropologist, professor in the Department of Anthropology at Columbia University in New York City, specializing in women's studies, Islam and the Middle East. Her book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (2013) is the ultimate base for this thesis. In the book, she criticizes Western, or more accurately American stigmatization of an "oppressed" Muslim woman, and compares it to her many encounters of Muslim women in different cultures of her research but mainly in rural Egypt, in which she sees little relevance to that stigma. Moreover, Margaretha A. van Es, postdoctoral researcher in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Utrecht University and a convert to Islam herself, inspires parts of my theoretical chapters as well. Her book titled *Stereotypes and Self-Representations of Women with a Muslim Background: The Stigma of Being Oppressed* in 2016 explores how stereotypes of "oppressed Muslim women" feed into the self-representations of women with an

Islamic background in the Netherlands and Norway, in which she focuses on Muslim women in Islamic organizations in those countries.

Moreover, the works of the “the holy trinity” of postcolonial studies are reflected as well: Edward W. Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha, with focus on Edward Said, because according to a New York Times book review “no one studying the relations between the West and the decolonizing world can ignore Mr. Said’s work”. Said was yet another Palestinian-American academic, political activist, and literary critic. In *Orientalism* (1978), his best-known work and one of the most influential scholarly books of the 20th century, he argues that Western academic works have been intentionally creating and spreading biased and manipulative projections of the East, among them, a false and stereotyped perspective of “otherness” on the Islamic world. In addition, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Indian scholar, literary theorist, and feminist critic, was another great example with her article *Can the Subaltern Speak?*. Despite it focusing on the West justifying “saving” Brown women from Brown men, it was still beneficial to me through common concepts discussed. Throughout the writing process, I also had Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s eye-opening TED Talk named *The Danger of a Single Story* (2009)¹ playing in the back of my head. Adichie is a highly influential Nigerian author and feminist whose words have travelled continents and made it to the pages of this humble thesis, the layout of which will be discussed in the next chapter.

1.3 Overview of the Chapters

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. After the introduction serving as Chapter One, the theoretical framework is presented in Chapters Two, Three and Four, in which the heaviest load of literature is concentrated. In further detail, Chapter Two serves as an introductory understanding of one’s self-identity in regards to multiculturalism and religiosity, respectively. For the chapter on multiculturalism, I start by giving a brief overview of Muslim migration in Germany to understand the diversity in identifying second and third generation immigrants and their individuality. In the second subchapter, I discuss their levels and layers of religiosity. To conclude, I share my own experience as a multicultural individual in the form of a short autobiography in the last and most personal subchapter. Chapter Three takes a turn in topic as it discusses the main reasons

¹ See: https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?

behind the stereotyping, othering and stigmatization of Muslim women. These include but are not limited to the image of Islam in modern mainstream media and the so-called War on Terrorism, the saviour behaviour, (Neo-)Orientalism, mistaking culture for religion, Eurocentrist converts to Islam, the worldwide gendered discrimination, and negligent feminism. In Chapter Four, I finally approach the main concern of this thesis. It begins with criticizing the general Western representations of the “Muslimwoman in Islamland” based on previous works of feminist authors, then compares the “imagined” Muslim woman in Germany and the “real” Muslim woman in Turkey, in which I draw personal examples and experiences as well. Following the theoretical part, Chapter Five introduces the research question(s), and explains what research method, approach and participants I chose to work with, the data collection and analysis processes. Chapter Six houses these results and therewith acts as the empirical part of the thesis answering the research questions. Chapter Seven is where the study is concluded, findings are summarized, results are reflected and evaluated, limitations are explained, and implications for further research are presented.

2. INDIVIDUALIZING THE IDENTITIES OF MUSLIM GERMANS

2.1 Muslim “Integration” in Germany

Many inhabitants of the world have migrated to a different culture than the one in which they were born, move regularly between cultures, live in nations colonized by a different cultural group, or have parents from different cultures. (Cheng et al., 2014, p.1) These are known as “third-culture kids,” “cultural cosmopolitans,” or “global nomads”; people who do not identify with only one culture, but associate with multiple cultures or a combination of different cultures. (Brimm, 2010 qtd. in *ibid.*) In Clifford Geertz’s words, we now live in a globalised world in which there is “a gradual spectrum of mixed-up differences”. (1988, p. 148) Germany is perhaps the second most popular migration destination in the world; as of August 2019 it has „20.8 million people with immigrant background” wrote Chase Winter in a Deutsche Welle online article. (2019)

Muslims, in specific, have been present in Europe since the emergence of Islam itself, in the seventh century CE. There were three main waves of Islam into Europe, starting with the Moorish civilization in Iberia, followed by Muslim Tatars in the northern Slav regions, and then the Ottomans, who moved into the heart of the old continent until the beginning of the twentieth century. Muslim immigrants of the twentieth century represent the fourth Muslim tide into Europe. (Erdenir, 2010, p. 1) The latest source of Islam in Germany resulted from a large-scale influx of immigrants from predominantly Muslim countries after WW2. Today, Germany has the second largest Muslim population in Europe, which was estimated at 6.1% in 2017, with 63% of it consisting of Turks. (World Population Review, 2020; Erdenir, 2010, p. 1)

However, Muslims in Germany have a variety of national origins. Many come from the Middle East with Arab background such as Iraq, Lebanon, and Palestine; others with Iranian or Kurdish roots, many from North Africa where Morocco and Somalia are represented but also from the Balkans in Europe, where Bosnia and Albania are the principle country of origin. Despite this diversity in origin countries, “Muslim” is often represented as “Turk” and the terms are used interchangeably. (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2014, p. 139) In fact, Muslims are a heterogeneous group in all senses of the word; some come from the countryside in their countries of origin, while others belong to an urbanized, well-educated elite. Some have been reborn as practicing Muslims in Europe,

some have come to Germany to practice their faith in a new cultural setting, some have organized their religious convictions along ethnic lines, and others have chosen to stand outside all kinds of organized ethnic or religious activities. (c. Carlbom, 2003, p. 14) Some are even descendants of Christian or Jewish families who converted to Islam later on in their lives.

The immigration of Muslims to Germany has produced an internal political debate about how to treat Muslims; should they be accepted and welcomed as a part of society? Is it desirable that they are assimilated or integrated? (c. *ibid.*) As Spielhaus argues, “integration” is a problematic term, because it creates “us” and “others”, where “others” have to find ways to be similar to “us”. (qtd. in Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2014, p. 11) In many instances, politicians do not define integration or what one can do in order to “integrate,” but instead use Muslims as examples of disintegration. For example, previous Federal Minister of the Interior, Thomas de Maizière of the German Christian Democratic Union (CDU) used the term *Integrationsverweigerer* (=integration deniers) referring to Muslims. The ideology of German society seems to take two shapes: for some, Muslims are fully “integrated”, blended into the non-Muslim part of society, whereas for others, they live in segregation, are othered and discriminated. (*ibid.*, p. 12)

Because I am conducting this research partly in Bremen, I proudly affirm that the city-state has shown incomparable progress in tolerating Islam and Muslims. In fact, “the federal state assembly of Bremen approved an agreement signed between institutions representing the Islamic community and the Bremen government recognizing Islam as an official religion in 2013. With this, Muslims gained a religious community status for the first time in the history of Germany. The agreement guarantees the right to embrace and practice Islam, the protection of Muslim community properties, the approval of the construction of mosques with minarets and domes, the allotment of land for Muslim cemeteries, the supplying of halal food at prisons and hospitals, the recognition of Muslim holidays, and Muslim representation in state institutions. (World Bulletin, 2013)

The following chapters clarify the multiculturalism and religiosity of second and third generation Muslim women in Germany, which help understand their individuality and why generalizations cannot be made upon them. The reason why I specifically study cultural backgrounds and level of religiosity (rather than social, educational, etc.

situation) as layers on which women with an Islamic background must be individualized, is because these are, in my opinion, the two most differing factors that make generalizing stigmas highly problematic. The diversity of the cultural producers and their forms of expression considered in this thesis is understood as an example of the diversity within Islam and as a denial of any orientalist stereotypes about Muslim women. (c. Araújo, 2019)

To introduce the individualizing of identity, I must define what is meant with “identity” first. Identity is a very complex term; it is easier to recognise aspects of identity than to define it as a whole. It involves various aspects all at once, such as language, culture, religion, ethnicity, etc. (Parry, 2002 qtd. in Gomzina, 2012, p. 27) Scholars have argued that people have levels of identity, too: a resident of Rome may define herself with varying degrees of intensity as a Roman, an Italian, a Catholic, a European, a woman, an adult, etc. (c. *ibid.*) In the following subchapters, I examine identity solely in relation to culture and religiosity, respectively.

2.2 The Multicultural Identity

The inevitable question “what is culture?” is one of the hardest questions to answer. The reason for the growing number of definitions of culture is the angle of emphasis from which culture is defined. (Gomzina, 2012, p. 27)

Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioural conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and [their] interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behavior (Spencer-Oatey, 2008, p.3 qtd. in Spencer-Oatey, 2012, p.5).

Culture consists of the “derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves” (Schwartz, 1992 qtd. in *ibid.*) and is therefore “different for each individual within that population”. (Matsumoto 1996, p. 16 qtd. in *ibid.*) Relatedly, in his article, Yep argues that cultural identity “can never be static or frozen”; instead, it is “fluid” and always “evolving”. (1998, p. 79) This is because cultural identity is „co- and re-created by and with every encounter”. (*ibid.*)

Multiculturality, as the name suggests, (but not to be confused with multiculturalism²) is a person having several cultural backgrounds and having attachments and loyalties toward these different cultures. (Huntington, 1993, p. 24 qtd. in Gomzina, 2012, p. 20; Benet-Martínez & Haritatos, 2005) Moreover, although multicultural identity involves a significant degree of identification with more than one culture; it does not presuppose same or similar degrees of identification with all the internalized cultures (Cheng et al., 2014, p. 2), meaning one can identify more with culture A and less with culture B or vice versa. The complexity of the subjective experiences of the individuals who belong to multiple cultural groups includes their ability to integrate the threads of their diverse cultural experiences into a coherent, unified understanding of themselves and their lives. (Mahtani, 2002; Giguère et al., 2010, qtd. in Yampolsky et al., 2013) Individuals with a multicultural identity correspond with higher levels of acceptance, respect and tolerance toward dissimilar groups and have arguably more intercultural competence. (Negy et al., 2003, p. 233; Cheng et al., 2014, p.2)

On the other hand, multiculturality often comes at a price. Multicultural individuals often feel so torn between their different cultural identities that it leaves them with a feeling of not belonging to neither a culture nor a place. This is what Vivero and Jenkins referred to as “cultural homelessness”. This may arise from cross-cultural tensions within an ethnically mixed family or between a family and its culturally different environment. (1999) Culturally homeless individuals may enjoy a broader, stronger cognitive and social repertoire because of their multiple cultural frames of reference (ibid.), but faced with diversity in different cultural settings, they need to navigate the diverse norms and values from each of their cultural affiliations and manage their different and possibly clashing cultural identities within their general sense of self. (Downie et al. qtd. in Yampolsky et al., 2013) They manage their multiple cultural identities in different ways. In the following, I introduce two models discussed by Yampolsky et al. (2013), which help understand the intra-individual organization and the subjective reconciling of one’s diverse cultural identities, configurations and well-being, as indicated by narrative coherence.

² Multiculturalism, on the other hand, is a political ideology and public policy that believes in the equal coexistence of many cultures in a locality, without one of them dominating the region. (Meien. 2007, p.3)

The Cognitive-Developmental Model of Social Identity Integration (CDMSII)

The CDMSII proposes four different ways that people can cognitively configure their different cultural identities within their self-concept.

1. “Anticipatory categorization” takes place while one is preparing to become a member of a new group, by projecting oneself into this group by foreseeing similarities between it and oneself. An example are Syrian refugees in Jordan twisting their Arabic accent slightly to match the local one.
2. “Categorization” is characterized by the dominance of a single cultural identity over others in defining the self. An evident example of this is a second-generation German person of Turkish heritage who may identify predominantly as German, while lightly identifying with his Turkish culture and not leaning towards the term “German Turk” but rather introducing oneself with “I am German, my parents are Turks”.
3. “Compartmentalization” involves identifying with one’s multiple cultural groups, but these identities are kept separate from each other, bound to the surrounding, such that one identifies with their cultures depending on the context to avoid any conflict that could occur if identities are perceived as contradictory. To illustrate, one may identify as both Indian and German, but this person will only identify as Indian when they are with other Indians, and as German when with other Germans; the two identities are rarely experienced at the same point in time.
4. “Integration” involves connecting one’s diverse cultural identities by perceiving and recognizing the similarities and differences between these different identities in order to complement and enrich each other rather than to clash. For example, one can identify as Chinese, Iranian, and Canadian and see that there are many shared values between their three identities. They may attend Sufi rituals with their Iranian–Canadian father, refer to Steven Chow films with their Cantonese–Chinese–Canadian cousins, and speak English and French with friends at school and work. Yet as this person engages in each of these cultural activities, they feel part of all of their cultural groups simultaneously.

Berry’s Bi-dimensional Model of Acculturation (BBMA)

Similar to the CDMSII, the acculturation model, too, has investigated multicultural individuals and how they reconcile their belonging to different cultural groups. The BBMA focuses on membership and involvement in the heritage and mainstream cultural groups and proposes three acculturation orientations:

1. Exclusive belonging to either the heritage or mainstream cultural group: this can be exemplified by a German Turk living in Germany only identifying as a German (mainstream culture) and ignoring his Turkish roots (heritage culture).
2. Belonging to both heritage and mainstream groups: Feeling equally German (mainstream culture) and Turkish (heritage culture) at all times.
3. Belonging to neither heritage nor mainstream groups: Neither identifying as a German nor a Turk, but rather something in between, feeling confused, misplaced and non-belonging.

The importance of these models to the research is that I used them to better understand my research participants and their position and identification within German/ Turkish society. Having understood the types and layers of identifying with culture, the following chapter similarly discusses multicultural individuals' varying levels of religiosity.

2.3 The Religious Identity

The religiosity of the migrant population in Germany has been a feature of debates on cultural diversity, which includes issues such as the provision of special diets and dress code changes to meet religious principles. The continuous interaction between Muslim minority populations and non-Muslim majorities affects how Islam is institutionalized and practiced, and has an effect on young people who seek to live as religiously devoted Muslims in European societies. (Bendixsen, 2005, p. 2) Unfortunately, religiosity has gradually come to be understood as related to processes of social assimilation or segregation, and most importantly identity crises. (Kepel, 1994; Rogers and Vertovec, 1998 qtd. in Bendixsen, 2013, p. 5)

Religiosity is a term difficult to define, but scholars have seen this concept as broadly about religious orientations and involvement, including ritualistic, ideological, intellectual, consequential, communal, doctrinal, and moral dimensions. (Holdcroft, 2006, p. 89) I say "religiosity" rather than "religiousness" (merely being religious), as it

assumes that there are levels to being religious, as previous research has documented the plural ways of being a young Muslim. There are both intra- and inter-generational differences within the Muslim population in Germany and the relevance of religion in their everyday practices varies, therefore the term “Muslim” should not be used “in a reductionist manner”. (Bendixsen, 2013, p. 28) Generally, the media and often current social research consider all people coming from, or having a background in, a country where the majority follows Islam, to be “Muslims”. Not to mention that they belong to different sectors of Islam, from Sunnis and Shias to Alevis and Sufis, one must not lose sight of the fact individuals differ substantially, and that people from an Islamic background may consider themselves non-believers or adherents of another faith. Whereas some consider Islam to be part of their cultural heritage, others confine religion to the private sphere. (ibid.)

By studying Islam in Germany, one soon realizes religion means more to individuals away from home, in their diaspora. Holding closer onto religion is often an attempt to fight “social alienation because of the displacement impact”. (Bendixsen, 2011, p. 98) Several researches have pointed out the generational difference in identification with and practice of Islam. Transmission of religion from one generation to the other always implies changes, and migration adds another dimension to those changes. Especially migration to societies that are highly modern adds to the escalation of the generational change. (ibid, p. 97) “Islam is no longer automatically transmitted from one generation to another or considered as a norm taken for granted”. (ibid) It is no longer a mere tradition relocated from the migrants’ home country to the new country, or as something that the youth either leave behind or embrace.

Instead, Muslim youth are creating hybrid and complex identities and establishing new models of religious and cultural expressions themselves. The young generation Muslims born in Germany frequently makes a distinction “between the traditional Islam of their parents and a global, pure Islam detached from national traditions and ethnic bonds”. (Bendixsen, 2013, p. 216) Few researchers have explored the effect of the distinction between culture and religion on young people’s understanding and performance of gender relations and on their ethnic identification. Distinguishing between tradition, culture, and religion is an effort to practice a so-called universal, pure Islam. The continuous efforts to disconnect tradition from religion shape how Muslim

youth in Germany construct their own gender identities and how they identify with their parents' ethnic or national groups (ibid.)

Undeniably, Islamic identity constructions of Sunni-Muslim women who have grown up in Germany are strongly influenced by structures of its modern secular-Christian society. (Klinkhammer, 2003, p.1) Moreover, many of them were raised to a Christian and a Muslim parent, which may also influence their beliefs. Therefore, Islam in Germany is “not assessed as a result of a presumed degeneration but as a product of religious identity politics” and is indeed affected by secularization. (Klinkhammer, 2001 qtd. in ibid.) The religiosity of second and third generation Muslim women has already developed its structures and norms into “a modern and individualistic way of believing”. (ibid., p. 2) A woman from a Muslim family or background can distance herself from religion altogether, or even follow aspects from the mainstream culture's religion for example. Age also plays a role, as women grow older, they usually grow closer to God for peace, or vice versa if they were raised to practice when they were young then gradually gave it up throughout the years. Just as the cultural identity is not static but fluid, so is the religious identity. Therefore, it is highly problematic to assume prejudices and make generalizations. Klinkhammer exemplifies: the identification of “fundamentalist”, traditional and political committed religiosity with wearing a headscarf is not plausible, and the contrary is equally incorrect: Muslims who do not wear a headscarf are not always secular in conviction. (ibid., p. 12)

Similar to the two models of cultural identity, young Muslim women identify differently with religion as they do with culture; Klinkhammer (ibid., p. 1) summarizes three types of religious identity constructions which she found in a larger study of modern Islamic “Lebensführung” (to use Max Weber's phrase). These are “all aspects of a modern way of life, but represent different attitudes towards the normative expectation of Western society that action and thinking should be individualised and rationalised” (ibid. p.2):

1. an “exclusivist” type of Islamic identity, aiming at the Islamisation of all spheres of life,
2. a “universalising” type of Islamic identity, aiming at a general ethical and spiritual support for everyday life, and

3. a modern but “traditionalising” type of Islamic identity that maintains the rituals and norms bound to the family.

During my fieldwork with young Muslim women in Bremen as well as Istanbul, as the empirical part of the thesis will show, I came to understand the different levels of their identifications with their religion. It was never black or white; yes, some cared about the place of Islam in their lives while others saw Islam as the religion of their ancestors only. But there was a whole gradient of grayscale as well; many were torn or satisfied to be in between, practicing the spiritual aspects and neglecting the physical obligations, or vice versa, having the physical appearance of a “Muslim” woman while not maintaining a strong faith, only turning to Allah in search of peace and many other combinations. Their realities were different in every way, and worlds apart from the widespread representations. Ironically, while depicted as submissive and indoctrinated, the young Muslim women I knew are liberated, educated, make dirty jokes, contemplate which color of hijab to wear with which outfit, and neglect certain religious obligations aware and willingly.

To conclude the chapters on self-identification, the next chapter addresses an autobiography that sheds more light on the inspiration behind focusing on individuals of varying cultural backgrounds and religion practicing levels.

2.4 On Being Monoracial But Multicultural: An Autobiography

The path to choosing multiculturalism and religiosity as two layers of identity can be traced back to a personal conflict in understanding how and why they contribute to my individualism, even as a second generation Muslim in Germany who much could be generalized upon. It demonstrates a journey to choosing my self-identity over the one chosen for me.

I am Palestinian Jordanian German, in no particular order or degree. According to Yep (1998, p. 81), cultural identity is non-summative, meaning, one cannot get a complete sense of a multicultural identity by adding up all the components that make it up. In other words, Palestinian + Jordanian + German \neq me. Ironically, even though I have only spent two weeks out of my twenty five years in Palestine, I am “100% Palestinian” to my “100% Palestinian” parents; my mother who herself was born and raised between Kuwait and Iraq and my father who left Palestine at 18 years to study in

Germany. Despite them being multicultural themselves, growing up to Palestinian refugee parents shuttling around the world, they still seem to strictly agree that the way they raised me, in a very “Bavarian” district in Munich, is completely “Arab”.

However, because they lived in Germany for decades, they became “Germans”, unaware; they are a mirrored image of the Achim and Anette in the infamous Alman-parent jokes. When a Turkish German shop owner in Istanbul’s Grand Bazar judged my father for falsely introducing himself — because “a real *Münchner* would have said he is *Bayerisch* not *Deutsch*” — my father agreed laughingly. Still, “you are starting to act like a German!” was the reaction to any of my undesired behaviours, including speaking German instead of Arabic, in a German-speaking country. When my family decided to spontaneously move to Jordan when I was 10, things took a turn. I was no longer asked to “be Palestinian” because I should be proud “to be German”. After having practically forced me to speak Arabic, “my mother tongue”, I was suddenly encouraged to speak German at all times, fearing I would forget “my first language”.

To Palestinians, I am an escapee who left them to fight the conflict on their own. To Jordanians, I am just another Palestinian refugee. To Germans, I am the Arab Muslim. In Turkey as well, it was always assumed I am a Turk judging by my appearance or name; they do not applaud my attempt at speaking Turkish as they do with other foreigners, but shame and often curse my parents for not teaching me “the language of my ancestors”. If I dare to explain that I am not Turkish and that my name is Sirin not Şirin, I get told that my family was “illiterate” when they named me. In short, I am not 100% of anything to anyone, I do not belong nor am I foreign. I am culturally homeless yet feel at home in many parts of the world. In Germany alone I cannot identify as coming from Munich only, after studying in Bonn and Bremen, I now greet with „*Griß Gott*”, “*Moin*” and “*Servus*” interchangeably.

However, I do not only identify with ethnically or geographically defined cultures, but with some of what falls under Islamic culture too. Even though I see myself as a practicing Muslim, my religiosity is not equivalent to that of my parents; I do not wear a hijab like my mother nor pay frequent visits to the mosque like my father, but care about the spiritual aspects of Islam and follow its values. I even follow morals I see fruitful in

other practices, and it does not decrease my faith in Allah in any way, if anything, it complements it.

I am fully integrated on both the CDMSII and BBMA introduced by Yampolsky (2013), because I feel part of all of my cultural groups equally and belong to both heritage and mainstream groups simultaneously. In Klinkhammer's Islamic identity construction categories (2003), I would be the "universalising" type as I value the spiritual and ethical aspects of Islam the most. More importantly, I am more than my ethnic background, and my identity does not only consist of my religion. As Baghdadi (2011, p. 5) highlights in her book, "I am many things before I am a Muslim", and a single story, a universal representation of "the Muslim woman" does not do me or any other Muslim woman justice.



3. THE REASONS BEHIND THE STIGMA

The growing public debate about the integration and emancipation of Muslim women originates from “a surge of right-wing populist parties with an Islamophobic, anti-immigration agenda”. (van Es, 2016, p. 4) This chapter discusses five major reasons behind the negative portrayal of Muslim women in, but not limited to, Germany.

3.1 The Image of Islam in the Media

Muslim women live on all continents. More Muslims live in South and Southeast Asia, by far, than live in the Middle East. Many important developments in law and culture have emerged from these regions, but because American troops have been in Afghanistan since 2001, various American and European newspapers have regularly featured the problems that women in Afghanistan face, focusing on oppression by cultural and religious practices rather than war injuries or other consequences of militarization or the dislocations of war. (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 15) The increasing and intense focus on Muslims and Islam in Western media is characterized by a “highly exaggerated stereotyping and belligerent hostility”. (c. Said, 1997, xiv) Therefore, much of the stigmatization is to blame on the islamophobic media, and can be summed up with the othering of Islam as a religion, relating tradition to fundamentalism, and the binary opposition of the religious and the secular. (c. Moallem, 2008, p. 107) Islamophobic media does not distinguish, it is purely collective racism. The Iraqi, Chechnyan, Kurdish and Bosnian cases are all different; from race and culture to language and religious sector, but what they do have in common is that there is a war against their religion. Islamophobic media does not have mercy on Balkan Muslims because they are Europeans, for example. Had the Bosnian, Palestinian, and Chechnyan victims not been Muslims, and had “terrorism” not emanated from “Islam”, the Western powers would have done more for them. (Said, 1997, p. xv)

Indeed, many Islamists have and continue to commit crimes in the name of Islam. There have been endless provocations and troubling incidents by Islamists during the past two decades. I am in no way denying the terror attacks, plane hijackings, hostages, bomb atrocities, etc. carried out by extreme Islamists causing considerable loss of life “in the name of Islam”, neither am I demanding the media not to cover such events. However, it is also wrong to assume the one and only motive behind terror is religion and give the

world a right to hate and blame all innocent Muslims for it. I would like to highlight that not all Muslims are Islamists; Islamist extremism is a threat to all humankind, including Muslims themselves. Still the “war or terrorism” seems to be purely a war on Islam.

Malicious generalizations about Islam have become the last acceptable form of denigration of foreign culture in the West; what is said about the Muslim mind, or character, or religion, or culture as a whole cannot now be said in mainstream discussion about Africans, Jews, other Orientals, or Asians (ibid.).

Said highlighted an important point, namely that such generalizations are indeed not made over any other faith. “Shades of Anger” (2017) by Rafeef Ziadah - a Palestinian activist summarizes,

Allow me to speak my Arab tongue before they occupy my language as well. I am an Arab woman of color and we come in all shades of anger. But you tell me, this womb inside me will only bring you your next terrorist, beard wearing, gun waving, towelhead, sand nigger. You tell me I send my children out to die, but those are your copters, your F16's in our sky. And let's talk about this terrorism business for a second, wasn't it the CIA that killed Allende and Lumumba and who trained Osama in the first place?

3.2 The Savior Behaviour

This subchapter is highly inspired by Lila Abu-Lughod's book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* and Spivak's article *Can the Subaltern Speak?* who introduce the “Saviour Behaviour”. Similar to the savior complex, often referred to as the messiah complex, the personality trait that urges a person to help, assist, and save others as if given that mission, it sounds like an act of heroism, but it is actually a negative and dangerous trait. Derogatory phrases that include “killing with kindness” (Schuller, 2012), “white savior industrial complex” (Cole, 2012), and “money-moving syndrome” (Monkam, 2012) often criticize aid as belittling and inappropriate. Writer Teju Cole (2012) exemplifies: “We can participate in the economic destruction of Haiti over long years, but when the earthquake strikes, it feels good to send \$10 to the rescue fund.” He says what draws the line is consent. “If we are going to interfere in the lives of others, a little due diligence is a minimum requirement”. (ibid.)

Abu-Lughod defines the Savior Behaviour in the case of “moral crusaders” saving “the oppressed Muslim woman” as “an indictment of a mindset that has justified all manner of foreign interference, including military invasion, in the name of rescuing women from Islam.” (2013, p. 27) Pity is powerful and dangerous because it implies that the person who has the emotion is more powerful than the object of the emotion. Empathy is not a relevant emotion because it is built on a greater sense of equality between the two

parties; the oppressed Muslim woman is figured as coming from a culture so different that it is difficult to understand or relate to her.

In other words, the problem is not that a viewer feels pity that a Muslim woman has been stoned to death but that a viewer assumes that all Muslim men are capable of stoning their wives. The power of definition, or of associating violence and oppression with Islam, results not only from the repetition of but also from the emotions they evoke. (Alsultany, 2012 p. 74) Cole elaborates, “A nobody from the West can go to an Islamic country and act as a godlike savior in the name of “making a difference.” (2012) In Spivak’s famous article, she exemplifies with saving Brown women from Brown men, in which no consideration is taken into what these women actually want. She clarifies that they are “subaltern” not because they are voiceless (hence the irony in “can they speak?”), but because they are not given a voice.

In Germany, this also is the case. As told by Abu-Lughod (2013, p. 13f), on April 13, 2011, a website called Muslimah Media Watch uploaded a poster from a German “human rights” campaign, in which what looks like plastic trash bags are lined up against a wall. A closer look reveals these bags are a figure shrouded in a burqa. The slogan reads: “Oppressed women are easily overlooked. Please support us in the fight for their rights.” A writer on another feminist website picked up the poster and retorted “agency is easily overlooked if you actively erase it.” The feminists, Muslim and non-Muslims alike, who drew attention to this campaign poster are among those who ask why so many, including human rights campaigners, presume that just because Muslim women dress in a certain way, they are passive individuals or cannot speak for themselves. These feminists are not ignoring the abuses the women suffer; to the contrary, they are suggesting that we ought to talk to them to find out what problems they face rather than treating them as mute garbage bags.

Luckily, on the other hand, The New York Times carried an article in 2001 (qtd. in *ibid.*, p. 36) about Afghan refugees in Pakistan to educate readers about the local variety of women’s veiling. From the now iconic blue burqa with embroidered eyeholes (which a Pashtun woman explains is the proper dress for her community), to large scarves they call “chadors,” to the new Islamic modest dress that wearers refer to as “hijab.” Those wearing the new Islamic dress are students heading for professional careers. A street

vendor confesses, “If I did [wear the burqa] the refugees would tease me because the burqa is for good women who stay inside the home.” The local status in the Afghan refugee community that is associated with the burqa is that it is for good, respectable women from strong families who are not forced to make a living selling on the street. It has nothing to do with being mute garbage bags by the side of the road, as the German human rights poster stigmatizes. (ibid., p. 38)

Moreover, Martha Nussbaum, a feminist philosopher, also publicized the problems with presuming that veiling or covering might signal oppression. In a 2010 article in the New York Times blog about the proposed bans of burqas in several European countries, she framed her arguments around the principle of freedom of conscience that is so central to Western laws and historical values of equal respect. She dismissed arguments that the burqa is a symbol of male domination by pointing out that those who criticize this item of dress neither know the first thing about Islamic symbols nor would they support banning most practices commonly associated with male domination in Western societies, such as commercial exploitation of women and fraternity violence, to name a few. Nussbaum offered some everyday examples to show the inconsistencies in the other two arguments in favour of the ban: (1) “security requires people to show their faces when appearing in public places” and (2) “the kind of transparency and reciprocity proper to relations between citizens is impeded by covering part of the face.” She wrote:

It gets very cold in Chicago— as, indeed, in many parts of Europe. Along the streets we walk, hats pulled down over ears and brows, scarves wound tightly around noses and mouths. No problem of either transparency or security is thought to exist, nor are we forbidden to enter public buildings so insulated. Moreover, many beloved and trusted professionals cover their faces all year round: surgeons, dentists, (American) football players, skiers and skaters (qtd. in ibid., p. 14).

Moreover, in January 2016, British Prime Minister James Cameron donated 20 million pounds into English lessons for Muslim women living in Britain, because learning English would help tackle their “traditional submissiveness”. Using the hashtag #traditionally submissive, uncountable Muslim women mocked him by sharing pictures of themselves with a list of their accomplishments. For example, “English teacher by profession and taught hundreds of British students English, should I learn the language too?”, “Columbia grad, BBC journalist, Pilates instructor, sports enthusiast, and mommy” and many other amazing examples. (Kassam, 2016) To conclude, “could we not leave

veils and vocations of saving others behind and instead train our sights on ways to make the world a more just place?” (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 202)

3.3 Orientalism and Mistaking Culture for Religion

The portrayal of Muslim women in a negative light in art, literature, the media and other spheres of representation smacks of a perceivable return to Orientalism, as similar ideas are recycled and reused to caricature Muslims. There definitely seems to have been a strange revival of canonical, though previously discredited, Orientalist ideas about Muslim women. Said’s general argument is that Muslims and Islam have historically been described by scholars involved in an Orientalist enterprise, where the Muslim part of the world has been (and is still) imagined as a negative “Other”, a “as stationary and somehow dangerous to the West”. (qtd. in Carlhom, 2003, p. 14) In recent years, Shari’a—the term people use loosely to refer to law that derives from Islamic legal traditions—has become an international symbol of Muslim identity and a dreaded and traditional enemy of women’s rights. Islam has gifted women more rights that imaginable but that is a topic for another time. “When [non-Muslim] men beat their wives, it is an aberration, counter to the liberal principles that govern here. When Muslim men beat their wives, it is an act representative of Islam”. (c. Kalender, 2015, p. 5)

It seems that the short answer to every complex question regarding Muslim women is Islam and Oriental culture, whatever this “culture” may be. Culture is a belief about another mental representation, which has become wide-spread across a human population on over a significant time-span. (Al-Khawaldeh, 2015, p. 401) Members of a culture do not necessarily share exactly the same set of cultural representation and the particular representations they hold are not identical, but are very similar so that the members of the culture can rely on them in social interaction. (ibid.) It must be noted that cultures naturally have fuzzy boundaries, and are, in this sense like regions. (Sperber, 1996, Žegarac, 2008 qtd. in ibid.) The idea of culture increasingly has become a core component of international politics and common sense.” (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 5) “Generalizing about cultures prevents us from appreciating or even accounting for people’s experiences and the contingencies with which we live.

As Abu-Lughod clarifies in her book, the reasons behind oppressions of Muslim women are the government, backward families, low economies, weak education system,

amongst many other reasons.

These women's lives show us just how varied and complicated the sources of any one woman's suffering might be. From the abuse of power by security police in Egypt in 2011 to the injustices of colonial British support for Zionist expulsion of Palestinians from their land and homes in 1948, we see that the most basic conditions of these women's lives are set by political forces that are local in effect but national and even international in origin (2013, p. 61).

But it seems easier to blame everything on the Shari'a and "the Oriental culture". Ever since the conflict, Syrian migration in specific has influenced Germany's views on Islam, neglecting the fact that many Syrians are not practicing Muslims or are Christians to begin with. It seems, that to many Germans, "Syrian culture", and specifically everything that does not go well with "German culture", equals Islam. To generalize Syrian culture as "Arab culture" is one thing, but to expand it as "Islamic culture" over millions of people spread around the globe is simply ignorant.

Indeed some cultures in which the majority is Muslim harbour practices that oppress and disadvantage women. Some cultural minorities have demanded special rights from their states claiming that polygamy or child marriage is part of their culture, and understandably, "a culture or religion that deprives women of human dignity is not worthy of preservation" (Kirkman, p. 3 qtd, in Kalender, 2015, p. 5)

3.4 Eurocentrist Converts to Islam

Following the spirit of the Enlightenment, with its clear Eurocentrist emphasis that saw non-Europeans as less than rational, contends that if not the only mentality that can easily do so, the European mind is definitely best able to relate to the real message of Islam. (Özyürek, 2017, p. 68) Even though one of the first Hadiths one learns when entering Islam is that there is no difference between Muslims of any race in anything but the piety and devoutness to Allah, a significant number of German Muslims believe that "if one can eliminate immigrant Muslim traditions —if not traditional Muslims themselves, —Germany is the best place to live an Islamic life". (c. *ibid.*) Seeing purified Islam as a perfect fit for the enlightened German mind, they also condemn immigrant Muslims for being so oppressed by their traditions that they are unable to make their own rational judgments, which would naturally lead them to the truth in Islam". (*ibid.*, p. 69)

Özyürek tells tales of German converts to Islam, in which they are being treated as "helpless, oppressed females, short on linguistic ability or, worse, intelligence. In other

words, overnight, they began to be treated as if they were Turks” she exclaims. (ibid.) She tells the story of Afifa, who had to defend herself still being “German” when her cousin attacked her with comments like “you dress differently, you eat differently, you say these strange Arabic words to your friends, you have nothing German about you anymore.” (ibid., p. 24)

One way in which many converted Germans deal with this unexpected and unpleasant situation is to disassociate themselves from born Muslims, and instead aspire to a genuine Islam untainted by culture and tradition. In trying to attain this pure Islam and save Islam from its negative associations, they reproduce or even further the already-existing racist prejudices against immigrants. The idealized untainted Islam they promote leaves [...] immigrant Muslims in Germany to bear the full brunt of the stigma of Islam (ibid.).

While I understand why this could be a self-defense mechanism, I cannot imagine it to be an affective one. It does however affirm my assumption that backwards, fundamentalist aspects of cultures are often mistaken for Islam as a religion.

3.5 Gendered Discrimination and Negligent Feminism

Muslim societies, as well as Western perceptions of them tend to be projected primarily through male perspectives. (El Solh, 1994) The othering of Muslims can be explained partly by the concept of the “default man”. In his book *The Descent of Man*, Grayson Perry writes about the way the world revolves around the idea of the default man, who is white, middle-class, heterosexual and usually middle-aged, and who is seen as “the reference point from which all other values and cultures are judged”. He and what he represents is the backdrop against which all other identities exist; any deviation from the blueprint of the norms of the default man poses a threat to the standards society upholds. (qtd. in Khan, 2019)

Mariam Khan extends Perry’s idea to assume that he is also one of secular ideology. If a “default” existed within Muslim communities as a subgroup, it would probably be a South Asian, middle-aged, cis, Sunni man. His is the face on event posters about Muslims, the one who sits on mosque and Muslim charity committee boards, etc. So the default for Muslim and non-Muslim women alike is something they can never be: male. (c. ibid.) This gendered discrimination is a major reason behind many negative portrayals of Muslim women, and understandably, feminists want to eliminate them.

However, often in the past few years have negative stigmatizations been coming from feminists who claim to be pro-Islam. The vibrancy of this entanglement, is clearest in the case of a new type of feminist:

who quotes fluently from the Qur'an, is familiar with Islamic law, invokes precedents from early Muslim history, writes sophisticated articles on the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), arranges conferences on Google Calendar, conducts online surveys, and draws from a wide range of experiences of organizing for change (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 201).

This kind of “feminist” therewith thinks she owns the permission to narrate (as an outsider, of course) about Muslim women and rob them of their own right to narrate, whereas if she actually cared for their well-being, she would simply hand them a microphone or a pen. Turkish-British author Cansu Kalender elaborates saying this kind of negligent feminism “has its weaknesses as it depicts women in minority cultures as victims who are weak and lack autonomy to decide for themselves.” (2015, p. 3) This “feminism” neglects that Muslim women, or at least some of them, actually choose to go to sharia tribunals, for example. It is a highly stereotypical assumption to say that all Muslim women are submissive, therefore, any woman who goes to sharia tribunal does so by force. (ibid.) It is problematic to assume a Muslim woman is not autonomous, whereas a non-Muslim one is.

If there is a human agency problem at all, it should be present for everyone regardless of cultural background. In the end, there are social, financial and cultural constraints as well as pressures surrounding every woman. (ibid., p. 4) This negligent “feminism” therefore fosters cultural stereotypes by always and only drawing attention to the worst examples of minority cultures such as genital mutilation, wife battering and child marriages. (ibid., p. 5) Statements like “the fact that Muslim women forcefully challenged the traditional viewpoint [...] indicates that Muslim women are no longer nameless, faceless or voiceless, and that they are ready to stand up and be counted.” (Moghissi, 2005, p. 196) are even more problematic coming from a Muslim, “feminist” author.

This kind of “feminist” also throws racist statements wrapped as compliments. During an exchange semester in Bonn, a German teaching assistant in the department of Islamic Studies told me “You’re lucky to have the opportunity to study, and abroad; your parents must be really liberal to let you come here without a *Mahram* (=male relative)”.

I was shocked to the degree that I did not know where to start, by telling her I am German-born and not “luckily sent” abroad? That it is the norm nowadays for Muslim families to encourage their daughters to study? That of course I can travel by myself in the 21st century? I am all about women supporting women, and had she not been an expert on modern Islam, I would have believed she was applauding me. Similarly, my cousin was wrapping her hijab in the school’s bathroom when a girl watching her mockingly said: “You’re actually really pretty... for a Muslim!” Such islamophobic, racist and sexist expressions wrapped as “compliments” are not always unconscious, very often they come from “pro-Islam feminists”.

I want to emphasize that I do not fight feminism, on the contrary, feminism is actually something I fight for. I fight the negligent feminism that leaves Muslim women out. I fight for the feminism that sees Muslim woman as equals, as they should be by default.

4. THE IMAGINED VS. THE REAL MUSLIM WOMAN

4.1 The Muslimwoman in Islamland

In more recent years, “feminist” as well as “Islamic” starting points have tended to ignore the “representation” part and instead contest the realities of “the Muslimwoman”. Those realities are the subject of historians and other social scientists, and require methods different from those of literary research. The actual condition of Muslim women is a serious and complex one, its study, however, does little to explain it. (c. Kahf, 2002, p. 2) The genealogy of the narrative, the study of its descent, “requires patience and a knowledge of details, and it depends on a vast accumulation of source material”. (Foucault, 1977, 140) There is nothing essential or timeless behind Western representations of “the Muslimwoman”; they are hints of specific moments and developments in culture. (Kahf, 2002, p. 2)

Islam is not a place from which one can come from, yet “Islamland,” as Abu-Lughod would call this mythical place, enables those who advocate for women’s rights to accrue moral capital. (2013, p. 61) It is problematic to call it “the Islamic World” as well, because it is ignorant to shove the millions of Muslims inhabiting different continents of the world into one geographical, mental and cultural entity. Abu-Lughod (ibid., p. 62f) fights *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (2008), written by a husband and wife with the saviour behaviour. Abu-Lughod complains that to them, the wrongs and suffering of women— whether sexual or mental slavery, rape or maternal mortality, so-called honor killings or confinement to homes and brothels— are to be found in distant lands, “half the sky” away. The stories they tell are from Africa, Asia, and the Middle East; as if women’s rights issues are pertinent only elsewhere.

The only Western women who appear in the pages of *Half the Sky* are ones who raise money to build schools in Cambodia, or give up their jobs to devote themselves to working in health clinics in Africa. The only Western men who appear are those who rescue prostitutes from brothels, or those who devote themselves to fighting maternal mortality. These are all good people, but how does this focus on global good works erase the fact that the problems that should concern the world are not only “over there”? Gender injustice is transcendent to the writers because “they do not ground it in the world they

know”. (ibid.) *Half the Sky* tells no stories about overworked lawyers who defend women in prisons who have been convicted of killing their abusive lovers or husbands. No quotes appear from reports that indicate the alarming rates of domestic violence and that one in every six American women has been raped in her lifetime, usually by an intimate or someone she knows. The only kind of problem Western women face is “unwanted touching from a boss” or “underfunded sports teams.” (c. ibid., p. 63)

Just like Islamland does not exist, neither does the Muslimwoman. I have lived in Jordan half of my life, visited relatives in Palestine and the United Arab Emirates, studied in Turkey and had life-long friendships with women from Egypt, Iran and Pakistan, and in all the women I have known through the past decade alone, I do not recognize “the Muslimwoman” of Hirsi Ali’s books or Yağmur from Germany’s *Turkish for Beginners*. Is it Hirsi Ali’s mother, surrounded by nieces who cook for her and sweep her house back in Somalia? Is it the filmmakers of Palestine or the writers of Lebanon? The Bedouin women in Egypt who weave rugs of extraordinary beauty and sing poignant songs about love? Or the fashion bloggers of Qatar featured in Harper’s Bazaar Arabia? The glossy spread about them in 2010, titled “Abaya Accessories,” reported on the young women with their massive closets debating which of latest high-end designer piece to wear to which event. Are these the Muslim women Hirsi Ali implores her readers to think about when she pities “the others, still locked in the world I have left behind”? (ibid., p. 72)

Hirsi Ali claims to speak from her own experience as an ex-Muslim woman. She argued that Islam means submission or obedience not just of women but men similarly. But as a young girl she had a massive hierarchy to contend with, of parents and a clan and what she calls “bearded men preaching seventh-century laws.” This is her family, and not every Muslim woman’s family. Her stories indeed teach us something about Somalis in exile and about many immigrants in Europe, but not about “the Muslimwoman” in “Islamland”. (ibid., p. 73) This is exactly why Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie urges the world to understand what she called “the danger of a single story”. (2009)

Abu-Lughod recalls that when she explained to her friend in rural Egypt that she was writing a book about how people in the West believe that Muslim women are oppressed, her friend objected, “But many women are oppressed! They don’t get their rights in so many ways— in work, in schooling, in . . .” (ibid., p.14) Abu-Lughod was

shocked by her vehemence and asked “They believe that these women are oppressed by Islam. Is the reason Islam?” It was her friend’s turn to be shocked. “What? Of course not! It’s the government’s,” she explained. “The government oppresses women. The government doesn’t care about the people. It doesn’t care that they don’t have work or jobs, that prices are so high that no one can afford anything. Poverty is hard. Men suffer from this too.” (ibid.)

Because I have known women like her through my years doing ethnographic research, I am often bewildered by what I read or hear about “the Muslimwoman”. It is hard to reconcile my experiences with the women I have met [...] with what the [Western] media present, or with what people say to me casually at dinner parties, in doctors’ offices, and on the sidelines at my children’s soccer games [...]. I am surprised by how easily people presume that Muslim women do not have rights (ibid., p.13).

Moreover, Muslim women are underrepresented on television, and when they are represented, they are misrepresented. In a growing awareness of “representation matters” that can be clearly seen in Hollywood films where Black and Asian women have become more visible on silver screens, Muslim women still are not given that privilege, and even when they are given a (side)role, it is one of two extreme opposites. The prostitute who sells her body despite all that “Arab money”, or the submissive, oppressed victim of culture who takes off her hijab and turns to alcohol as soon as the White boy asks her to, as *Türkisch für Anfänger* (Germany), *Mr. Robot* (USA) and *Elite* (Spain) and many other “representation matters”-hit series suggest. Gaining loads of praise and popularity, arguably because of the successful choice of protagonists, I did not enjoy these racist works disguised as a humorous culture clashes. When Muslim women were represented in TV dramas, they tended to fall within these three categories: submissive, passive decoration on the show, or in need of rescue, as her male counterpart was, of course, non-other than the terrorist or criminal. While the Muslimwoman “did not make compelling prime-time dramas, [she] did make for compelling news.” (c. Alsultany, 2018, p. 18)

4.2 The Image of Muslim Women in Germany

This chapter brings forward some negative representations of Muslim women in German media. As I am disappointed in most German mainstream media and other mediums generalizing negative stories about Muslim women, I will try not to do the same and clarify that this is one article in one newspaper. Of course, there are many like it, but on the other hand, there are many articles defending Muslims and showing their true colours as well. In an article in one of Germany’s most popular newspapers *Der Spiegel*

entitled “*Allahs rechtlose Töchter. Muslimische Frauen in Deutschland*” (=Allah’s daughters deprived of rights) put down in words the thoughts of many Germans. The article states:

Tausende Musliminnen leben in Deutschland unter dem Joch des Patriarchats, weggesperrt in der Wohnung, hilflos gegen Gewalt und Zwangsheirat. Ohne Chance auf Integration verschwinden sie in einer Parallelwelt, die von fundamentalistischen Haustyranen dominiert wird (Der Spiegel, 2004, p. 60 qtd. in Baghdadi 2011, p. 50).

Despite it being sixteen years old now, not much has changed regarding the image of Muslim women in Germany, at least among its generation. An emancipated “us” keeps being contrasted with stereotypical images of a backward and patriarchal “them”. (ibid.) German women are supposedly free and independent, active in the public sphere, sexually liberated and seldom subjected to any form of gendered violence. Muslim women, on the other hand, are perceived to be submissive, sexually repressed, isolated, passive, and subjected to all sorts of violence and oppression, do not have opinions or rights not only due to a weak character, but by demand of their religion. A discourse of “saving” them is frequently used to legitimize policies for migration control and assimilation, which not only deprives Muslim women from their individuality, but also positions them as outsiders to the society they live in. (c. van Es, 2016)

Once again, I want emphasize that this article is now fifteen years old and the decades of Germans and multiple generations of Turks among Muslims of other origins living together, has indeed changed society and brought openmindedness upon it. In fact, most of German youth nowadays, especially ones identifying as the left-wing, alternative generation, fight for the rights of Muslim German as all humans alike. However, for older generations, the stigmas and stereotypes seem not to have disappeared. This is called “identity freezing”: when an “interactant imposes an objective and public identity” over another. (Yep, 1998, p. 79) Such dehumanizing headlines have not often been seen again, but Islamophobia is far from over.

Around the time of the research, there have been multiple islamophobic attacks, as recent as the one in which multiple young Muslims died awfully in Hanau in March 2020. I have witnessed with my own eyes the kicking, sabotaging and other means of destruction of peaceful stands distributing free brochures about Islam. In 2005, the German Islamic School in Munich that I attended was shut down, claiming it is “the German headquarters of the Egyptian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood” (Süddeutsche

Zeitung, 2005), when in reality it was a beloved home to elementary students who learned nothing about fundamentalism but only obtained basic knowledge about Arabic language and reciting the Quran. Furthermore, more than once, young Muslim women were attacked at peaceful anti-Islam events. At an event organized by Turkish-Muslim organization IGMG to raise awareness on the discrimination Muslim women face in their daily life in Berlin, it happened again. The head of communication, Ilknur Küçük, said that Muslim women, especially those wearing headscarves, face frequent discrimination daily and even verbal or physical violence still today. She hopes prejudice against Muslim women will disappear; “we are also living in this society. Just as everyone is living and is accepted as they want, we also want to be accepted that way. Even asking a woman with a headscarf *isn't it hot?*” is not nice.” (Daily Sabah, 2019)

The hijab in Germany today still symbolizes being passive, unwilling to integrate whereas its Christian equivalent of a nun’s veil and coif is a simple demand of the church that must be honoured and respected. I am not biased in this because I do not wear a hijab, all I ask is equal rights, but no, Muslim women with headscarves “have upset the public to the extent that political authorities in various European countries have codified regulations banning the headscarf from public arenas”. (Bendixsen, 2013, p. 2) In 2003, a controversial public debate ignited in Germany about whether Muslim women teachers who wear headscarves could teach classes.

A German schoolteacher of Afghan origin, Fereshta Ludin, was denied a teaching position at a school in Stuttgart in the state of Baden-Württemberg. She complained that she was being discriminated against on the grounds of her religious beliefs. When her case was brought before the Constitutional Court (*Bundesverfassungsgericht*, which is at least as powerful as the American Supreme Court), the Court ruled that the school administration could not deny Ludin a job for wearing a headscarf but still expressed fear that the headscarf as a religious symbol would. (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2014, p. 137) As a result of her case, the headscarf became a focal point of integration debates, in which the German Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Social Democratic Party (SPD) articulated the national narrative of belonging by discussing “how to turn Muslims into German citizens”. Thus revealing the tensions between these two interpretations of the national narrative regarding who belongs and who does not belong to Germany. (c. *ibid*, p. 138)

In a more personal experience, ever since I was a child, I heard my mother be asked if she was “allowed to choose her own husband”, where she would have to defend her parents giving her a choice and emphasizing that she was also not forced to marry at a young age, assuming that was going to be their next question. It must be added that this was in Munich, supposedly one of Germany’s most multicultural metropolises, not a never-had-a-non-German-neighbour village at the edge of East Germany. Still, I did not think much of it until I grew older and started to get similar questions myself. I would be asked why and “how on earth” I (still) do not cover my hair, when my parents intend to marry me off to an oppressive man twice my age back in Islamland and other stereotypical comments I thought had grown instinct since my mother’s generation.

Stigmatizing the Muslimwoman in Islamland is like imagining the Germanwoman in Nazireich, would the West feel the need to save her, too? This generalization is outdated, ignorant, wrong, and merely unacceptable, and the danger of a single story is real. In alternative stories, or in actual reality, Muslim women in Germany and other parts of the world are individual and not much can be generalized upon them. In the following chapter, I exemplify with the reality of Turkish Muslim women as I personally observed them throughout the time including but not limited to the months of my fieldwork in Istanbul.

4.3 The Reality of Muslim Women in Turkey

Muslim women all over the world have been active participants as writers, professors, models, designers, business owners, and other occupations and careers. New magazines, television programs, sports clubs, hairdressers, and clothing stores for and often by Muslim women have flourished in the last decades. Many have become entrepreneurs, establishing businesses that combine economic and religious motives. They have engaged in the creation, labelling, and advertising of the objects, narratives, representations, and performances of Muslim womanhood that combine Islamic teachings and practices with new and old conceptions of piety, beauty, fashion, lifestyle, motherhood, professionalism, and citizenship. (c. Gökarıksel & McLarney, 2010, p. 2) In Turkey, too, Muslim women are successful and independent, from thriving business women to nourishing fashion bloggers and everything in between. The reality of Muslim women, Turkish or from anywhere else in the world, is complex and cannot be boxed into

one entity. Therefore, in this chapter I try as carefully as I can to represent the Muslim women I have personally dealt with in Istanbul, and later give some of them the voice and permission to narrate their own realities, too.

Found in 1923 on secular principles, the Republic of Turkey has tightly controlled religious manifestations in the public sphere. With a law that forbade the wearing of religiously inspired clothing in public, such as the *çarşaf* (similar to the *niqab*) and the *fes* (the wine-red hat with a tassel Ottoman men wore), it was unclear about scarves covering women's hair and necks, yet a number of local authorities did not permit them. "These regulations (and their local interpretations) aimed to create a secular public sphere as part of a process of Westernization". (Korteweg & Yurdakul, 2014, p. 56) Citizens were encouraged to wear "Western" dress, and during the first years of the Republic, those who did not obey these laws could be sanctioned including execution of those wearing religious attire by the Independence Courts.

Although the general headscarf ban was lifted by the current government in 2013, the headscarf still symbolizes the Islam that secularists want to keep out of the public sphere. (ibid.) While it is not something to be proud of that a country with a Muslim majority takes such harsh and fatal decisions just to blend in with Western modernism; I want to highlight the two contradicting positions. Whereas the world views Muslim women as veiled and more importantly violently forced into being veiled, one of the greatest countries with a Muslim majority now publicly does not perceive the veil as part of its culture. In fact, Turkish citizens are so pro-secular that they do not only ignore the supposed obligation of a modest dress code but even stop identifying with Islam altogether.

Still, people around the world are being bombarded with one-sided images about Turkey as the Islamic Ottoman Empire. Images of modern-day Turks have been represented and portrayed through two main channels: Turkish populations living in foreign countries, such as Germany, the Netherlands, etc., and through mainstream media and academia, because "worldwide, it can be observed that there is a tendency of looking at culture as a collective feature of a group". (Spencer-Rodgers, 2007 qtd. in Al-

Khawaldeh, 2015, p. 399) In 2016, a study conducted by diverse institutions³ on the investigation of stereotypes in the German-Turkish context, interviewed 2042 people on the subject of stereotypes towards Turkish people. It compared how Germans describe Turks in Germany with one-word adjectives, and how Turks in Turkey describe themselves in a two column graphic. Results show that while Germans see Turkish people as extremely “religious” (it being the number one used word), the self-ascription column shows that “religious” does not even reach the first 10 words by which Turkish people characterize themselves.

As noted, the Turks in Germany and in Turkey are two ends of the spectrum. The Turks I knew and grew up with in Germany have held onto religion on tightly, evident not only in dress codes and “Islamic” and other cultural traditions, but in spirituality and piety as well, because as argued earlier, religion is often an attempt to fight “social alienation because of the displacement impact”. (Bendixsen, 2011, p. 98) On the other hand, the Turks I have dealt with in Istanbul specifically seem to stray away from religion in its traditional sense, or at least decline the “outer” and focus on the “inner”, as in skip the dress codes while maintaining a certain connection to God. This is not the case for other cities in Turkey, where a traditional Islam is more evident.

Moreover, having lived in Jordan for years and visiting other countries with a Muslim majority, I went to Turkey expecting similar religious experiences. However, the cultural (or better described as religious) shock I experienced there was huge. During the month of Ramadan, the almost non-existent street decoration honouring the holy month rather disappointing, as opposed to the very evident Christmas and New Year’s decoration on every corner of the city. Moreover, restaurants and cafes were open all day and, because almost nobody of the young generation is fasting, they offered food at school meetings, in contrast to Jordan where all restaurants are closed until an hour before Iftar and even youngsters brag about fasting willingly. In my internship office in Istanbul I was the only one fasting and was mocked with jokes like “the German is fasting and the Turks are not” from my colleagues offering me sandwiches every single lunch break,

³ Institute for German as a Second and Foreign Language of the University of Duisburg-Essen, the Center for Turkish Studies and Integration Research in Essen, the Bahçeşehir University Berlin, and 14 other universities in Turkey)

whereas I was used to Christians and Atheists alike in Germany respecting my decision to fast.

This only stresses how important it is to make own experiences. It would have been easy for me or anyone to generalize that all Muslim countries are the same or that Turkey as a whole is a pro-secular, religion-rejecting country, but I know for a fact Istanbul and Izmir are unlike the rest of Turkey. In fact, in Istanbul itself I made contradicting experiences. I lived a year in a rather conservative neighborhood in Eyüp, where the number of mosques outnumbered the number of apartments and the Adhan was so loud it was disturbing, and a year in the most liberal district of the city, Kadıköy, where there are uncountable bars and clubs and people party until the sun comes up. I do not want to state that those things do not mix, there is not just black or white; one can pray in a mosque during the day then party at night, and that is what I admire about Turkey's liberating, complex reality.

Coming back to the subject of women's representation, whereas I was expecting to see many young women wearing a hijab or modest dressing, I have instead seen so much bare skin on a cold December night as I saw in Germany on a hot summer day. Aware of the fact that my university, a private elite university, is quite a "liberal" place, I was still shocked by the scenery. Whereas even in Germany there are unspoken rules about dress codes and female students know their limits when it comes to bearing skin on campus, there was no such thing in Istanbul. Campuses felt like fashion runways where absolutely nothing is inappropriate. Moreover, while "the heavy black hijab dominates the representations of Muslim women internationally" (Piela, 2010, p. 8), I personally have not seen a single woman that wears a black scarf, out of fashion and beauty related reason, it is simply "not a good look on our skin tone", a girl once told me. Just like *Stereotype World: The Middle East Speaks Up*⁴ can confirm: hijabs nowadays are colourful, bright with feathers, glitter and studs, and its wearers bold and beautiful.

However, because of its journey to "Westernization", Islam is also portrayed negatively following in the footsteps of Eurocentrist, secular notions in Turkey. While I cannot speak for all mediums, as the language barrier has hindered me from observing mainstream media for example, I can speak for the mediums of representation I am

⁴ See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p6oAGLPDSjw>

familiar with, drama and music. Over the past few years, I have been watching Turkish films and series with subtitles, and I could not help but notice how Muslim women are represented in them. Similar to the problems of hegemonic masculinity and emphasized femininity present in the film industry worldwide, also the Turkish powerful and independent female characters that are supposed to make the show “feminist” are ones that show no religion, because even in Turkish standards Islam seems to mean oppression — a problem that is worsened by the dominance of all-male screenwriters. The “strong, independent woman” is one that does not show religion (except for at funerals where she turns to Allah to pray for the deceased and throws a black scarf over her hair in respect).

Through my observation, even to Turks, Islam and modernity cannot go together, and a Muslim woman cannot be a strong, independent one. It seems that Islamic clothes in all forms are a thing of the past and only *Teyzeler* (=old aunts) in the countryside wear them, probably just because it is a tradition. Unlike in the Arab film industry, where a modern way of modest clothing is present, through mixing coloured and patterned hijabs with baggy dresses and wide-legged pants that indicate that Muslim women can in fact follow trends, be strong independent women while “meeting religious and cultural demands”.

Because I had initially planned to write my thesis about the representation of Muslim women in the Turkish film industry, I held informal conversations with young, practicing female Muslim students and I was relieved to find that even they were disappointed in that kind of representation. They all agreed that there should be religious female leads on TV just like there is in real life, they admitted, drawing examples of themselves, their mothers, teachers or bosses. They deemed it “unrealistic” and “disgraceful” to “assume that all powerful women are religion-less, and that the religious women live buried in wooden huts in the countryside”. Because in reality, most Turkish women practicing Islam, were liberated, strong and independent.

As discussed by Asker Kartarı throughout his seminars, Turkish Muslim women are not “oppressed” like they are represented in Germany, they actually have equal rights if not more than their male counterparts, they “have the say in their household, their voice is not just heard, their demands are taken as holy orders”, he once noted. How these negative portrayals, as opposed to the positive reality, impact young Turkish women and

how they represent themselves in society will be explained in the empirical part of the thesis through the lens of five interviewed young Muslim women from Istanbul.

Having therewith concluded the theoretical part of this thesis, the next chapter describes the method used to study the difference between the self-representations of young women with an Islamic background in Istanbul and in Bremen, and how they are affected by the stereotypical representation of the “Muslimwoman”. Because this research does not discuss a single, tightly integrated topic, but rather a series of intertwined topics that help understand one brighter picture, the following questions reflect the study’s purpose. The principal research question is:

How does the representation of Muslim women influence the self-representations of young Muslim women in Bremen in their daily lives, and how is it different from how young Muslim women represent themselves in Istanbul?

This research question is to my knowledge and access a new one. The guiding research questions are:

- a. To which extent are the stereotypes and prejudices towards Muslim women prevalent in 2020?
- b. Are sugarcoated prejudices and Islamophobic statements wrapped as compliments evident examples of the stigma?
- c. What are further reasons behind these negative betrayals?
- d. How does the presence of these representations influence them emotionally, affect their daily lives, and most importantly, their well-being?
- e. Does Islam stand in the way of “integration” of the young Muslim women in German society? In other words, should their self-representations be seen as part of a politics of belonging?
- f. Why do young Muslim women often turn themselves into “ambassadors” of Islam in Germany whereas Turkish women stray away from religion altogether?

To answer these questions, the research approach I chose is strictly anthropological; it uses a qualitative instead of a quantitative research method aiming to gain a deeper understanding of the subject under investigation. The primary purpose of this study is to better determine what influence, rather than just effect the representation of Muslim women has on the self-representations of young Muslim women in Bremen

and Istanbul; on their well-being, their feeling of belonging to society and their self-image within that society. Another aim is to compare the impacted self-representations of the women in the two cities. The research aims to provide results that contribute to further studies, especially in the area of transcultural studies, point out how stereotypes, prejudices and stigmas hinder intercultural communication, clarify the importance of individualizing culture and religiosity, highlight the dangers of single stories and shift focus from false representation to real self-representations.



5. THE RESEARCH METHOD

In this chapter, I shed light on the research method and approach chosen for this research in the first subchapter. The second subchapter discusses the data collection process; beginning with entering the field, the sampling strategy followed to find the research participants, as well as the challenges faced in the field, and addresses the interview style I deemed fruitful. It also introduces the nine research participants with a short autobiography honouring each one of them. The third subchapter clarifies the data analysis process and coding strategy followed to achieve best results.

5.1 The Research Approach

For a research studying the impacts of a certain phenomenon on the self-representation, well-being and sense of belonging to society of young women, a qualitative rather than a quantitative research method had to be chose, because it gives the research an emic feel, and more importantly, the desired human voice. Moreover, out of the various qualitative research methods, an ethnographic approach specifically has proven to be the most suitable for examining and understanding the relation between multiculturalism, religiosity and self-representations. This ethnographic perspective should help answer the research questions efficiently and give a chance to correct the universal, false narrative regarding the diverse womankind. I found that only through qualitative interviews, could I truly investigate and understand the impact of these representations on young women on the personal but also on the social level. The following subchapters elaborate on that.

5.2 Data Collection

5.2.1 The sampling strategy

When first entering the research field, I talked to the director of the Gender Center (Cinsiyet Merkezi) at Kadir Has University, who redirected me to events, student clubs, and mail lists that could help me, but gave me little hope of finding content in English. I tried to seek dates of events discussing women's issues in Istanbul, I attended an open lecture held by her in English on public perceptions of gender roles and the status of women in Turkey, and saw a protest regarding an oppressive law. Realizing these methods were not ideal for me, I switched to purposive sampling, which I saw most

beneficial for my research. Following this strategy, I chose the research participants schematically and according to pre-set criteria. I focused on finding young, multicultural women with an Islamic background from Bremen and Istanbul. Despite the differences in age, cultural background and educational status being minimal, the real diversity in the participants lies in their religiosity. The semi-heterogeneous group consists of:

- a. ones who see Islam as an important part of their identity
- b. others who care about the place of religion in their lives, but not the “traditional” Islam of their descendants
- c. one convert to Islam
- d. one who no longer associates herself with religion at all, but still sees Islam as part of her culture

Over a semester’s period, I searched for research participants and it seemed to go smoothly in the beginning. In Istanbul, I approached young women at university that met my criteria after learning that their English speaking skills were good enough, and they always seemed to be very enthusiastic about my topic and willing to help. When I actually wanted to set a time and place for the interview, the majority backed out or kept postponing and I was left with little hope of actually finding research participants on time. The interviewees from Istanbul were therefore ones I recruited in different places, only one was from Kadir Has University, the others I met in random places such as in a picnic. In Bremen, conveniently, the majority of my research participants were young women I was already acquainted with from university or events I attended there, who the contact to was uncomplicated. My short visits to Bremen throughout my stay in Istanbul made it nearly impossible to search for participants I did not know beforehand.

5.2.2 Ethical concerns and other challenges in the field

Aware that my interview questions encouraged sensitive and intimate narrations, confidentiality was a great concern to me. In fear of getting caught in ethical issues, I verbally stated at the beginning of every interview that I will use direct quotes from the research participant’s answers and that I therefore need to record the interview digitally, and all research participants agreed to the terms. I further consented all interviewees on what demographic information I could use to introduce them, gender being known, name, age and study field were among the things they agreed on, three of them preferring a code

name. I also informed them that they may ask me to omit parts of their interviews if they regret mentioning something too personal or poorly thought out, and asked if they wish to read my transcript of their interviews, but they saw it as unnecessary. As can be concluded, I took it upon myself that these women feel safe and respected during all of the process concerning them from beginning to end.

Besides ethical concerns, I faced more challenges than I had imagined while building this research. I started this thesis imagining the problems I would face would be limited to two things: not finding up-to-date literature and enough English speakers that I could interview. After entering the research field, however, more problems started to pop up. As mentioned, I signed up for student clubs and mailing lists that would lead me to relevant content or redirect me to people that could benefit me. Although I could at least translate the content I received online, it was not beneficial, because it rather far from what I had imagined in my thesis pages. I therewith gave up on the snowball method. I then attempted participatory observation, in the protest I watched from afar, not understanding more than keywords. Logically, not speaking more than basic Turkish at the time of collecting data affirmed that I better give up this method as well. Counting on interviews as a single method, too, brought challenges along. Undoubtedly, I only am to blame for the time pressure I put myself through, as I had nine interviews in two weeks, which can be not only be overwhelming to review and transcribe, but also quite redundant to have the same conversation repeatedly for a month.

However, some difficulties were out of my hand. In two interviews, the women I was interviewing switched to German making things easier for themselves but harder for me, as I had to translate them⁵. In others, the English was hard to understand at times. Moreover, I had planned to do all interviews with Turkish women in person while I was in Istanbul, because I have found outcomes of in-person interviews deeper and truer than online ones (despite FaceTime technically being, face-to-face, too). However, because of the outburst of the Coronavirus (COVID-19), a quarantine during the second half of March prevented me to proceed as planned. As a curfew was issued, two interviews in Istanbul unfortunately had to be held online. Moreover, I had not planned to interview students and recent graduates only. In fact, I would have preferred to have a more diverse

⁵ The interviews with Scherihan and Zehra were in German. All quotes from them have been translated by me, a translator by profession; even if not 1:1, the translated still echoes the original message.

group that includes non-educated women too. However, it much harder than I had imagined to access such individuals (which indicates that the majority of Muslim women are indeed educated). I also did not want to limit myself to an age group, but it so happened that they were all in their twenties. In addition, the interviews were not equal in duration, and they differed from twelve minutes to sixty-five minutes, which made it challenging to analyze them the same way.

5.2.3 The semi-structured interviews and research participants

As mentioned, I have found qualitative, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews to be the ideal approach and ground rule for my research, as they are open-ended conversations that encourage an unlimited narration flow and offer enough leeway for individuals to express themselves freely. I held the interviews face-to-face: in person or per FaceTime, because that helped me understand the research participants' answers better through behaviours, reactions, facial expressions, and body language. Because of the ethnographic nature of the study, I foresaw semi-formal interviews as the most suitable, especially that I am interviewing fellow young women around my age, but they were formal in the sense that they were conducted in a new setting and were audio-taped. Questions were very open-ended but centred around the question "Can you tell me what *it feels like* to be a Muslim woman in Bremen/Istanbul, and how it impacts how *you* represent yourself in society?" The remaining interview questions are attached in Appendix A. Follow-up questions were asked dependent upon the responses given, while keeping the guiding research questions in mind.

The interviews with the women in Bremen were all held over FaceTime in March 2020 while I was in Istanbul. The German interviewees were:

Hiba: a 24-year-old of Egyptian-Dutch descent, who takes the spiritual and ethical aspects of Islam to the heart. Despite coming from an International Finance study background, she is passionate about feminist issues and works hard to eliminate discrimination. She also rocks a modern turban-style hijab.

Luisa: A convert to Islam at just 18 years, she already possesses impressive knowledge about life and religion. Even now at 20, she still prefers the spiritual rather than the physical aspects of Islam and continues to dress the way she did before converting. She just started her Bachelor's in Health Management.

Scherihan: a fellow Master's student at University of Bremen, who at the age of 26 and with a Bachelor's degree in Political Science cares about various issues regarding women's representations. Scherihan comes from a Kurdish background and deliberately follows the strict dress codes encouraged by the Quran.

Zehra: born in Turkey, Zehra, who is a Business graduate at 27, has been in Bremen most of her life, yet has a lot of work experience in Arab countries, making her familiar with German, Turkish and Arabic languages and cultures. She dresses liberally yet lets Islamic ethics and values guide her daily life.

In Istanbul, too, all interviews were held throughout March, but in person or online. The Turkish interviewees were:

Bilge: born and raised in Dubai as a child, she, now 23, struggles with her studies in Electrical Engineering and her faith in God alike. She believes in his existence yet questions many traditions associated with it, as she believes they are outdated Turkish culture.

Ayşe: born to a non-practicing Turkish mother and a religious Iraqi-Turkmen father in Canada, she was raised bilingual and semi-religious as she calls it. Still, she decided to study Arabic Literature and Islamic Law and now works between Canada and Turkey. With 25 years of age, she has already travelled so much and told foreigners she met along the way to the beauty of Islam.

Esma: a recent graduate from Kadir Has University, who at the age of 24 works as an industrial engineer in a great company, in which she disapproves of the hijab-banning rules. Her Greek grandmother raised her to sing and dance to Greek folklore music but not to step in the footsteps of her conservative parents.

Nazrin: raised by an Alevi Azerbaijani mother and a Sunni Turkish father between Istanbul and Baku, she chooses not to practice publicly. As a 23-year old Anthropology student, she strictly believes religion should not be a public debate but rather a personal matter.

Lastly, and also held over FaceTime, my special interviewee between Istanbul and Bremen was:

Betül: a 28 year-old Turkish Computer Science PhD student in Bremen, whose cultural shock lies mostly in Germans always assuming she is a close-minded, uneducated Muslim by default, just because she comes from Turkey, whereas she does not believe in a God and is obtaining her third degree at such a young age. Betül fights with her basic German to escape and illuminate such stigmas.

Having explained the data collection process, clarified at the method and introduced the research participant, what remains is to demonstrate how the collected data was analysed, summarized and presented. This will be done in the following.

5.3 Data Analysis

While remaining as true and unbiased to the interviews as possible, the data analysis was undeniably subjective. My analysis occurred during the interview transcription phase in which I constantly compared previously collected data to new data to see if patterns were developing, additional questions were raised, and the results supported or contradicted one another. Prior to holding the interviews, I sent the research participants a document to read thoroughly, which included the two cultural identification models introduced by Yamplosky (2013) and the religiosity categorizations by Klinkhammer (2003) to run themselves through. A table that shows the results is attached in Appendix B. With this, I aimed to group them according to their multicultural and religious identifications and help understand and therewith analyze their answers and reactions accordingly. This gave them the impression, or tricked them even, into thinking I was going to question them on the cultural and religious backgrounds, giving them no chance to prepare for answering questions about the representation of Muslim women. This was one of many reasons why the results of the interviews provided rich data. I then interpreted most of the interview's contents in detail, paying attention to no-verbal communication as well.

I aimed to develop a coherent, thematic narrative relying on excerpts and quotations of the interviews as building blocks. I looked for nuances within a theme to refine my interpretations of particular excerpts. (Emerson et al. 2011, p. 209) In order to analyze the data, I started with producing codes, coding was not just labelling for me, it was linking: "it leads from the data to the idea." (Richards & Morse, 2007, p. 137 in Saldana 2009) I invested a lot of time and effort into producing codes, for "the excellence of the research

rests in large part on the excellence of the coding”. (Strauss, 1987, p. 27) All codes were developed manually by color coordinating matching codes in the interview transcriptions with thematic generalizations. The ten colours provided ten generalizations and can be found in a table under Appendix C. By examining comparative elements, I could categorize ten common themes in all nine interviews:

1. Descriptions of their religiousness/ religiosity levels
2. Stereotypes and prejudices they have heard or experienced personally⁶
3. Sugar-coating Islamophobia in compliments
4. Attitudes towards the presentations: Confirming or denying them
5. Further reasons behind the stigma
6. The emotional and social impacts on them
7. How their self-representations were influenced
8. Their narrations of Islam’s and Muslims’ reality
9. Belonging or disbelonging to society (for the women from Bremen)
10. Westernization (for women in Istanbul and the expat in Bremen)

The data analysis was difficult because it was new to me. In my previous studies, I focused on turning field notes including descriptions of atmosphere, time and space into a narrative, an actual story; but never had I transformed them into a thematic text before. In most researches, interview participants are referred to in numbers such as in (#1, lines 3-5), but because I wanted to give mine a true human touch and honor the narrations of these women to the maximum, I decided to quote every interviewee using her chosen name. The numbers following the comma lead to the line numbers in the transcribed interview, such as in (Esmā, 23-27) for example. How I turned those narrations into an ethnographic text will be shown in the following chapter, which also presents and discusses the results of this research.

⁶ I was not aware that the term “representation” is specific and new to many; therefore I often had to explain it or choose stereotypes/prejudices as an alternative term in most interviews.

6. MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE REPRESENTATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN

This chapter presents the findings generated from the research through the data collected in the shape of nine interviews in two cities. In the first subchapter, I present the results common between both the young Muslim women in Istanbul and Bremen, in the second subchapter results regarding the women in Bremen and in the third and last subchapter the ones specific to the women in Istanbul.

6.1 Representation Matters

My first impression on the interviews can be summed up with a feeling of surprise: all nine women of varying age, heritage, place of birth and living, study field, as well as religiosity were strangely similar in viewpoints regarding the study issue. In the following, the common perspectives of the multicultural interviewees in Bremen and Istanbul are revealed to answer the guiding research questions.

Does the stigma still stand in 2020, and to which extent?

I had questioned whether my research topic might be outdated, however, even after my investigation and a decade after events such as 9/11 spread islamophobic notions, the stigma of the oppressed Muslim woman still exists. It is the most generalized representation and a common axis undergirding German but also Turkish representations. “The majority believes that women don’t have rights in Islam” (Hiba, 29; Bilge, 6), and are being “forced” to do certain things; “what to wear, what to eat, whom to marry, where to go, what to do”. (Betül, 19-20) Women willingly wearing a hijab would receive questions like “did your parents force you to wear it?” (Ayşe, 59) “Do you have any freedom at home? Do you have any freewill?” (Hiba, 27), and just for wearing it, people “would immediately think you are very conservative or oppressed”. (Hiba, 78-79)

Tightly intertwined with the stigma of oppression is the dependance on parents and/or the opposite gender: “they are always dependent on their men” (Zehra, 25), “cannot make their own decisions” (Esma, 7), “their families make all decisions for them”. (Betül, 40) In most cases, such stereotypes are not directly addressed, but are implied through more subtle comments or questions, such as when my mother would be asked if she was allowed to choose her own husband, as I had mentioned in previous

chapters. Other examples drawn from the interviewees' experiences are "what would your parents say, would they allow this?". (Ayşe, 24) In a less direct way, Luisa said "I don't want to be looked at as someone who is not capable of thinking for themselves" (93-94), meaning she had been accused of that before.

Moreover, Islam is still connected to old traditions and rituals that were, maybe still are in rural areas, common in cultures where Islam is the principle religion. Traditions such as that women "have to get married in this way or meet [men] in that way" (Ayşe, 43-44), that they do not interact with men altogether, such as when Scherihan was asked in job interviews "and what would you do if you were to work alongside a man?" (34-35) Bilge is bothered by further generalizations:

that they all wear headscarf and loose-fitting clothes. They support the right wing in politics. They tend to be reactionary. They are usually traditional people. They don't work, just stay home. They tend to connect everything to their religion, like achievements, failure, loss, death, accident, etc. (6-10).

These generalizations heard in Turkey are similar to the ones experienced in Germany.

Furthermore, I found direct statements in almost every interview that women with a Muslim background are supposedly uneducated and/or unskilled. While I had mentioned this one before, I did not think it would be prominent to this degree and in this era, where education privileges are available to all girls and women in both Germany and Turkey. Zehra harshly denies stigmas like "uneducated, have no knowledge, are only housewives, can only give birth to children, cannot be employed, and are not even able to stand financially on their own." (21-25) It is surprisingly also still out there, despite immigrants with a Muslim background being in Germany for generations now, that Muslim women do not speak German (well). „It seems strange to them because it doesn't correspond with the image they have in their heads“. (Scherihan, 18-20) She regrets that her hijab resulted in employers "doubting her gifts, skills or intelligence" (30-31), and that even today "it is not known or seen as common that a woman with a headscarf can do things that any intellectual person with a university degree can do. It is still is foreign to them". (68-70) This is especially insulting, because it was not rocket science that was doubted, but rather beginner skills; she adds, "they didn't believe that I was good enough to do the demanded job, they doubted my basic skills, even though someone with a master's degree can *of course* write summaries or protocols". (122-124)

On another note, I have previously encountered some ignorant individuals who believed the entire Middle East's population is Muslim, and thereby strict, conservative, and backwards. This was made evident when such individuals would ask my Arab friend in Germany why his name is John not Mohammad, and he would have to explain that it is common for Coptics (Egyptian Christians). Similarly, Betül, as a non-believer, explains her confusion towards many Germans assuming "someone Turkish is someone Muslim" (6), by default. On the other hand, Nazrin is mostly bothered by the idea that "a good Muslim woman should wear hijab" (19) or that in general, "a good and kind person is someone who is religious and has fear of the God". (15-16) She, as do I, strongly believes that the only thing that makes a person a good one, is actually doing good in the world. (22-23)

Does sugar-coating the stigma lessen the harm?

Hearing the almost identical stereotypes and prejudices of Muslim women in Germany and Turkey shows how these are worldwide globalized images. Of course, many of these are not said to women in their faces, and when they are, they are rather stated indirectly. This sugar-coating takes many shapes. It can be wrapped as 1. a "compliment", as I had discussed in a previous chapter, such as the actually offensive comments Scherihan got in job interviews as a praise for her basic skills, „wow, you can do that!" (75) as if her headscarf was standing in the way of her using Microsoft Office like every other German in seventh grade. Or as 2. an indirect offer to help overcome backward parents: "Should I call your mom and tell her you're at my house? She wouldn't let you go to a party, you told her you're somewhere else, right? I can be your cover or alibi". (Hiba, 34-35) Or by 3. sympathizing with the passive girl oppressed by her father; "Oh Ayşe, if your dad forced you, I can speak to him, and if you ever need to talk about it, I'll be there for you" (75-78) like what Ayşe got from her teacher when she first wore the hijab. The savior behaviour concealed as a feminist act of empathy.

Often the message behind the "compliment" is intended, but even if it is unconscious, it can be harmful. Scherihan sees "but you speak German so well!" as other words for "you are foreign", "you don't actually belong here". (150-152) This affirms Riem Speilhaus' understanding of the term "integration" as problematic, as it implies "us" and "them". Hiba recalled how the manager of her internship told her she did not want

her at first because of the hijab but “now she really likes [her]” as if that makes up for it. (91-93) She was also told a few times that she looks “more modern” when she replaced the hijab for a turban (98), similar to when many people tell a woman who takes off the hijab that she looks much better. While that cannot be merely understood as islamophobic, it still “is not a compliment; I think it is rude, like the hijab makes you ugly or whatever”. (Hiba, 106-107)

Are the realities of Muslim women close to being individualized?

As I supposed prior to the research and affirmed through it, when “Muslim” women are represented, no distinguishes are made on their varying cultures, mentalities and levels of religiosity, let alone is it ever brought to light that some women with a Muslim background do not want to be associated with the religion for whatever reason. “There is a monolithic brush that all Muslims are painted with because of our common thread: the belief in Allah, his messengers and his book, [...] but this shouldn’t be taken to mean that we are all the same without variations in practices and ideas.” (Khan, 2019) Klinkhammer noted that the religiosity of younger generation Muslim women has “already developed its structures and norms into a modern and individualistic way of believing.” (2003, p. 2)

To confirm this, the significance of religion and how they practice it varies for each and every one of my interviewees. From ones who met most Islamic demands: “I’m very religious, I pray and fast, I cannot refrain from all sins, but I always try to do good” (Zehra, 62-64), to ones who wish were able to do more: “I have faith, but I do not perform most religious routines. I feel embarrassed and guilty that I cannot be a good enough Muslim and cannot defend the rights of Muslims”. (Esmā, 55-56) From ones who see faith as the only aspect to religion: “I believe that there is a God, I wouldn’t say I’m religious in actions. Islam is a belief to me, not a lifestyle” (Bilge, 35;37), to ones who see faith and demands equally important: “I have values and I care about some responsibilities. I don’t even pray five times a day, but I try my best.” (Ayşe, 151-152) Betül, however, who comes from a Muslim background, grew up in a family of non-believers. “We are atheists, my father drinks, my grandfather makes rakki.” (70-71) Hypothetically assuming it matters or indicates something, only four out of the nine “Muslim women” I interviewed wore a hijab. This affirms that they make a distinction

between the traditional Islam of their parents and have a far more open-minded understanding of religiousness.

It came to my surprise that the most practicing of them all was the non-Muslim-born: “I converted out of pure conviction and belief” (Luisa, 63), whereas Nazrin, born to Alevi and Sunni parents, on the other hand, does not practice publicly at all, because she sees religious belief as a personal matter and not a matter of classification. (3-4) Some of them also confirmed my assumption that religiosity is dynamic; “belief changes according to the conditions of time” (Esma, 49); “sometimes you feel closer to Allah and sometimes less, sometimes you feel you have to pray, sometimes you don’t really care about it.” (Ayşe, 154-155) A more important point they reaffirmed is that religion is just one aspect of one’s identity and not *the* identifier for it, Nazrin jokingly says “I do not go and be like: Hi! My name is this and I am a Muslim woman.” (35-36)

Not only on the religious level, but they also emphasized that the cases of Muslim women must be treated separately; They argued that they could navigate constraints individually and self-responsibly, not collectively, and wanted more attention to be paid to the “average women” who were not oppressed, and to erase the assumption that the oppression is attributed to Islam. In their words, “it has nothing to do with religion, but with the Muslim women themselves. The image has to be changed, it depends on which country you come from, your background, where you grew up, etc.” (Zehra, 37-40) On the contrary, Luisa even argued that a careful study of Islam would lead to women’s empowerment. (65-67) Nazrin further believes “one should not be gauged to represent a whole region or nation, it is enough to be a part of the measured group, to simply exist in the group”. (29-32) More poetically summarized,

I am aware that much of what goes around regarding stereotypes and racist statements is not true nor corresponds with reality at all; every person is individual, everyone is different and there is also rich diversity within Muslims themselves. This means you can’t shove them all in the same drawer (Scherihan, 42-46).

The nine women have, in their own ways, encouraged the individualization of the realities of Muslim women worldwide.

What are (further) reasons behind the negative betrayals?

A few research participants shared the reasons of where they think these representations could be stemming from. They agreed that the media carries the bigger

weight, “it has to do with how they show the Middle East in the media” (Ayşe, 239-240), but so do first generations of immigrants in Germany, as they “hold onto tradition too much, even if it’s not a good one. And then of course society will believe this is Islam, not the culture.” (Hiba, 61-62) Decades ago, education was not available for women, and that is why that generation has probably remained illiterate until today. (Zehra, 28-34) They also affirmed that culture is often mistaken for religion; Bilge believes that “most people and nations think that their traditional ways are Islam.” (36-37) Two further reasons explained by interviewees are the power factor and plain ignorance. The power factor, in my opinion, is an extreme case that I do not see a common reason to be generalized, namely certain Germans wanting to “feel a little higher and stronger. This power factor, that you are the one who cannot speak well or cannot articulate herself well, that you are beneath them, them who are at the top.” (Scherihan, 22-25) Also Luisa addressed it, “I hate people’s ignorance and I hate to know that they assume they are standing above me or see me as some weak, influenced little girl.” (111-113)

She added that the prejudices come from “the fact that Islam is mis-experienced in a lot of Muslim countries”, therefore “people who do not inform themselves about Islam only have said picture about women in their heads and do not see the real aspects the rules of Islam actually bring along.” (81-83) It was important to me to include a non-Muslim-born in my research to test Özyürek’s theory (2017) about Eurocentrist converts in Germany being a reason behind the stigma, and Luisa confirmed much of it is true. (45) She justified that by Islam still appearing as “foreign, unfamiliar and in most people’s heads even as something extreme or dangerous.” (50-52) She finds that most Germans partly link freedom to exposing skin, “which is why at first glance Muslim women appear as “locked up” (71-72) and added that “some Muslim women stay home to take care of the household which is unfortunately seen as old-fashioned in Germany”. (73-74)

How many Muslim women does the stigma actually represent, though?

Explaining the reasons they see behind the representations only shows that they did not deny any stereotypes or prejudices completely, but rather acknowledge that there is some truth to them, yet they did not associate themselves with them. Scherihan admits that there are certainly women out there who would not prefer to work with men, but it would not be a problem for her, even as a practicing Muslim. (36-38) Hiba also knows

some parents oppress and judge, but hers do not. (37) Ayşe elaborates, “I’m 25, I’ve been living on my own for eight years, my parents don’t tell me what to do or put their nose in my business”. (210-212)

All research participants in Bremen as well as in Istanbul were aware of oppression and gender inequalities, “I know some families are oppressive.” (Esma, 13) They did not deny that some Muslim women were forced to follow Islamic dress codes, “some girls don’t have much freedom or are indeed forced to wear hijab” (Hiba, 59), or at least that their families “prefer” them to wear it. (Esma, 20-21) This shows that younger generations of Muslim women are breaking free from the Islam polluted by oppressive elements of some cultures, and rather lean towards an Islam that solely celebrates the bond to Allah.

The more I informed myself about true Islam; I realized that it is sometimes even falsified by strange rituals and cultures from countries where Islam is strongly represented. So it depends on individual families and their values. Oppression of women can be justified with a wrong interpretation of Islam, that’s why it definitely can occur in Muslim families. Luckily, I do not know any girls who suffer from it in real life (Luisa, 65-67; 83-86).

Hiba and Luisa clarified that they and most Muslim women are not represented in the Muslimwoman in Islamland and that generalizing is therefore wrongful and problematic. “I can see these betrayals in *some* women, I don’t see the majority of women in these betrayals though, it’s not like I ever saw myself, my sister, my mom or my other Muslim friends in the woman they show on TV” (Hiba, 69-70), she censures “who the hell is she? Do people really believe this crap?” (71-72) and her harsh language expresses how disapproving she is.

In Istanbul, on the other hand, I found more agreement with stereotypes, explained by the older generations of Muslim Turkish women indeed fitting into them;

I agree that most of the *old* Turkish Muslim women are reactionary, wear headscarves, and connect everything to religion. The reactionary thinking that most of the old Turkish Muslim women have, discourages only themselves to have the place they deserve in career or in general (Bilge, 23-25).

Ayşe even exemplifies how such stigmas spread and become generalized: “in Canada someone told me Muslim women don’t date, they marry directly, and I know he said that because he probably met a Muslim woman who told him that. Because actually a lot of people don’t date before marriage, it’s not a rule in Islam but it became culture.” (83-83) With their statements, they acknowledge that stereotypes come from some truth, but they

fight the generalizing ability they have to them: “it has a true side, but people should be careful and understand that not all people are the same”. (Ayşe 94-95)

How do these representations affect Muslim women emotionally?

The research participants expressed much frustration with the ongoing representations, not always directly through direct words, but often through their facial expressions and behavioural reactions during interviews. I could observe how the majority of them were personally attacked and harmed by the matter and not a single one did not feel targeted or affected. From what I could sense during the interviews, there was a hurricane of feelings that I understood as sadness, anger, and frustration. Their behavioral reactions, noted through face expressions and body language, such as looking away, frowning, etc. were a mixture of denial and disapproval but also shame and guilt, as if responsible for such negative images.

In their own words, in Bremen “the hijab for sure affects my image in society. I could never really be who I wanted to be”. (Hiba, 78; 75) Coming across negative representations “bothers me, makes me emotional, because I feel seriously affected. When something is addressed to me personally, I get nervous and aggressive”. (Zehra, 56-57) Scherihan was the most vocal about her feelings. In multiple instances, she expressed “it’s really harsh”, “I find it so sad” and “it’s hurtful”, and is mostly affected by facial expressions, “evil” stares, and insults, which understandably make her angry. (61; 76; 96; 142) What truly saddened me was the sorrow I saw on Luisa’s face when she explained that whenever she tells people she converted to Islam, the first thing they ask her is if she “did it for a man”. “It’s the prejudice that affects me emotionally the most, because I hate to appear as a woman whose decisions are based on a man”. (92-93)

The impact on their well-being was almost identical for the Turkish women. Betül’s anger lies mostly with Germans assuming she is Muslim, and not treating her as an individual case or giving her a chance to explain herself. (6-7) She narrated in complete sadness “they say I am running away from Islam”, when in reality, this stigma runs after her, “at university, at work, at cafes.” (6-8) Not only does she find the representations and stereotypes surrounding Muslim women “shocking” but also “insulting”. Esma’s words were harsh, too: “If I was a girl with a headscarf, I would be *disturbed* in many

environments”. (2-3) Bilge adds that it annoys and upsets her when “people generalize something about old generations on new generations”. (41-42)

Aware of their feelings toward the issue, most of them did not realize how it influenced the way they see or represent themselves. Whereas all of them have talked about representation as an ongoing issue, only a few have addressed how these prejudices and stigmas impact their individual self-representations, often leading to unconscious self-discrimination, or resulting in an unaware distancing from religion. In the following, I elaborate on how their self-representations are impacted and influenced, and whether they confirm or challenge the dominant image. I also reveal that young women in Bremen and in Istanbul alike try, aware or unconsciously, to break stereotypes with the way they present themselves in society, yet differently in each city.

6.2 Case Studying Bremen

6.2.1 Writing against integration

For the young women in Bremen, the interviews mostly concentrated on the question “what does it *truly feel like* to be a Muslim woman in Bremen?” In their experiences, society in Bremen is easier on and more welcoming towards Muslims. (Zehra, 67-68) Scherihan elaborates, „I think in Bremen we actually have it quite well, it is really multi-coloured on the streets; we have a lot of women with headscarves. Bremen is very open and tolerant but sometimes you have difficult days” (153-154), which is why “it’s good but it’s not perfect.” (Hiba, 120) Despite being in Bremen for almost a century, Scherihan’s family still faces discrimination because of their Islamic background. “We are now the 4th generation in Germany, but [my Islamic background] is still not seen as normal.” (2-3; 71-73) Because religion stood in the way of her finding a job, she added, “of course not everything is related to my headscarf or my migration background, but I still ask myself, what would they ask [in the interview] if an *urdeutsche* (= indigenous German) woman was sitting here, would they treat her the same as me? I doubt it.” (132-136)

Undoubtedly, with the uncountable things to be praised, there are some things that can be criticised as well. “There are a lot of prejudices and many people do not want to get rid of them or do not put in any effort to fight against them.” (Scherihan, 16-18) More specifically, “there are so many ignorant people who just don’t want to change their

views, who just don't want to understand what Islam actually stands for." (Luisa 99-100) Because Luisa, as a convert, has a different experience from the interviewed Muslim-born women, she had much to add to the reality of practicing Islam in Bremen. She considers Germany to be compatible but not ideal place to practice it, because

as a Muslim in Germany, you are legally able to live out and practice your faith openly, due to its liberal and democratic system. Yet important, fundamental values conveyed by Islam, such as modesty, purity and decency deviate very much from what Germany's too liberal system of government caused. Germany definitely does not contribute to focusing and strengthening one's faith, because society conveys no religious values at all and rather encourages people to turn away from God (24-27; 40-42).

She points out a very clear hypocritical double standard. A society in which "adultery, nudity and ruthless party behaviour is seen as completely normal, even as a sign of freedom" but "modesty and abstinence appear as a sign of weakness or even oppression" (28-30) to use her very words, is highly discriminative. This is why this is as a feminist issue, both should be seen as normal, and any woman, Muslim or not, should be able to choose either without being judged.

It seemed to me that they specifically wanted to underline the generational difference between Muslims in German society, not only in religiosity as I had discussed in previous chapters, but also with "fitting into" the prejudices that roam around. It was not hard to take out of Hiba's statements "I believe that with this generation, these betrayals will not be as common as before" (72-73), and more prominently "I am grateful that I was born here and in this generation, not before, and have opportunities I wouldn't have [if I wasn't born here and now]". (111-112) They further pointed out that it is a major shift and noticeable change; the recent generation have a very good education, are academics and business women and speak German fluently. (Zehra, 108-112) Perhaps most of the first generation of Muslim immigrants were uneducated housewives, but nowadays Muslim women try at least to be economically independent even if they have no major education. (Zehra, 111f) I agree as I could see this improvement in the three generations of women in my own family; my grandmother could only study until middle school, but my mother has a Bachelor's degree and I am wrapping up my Master's. Without any hesitation, Scherihan added that the "majority of Muslim women in Bremen are open-minded and well-educated". (56-57)

Moving forward, there are numerous researches concerning the national belonging and well-being of Muslim girls and women in Europe based off their religious

beliefs alone. While that is not the focus of my thesis, it is an aspect I cannot neglect, because how the representations influence their self-representations is connected with how it makes them feel on an individual but also on a social level. For this, I believed asking the research participants to sort themselves into the two models of cultural identification would help me understand their “integration” status in society, including their feelings of societal and national belonging, but I was mistaken. I expected their responses to be balanced between belonging and not belonging, yet it came to my surprise that they all felt complete belonging to German society even with the problems they had mentioned to me. I did not sense the “cultural homelessness” Vivero and Jenkins (1999) talked about. While this truly delighted me, I could not understand it at first.

Despite the increasing efforts to tolerate Muslims in Germany in the past decade specifically, some research participants pointed out something beyond empathy and tolerance that is perhaps the most crucial for the true “integration” of Muslim women in society, namely acceptance. Hiba argued that “they will never truly *accept* you as their own, even though you’re born and raised here. You’ll always be excluded, left out.” (6-7) When I asked her why she had said she sees herself as “fully integrated” on one model and “belonging to both heritage and host cultures simultaneously” on the other if she does not feel accepted, her reply came to my shock. “Because this doesn’t mean they see me the same way. You asked me what I think I am on the two models, not what *they* think I am.” (141) In heart-piercing words she added, “I don’t know if they would even allow me to say I’m “German” German.” (21-22)

Similarly, Scherihan explained “I look different, I dress differently, and I don’t fit into society. These are things *they* think of me, not what I think of myself”. (89-91) A point I would not have discovered myself without them pointing it out is that where young Muslim women see themselves in society does not necessarily equal where society sees them in return. This could be seen as a critique against the two models of multicultural identification, as they perfectly capture how one places oneself within society but fail to capture if society confirms that placement. Whereas all interviewees saw themselves as equals to their counterparts, they regret that those same counterparts rarely saw them as equals. Acceptance is the most important wish these women have; Hiba admits “us and them, we and they, Muslim and Christian, Arab and German, stuff like that did not exist

in my dictionary before” (17) until “they put me in categories they don’t put themselves in”. (18-19) She elaborates,

I go to a job interview believing I’m just like any other girl in my year, but they just don’t see me like that. My name is Arab and I cover my hair, I’m different to them and that means they would rather take the girl with the light hair and a German name even if she qualifies less than I do (88-91).

Because my education and work experience are concentrated in Jordan, many German companies doubted my German language, until a friend told me to add my German nationality to my CV, which were the two magic words I needed to stop my applications from being ignored.

The difference is that I would be okay with not being chosen because of lack of skill, but in her case, it is purely based off how she looks or her name sounds, which is unarguably discriminative. Her emphasis on the words “I will never forget how relieved I was” when she had an interview with two Germans also stemming from a migration background, because she knew they would only judge her based on the interview and her skills, not how she looks or what she believes, was very sad. (83-85) I found myself analysing this relief and found it as a common feeling when Zehra said “as of recently it’s no longer impossible to get a job with a headscarf”. (16-17) In a time where, thankfully, things like crazy-coloured hair, tattoos and piercings are becoming accepted in even professional working spaces, it is still a relief that a hair cover is allowed.

To answer the question of what it truly feels like to be a Muslim woman in Bremen, “they demand integration, we demand acceptance” is an efficient summary. (Hiba, 155) Tolerance is the first step, merely the beginning, but the young “ambassadors of Islam” will not stop fighting back until society sees them as one’s own. What they have to do in order to achieve that will be discussed in the following chapter.

6.2.2 Bremen’s female ambassadors of Islam

The question of how stereotypical representations affect the interviewed young women is of high interest because it threatens their right to self-determination, for example, how they represent themselves within society. (c. van Es, 2016) Through my observations, I have concluded that the young Muslim women in Bremen turn themselves into a sort of “ambassadors” of Islam in different ways and for different reasons. I do not mean messiahs when I say ambassadors, but representatives of an alternative, modern Islam that is compatible with life as lived. For many young Muslim women this is not

intentional, but for those acting as ambassadors of Islam, they willingly intend to offer explicitly articulated alternative self-representations targeting the mainstream public. The very fact that they aim to “challenge”, I will say, dominant stereotypes about Muslim women reveals their strong influence on their self-representations and well-being. In the following, I will explain how I came to the conclusion that they act as ambassadors, as well as how and why they do.

Challenging the public perception by narrating their individual realities

Many of these women feel the need to constantly monitor their behaviour to shatter the stereotypes, which normally would not be a negative reaction. „As a Muslim woman in Bremen, I do pay attention to what I do, how I behave, how I approach, deal with and represent myself to non-Muslims.” (Zehra, 88-90) Combined with a motive, however, it is a price to pay. In many instances, they feel the need to challenge the public perception by justifying their individuality. By narrating their own reality verbally, in written form or through actions, they have found alternative, peaceful ways to fight stereotypes and correct the negative image of Muslim women. From the way some of them emphasized certain words, I could withdraw the conclusion that they were fed up with these representations and demanded the individualization of Muslim women’s cases. “I’m *nothing* like what they think I am.” (Hiba, 141) and „I do *not* belong to the clichés that people have towards Muslims”. (Zehra, 58-59)

They chose to defend themselves and other women like them verbally by declining stigmas and offer their alternative realities. “We have to be seen as the gainfully employed and economically independent Businesswomen that we are” (Zehra, 51-52) and „of course I would work with a man, even as practicing Muslim woman”. (Scherihan, 36-38) Such direct statements can be interpreted as a way to fight the ongoing representations, or as previous authors have described it, “her jihad or struggle to deconstruct the demeaning stereotypes that prevail about all Muslim women”. (Gandhi 2013) Scherihan describes her peaceful conflict-avoiding fight;

It’s really exhausting, you can’t fight everyone, but I think the way we behave in society says a lot about us. I continue to try, as a human being, as an individual, to make a difference through who I am, as I am. I try to change and implement a lot in my private life, in my study or work fields, simply through my character, as I am. Of course, I also go to cinemas, theatres and elsewhere, and I think because of my charisma and aura I can break a lot of stereotypes (185-188).

As is made clear, she indirectly addresses the stereotype that Muslim women are taught to stay home, therewith you would not find a Muslim woman in a cinema or theatre. Similar is the thought that Muslim women do not go to parties. Hiba tells the story of her friend who offered to cover for her in front of her mother about going to a party, which at first instance seems like a very nice thing to do for a friend, but in reality is just another saviour behaviour act;

I was [shocked], it took me some time to finally tell her that “no it’s okay my mom knows everything. I *can* tell her I’m going to a party, she doesn’t care.” And then I didn’t know: is it worse that she supposes my mom is strict because she’s Muslim, or that I had to defend her? This is what I hate, if I was German-German I would never have to make excuses, but because I’m Arab-German, I have to always justify myself, my religion and culture and so on (37-41).

The last statement is one of many examples in which Muslim women feel an urge to defend themselves against prejudices verbally. In another narration fighting the stigma of the uneducated women, Hiba gets loud and states in confusion, “all my cousins have bachelor degrees. Not just here [in Bremen] but also the ones back home [in Egypt]. (52-53)

Breaking the stereotypes by providing alternative images of themselves

Often though, verbal statements like the above-mentioned are not enough to eliminate negative betrayals and more powerful measurements need to be taken. In such cases, these women take matters off their tongues and into their own hands. They try to change the public perception by providing alternative images of themselves; by representing themselves as modern and emancipated women, they challenge the stigmatized perceptions of Muslim women in German society, change the dominant image of Islam and defend the rights it has gifted them. This is not new to me; I recall my mother telling me we Muslims should always smile at strangers, and be friendly to everyone, not simply because it is Sunnah, but because “they already assume we are bad people, show them that you are nice”. She would feel the need to speak in *gehobenes Hochdeutsch* (sophisticated German) because judging by her looks alone, they would never believe she was educated, let alone spoke German fluently.

Similar were the alternative images Luisa, even as an “indigenous” German, she would have to provide her family with a model, perfected image of herself after she converted to Islam. She narrates in shame; “I automatically change my natural behaviour sometimes; at family gatherings, for example, I always try to appear extremely happy and

open-minded because I don't want my family to connect anything negative about my behaviour with Islam." (113-117) Aware that many negative behaviours are easily associated with Islam, which would never for example be linked to Christianity because of no connection to religion whatsoever, she is confused with her reaction, but understands the risk she would take if she did not do it. To confirm Özyürek's assumption that converted Muslims do not want to be compared to born-Muslims (2017), Luisa confesses:

As a converted Muslim girl myself, it is very hard to be taken seriously. I think most converts feel a high amount of pressure whenever someone asks them about it because they always feel the need to explain themselves in a way non-Muslims can differentiate them from [some] born Muslims who fulfil exactly those negative stereotypes everybody has in mind (52-58).

In a more common experience of providing alternative images of oneself, Hiba explains: "I would tell my sister to lower her voice while on a public train, because I would not want them to point at us and say oh these Muslims are so loud and annoying. I talk in German to my family so people don't look at me badly." (133-137) Despite speaking a foreign language like Arabic (or Dutch, so in no way connected to Islam) to her parents is not even a negative behaviour, she knows it would attract unwanted attention, which is why she felt like she has to avoid it and present herself strictly as a German speaker.

All while holding tighter onto religion

Despite the urge to monitor their behaviors, challenge the dominant image and break stereotypes whether through words or actions, they fully understand that giving up religion and expressing religiousness through dress code or other means is not a solution to eliminate the stigma or "adapt" and feel at home in the nation and as part of society. As opposed to the interviewed women in Istanbul, holding onto religion led to their empowerment and they do not see that that interferes with living in Germany. Nicely conceptualized are the words: "Religion, language and education are very important to my family, but they let us make our own decisions about studying, Islamic clothing and other things, like so many other families. I just wear clothes that the Quran requires because I feel better that way". (Scherihan, 7-8) To stress that this does not stand in the way of their integration, she elaborates, "but my sister is married to a German for example." (8-9)

It has been a public debate whether neglecting the hijab to fit into a secular society is the best solution eliminate troubles and promote integration. Despite the hijab not being a crucial sign of religiousness, it is still ironic and unfair that Muslim girls and women wear it in order not to draw attention to themselves but that is exactly what it seems to be doing. Hiba also sees no point in taking off the hijab to adapt to a more modern or liberal fashion sense:

You would think that way you would let society win, but for me it would actually be a lose-lose situation. If we were hijab, we lose because of the social pressure, if we take it off, they judge us and say we needed a reason to take it off at the first chance because we are not [convinced of it] anyway. We really cannot win (100-104).

As angry as they are with the negative representations they are faced with, they refuse to give up any part of their Islamic identity, because the acceptance of one's religion should not come at the cost of giving up any part of it.

I do want to break all the prejudices, but not by having to give something of myself up, but simply through the way I really am; as a nice person, a helpful person, an open person [...] not somehow through my clothes. I do not want to stop dressing in an Islamic way just because some people want that. I wouldn't be *me* anymore. I want to behave and dress the way I like it, and with still show people "it's not how you think" (Scherihan, 163-173).

This here exactly is what I mean when I say they turn themselves into "ambassadors" of Islam, and the term is in fact inspired by a similar study done by van Es in the Netherlands. (2019) I do not in any way mean that they act as literal messiahs or preachers of any way;

I just make sure to present my religion as good as possible. I would never say I have to convince [my non-Muslim co-workers] to become Muslims. I say "*la ilaha ila Allah*" to myself while working and if someone is interested and asks about it, I explain, if not then I don't force these people to talk about religion. It does not mean I tolerate people when they hate on my religion, but that I least still treat them with respect (Zehra, 130-131; 133-134; 137-139).

I adored every single attempt of these women to contribute to the correction or better yet the elimination of the stigma, but even more their holding onto religion and not giving up any aspect of their religious identity. This corresponds with Bendixsen's (2011) observation that even for the generations born to Muslim parents in secular Germany, religion means a lot, still, and they cling to it to fight social alienation.

But what drives them to act as ambassadors of Islam, and with what aim?

A question that quickly comes to mind is *why* these women feel like ambassadors of Islam. There are a few answers to that question, which I could conclude from their verbal statements and behavioral reactions: simply to prove the non-Muslim gaze wrong,

to fit in and be accepted as they are, but also out of shame, guilt and fear of falling under stigma. In the following, I discuss how I came to these reasons as concluded from their answers through a subjective interpretation.

It seems that these women feel a certain pressure to feel acceptance, which is a level higher than belonging, feeling that society sees one as they see themselves in it. It is their human instinct, innate desire to simply fit in. As van Es (2016, p.1) explains, young Muslim women want more than anything to be seen as “normal”, and I could trace her words to my own interviewees, their efforts to break stereotypes can be understood as attempts to affirm their belonging to German society and demand acceptance for their religion. This means that belonging is not only a matter of legal rights and responsibilities but also of participation, identity, and a sense of belonging. (c. *ibid.*, 2) All of the women interviewed felt stigmatized and alienated from society, in their words “excluded, left out” (Hiba, 7), purely as a result of how other Muslim women, none that represents them, were portrayed.

Therefore, it is only understandable that they would try to escape that stigma, by proving the non-Muslim gaze wrong. “Their self-representation can be seen as a refusal to serve as an object of the male gaze, as well as the non-Muslim German gaze.” (Soliman 2019) In fact, all four women alike talked about “feeling the need to explain oneself in certain situations” (Luisa, 110-111) and “constantly having to justify yourself and to prove them wrong” (Scherihan, 62-63).

There is a constant urge to prove people’s bad impressions and views on Islam wrong. I would always explain how it is actually supposed to be and how the person’s behaviour or appearance has nothing to do with true Islam. I always had the urge to prove people’s thoughts of me or Muslims in general wrong, and I probably still do (Luisa, 53-54; 103-104; 109-110).

Justification and proving wrong is the main motive.

Another reason I believe is guilt and shame. I felt it, and so did Edward Said. “The sense of guilty involvement which, despite myself, I was made to feel, struck me as precisely the feeling I was meant to have. The media had assaulted me, and Islam –or rather my connection with Islam– was the cause.” (Said 1997, xiv) His choosing of the passive tense is an important aspect to point out. He, and the young women, are made to feel shame and guilt until they actually feel it. In many cases, this creates counter-stereotypes and leads to what cultural scholars named self-discrimination. I visibly sensed

this when Zehra meant to criticize the non-Muslim gaze, unaware that she had adopted it. In reply to a few discriminative encounters she had, she asked herself:

How are you dressed? How do you talk to this person? How do you behave in conflicts? If those things suit you, then you wouldn't have big difficulties. I think I only had one small argument with a German on the street once, because I was walking dressed completely in black with Abaya at the time, so I also covered my face and eyes for a week after I came back from Dubai. I think that just left a bad impression on the non-Muslims and they couldn't cope with it. But I could also solve that with a short discussion or debate, otherwise there was no big deal (75-83).

While I admire how easy it is for her to justify the verbal attack on her dress code, as multicultural individuals or second generation immigrants have higher tolerance and respect towards dissimilar groups, as clarified by Negy et al. (2003), and in this case an islamophobic person, I did not applaud it. Such behaviour is called self-victimizing in law and is often a hinder to solving a crime. In my opinion, she is unfortunately blinded by non-Muslims' hate towards Islamic clothing that she started making excuses for them and even defending them, seeing her dress code as "extreme" through their gaze. This is clearly an unconscious, unaware behaviour, because she was also one to quote „Do Muslims only belong to Germany if you don't see their faith on them? We Muslims are ashamed to wear headscarves or grow beards, to pray at work, to fast or not to study. We throw *ourselves* into the assimilation spiral.” (98-101)

Moreover, their other conscious reactions to prejudices varied drastically through age and experience. It seems that they avoid and stop feeling the need to defend themselves, Islam or other Muslim women with every year they grow and every discrimination they encounter.

I used to justify a lot but as I've got older I stopped, to be honest. I decided not to talk or represent anything related to the Islam. Everyone can know that I am Muslim, but any questions related to it, I always avoid when speaking to non-Muslims. I used behave in a certain way, then I realized that is actually for nothing, because they will never see you any differently. Now, I don't feel obligated to prove anyone wrong, if you already think that, it's not my duty to show you otherwise, you have to be able to think that for yourself (Hiba, 41-42; 127-129; 147-151).

It is no secret that they, as have I over the years, feel fed up with the constant time, effort and energy we have to put into defending ourselves and justifying our religious beliefs. Replies like "I try to say something most of the time, but sometimes I spare myself the headache" (Zehra, 125-126) and "I stopped trying to change people's perception because I found myself getting lost in arguments that never had a positive outcome and only left

me exhausted” (Luisa, 97-98) did not come to my surprise. In fact, I expected to hear them as I related to them, therefore completely understood and respected them as well.

I just don’t want to allow people to rob me of my energy, having to justify myself is very exhausting. That is their problem and they should just solve it and not me. I really don’t feel like having to talk about it every time. When something is really racist, I get loud and talk about it. But if I notice that nothing comes out of it anyway, the person is like a wall, I could tell them everything they would still think that way, then I won’t bother (Scherihan, 84-86; 91-94; 183-184).

As clarified, it is not an easy being an ambassador of any religion, let alone the one religion that is perhaps the most attacked and negatively portrayed in the world. To conclude, I understand why they would act as an ambassador of Islam, because as Baghdadi says, when “suddenly you are THE Muslim woman” (2011), of course one would feel the need to go to the extreme lengths under that pressure and spotlight.

In the next chapter, the main research question will be answered, namely: how are the influenced self-representation of young German Muslim women in Bremen different from how young Turkish Muslim women represent themselves in Istanbul?

6.3 Case Studying Istanbul

6.3.1 Writing against culture

With this research, it was a main goal to truly listen to what the different women in Istanbul have to say about their alternative, multi-layered reality of being a Muslim woman in Istanbul, because I neither should nor wanted to speak for them. I did not want to be the “outsider” doing a research on an “other”, but wanted the chosen research participants to write in their own words instead. This is partly because unlike in Bremen or other cities in Germany, I do not know and live that reality and therefore cannot narrate it through my lens of observation. Therefore, I dedicate a paragraph to each one of them to write her own reality and thoughts

Alternative realities of Muslim women in Istanbul

In Ayşe’s eyes, “most people are open-minded in Istanbul, they don’t judge if you do whatever is “supposed” to be haram”. (25-28) To her too, the source of stigmas “is not Islam; it is Muslims, and how they practice.” (41-42) Discussing the stereotype of Muslim women not having relationships before marriage, she says “I can still like someone, I can date someone, love someone my own way. Most women nowadays date for years before they marry.” (44-45, 87) And despite her being very attached and fond of her hijab, she

does not see it as an identifier for being the “model” Muslim. “I’m different from other women who wear it, in which boundaries I have and values I practice in my life.” (161-162) She had often been attacked with the assumption that her father allegedly forced her to wear a headscarf; however, she can assure she did so with her free will, like most Muslim women. “I wore it when I was nineteen, so I was in university and old enough to make my own decisions. My dad was happy when I wore it but he didn’t tell me to.” (60-61, 65) Furthermore, she is confused with the fact that Arabs are seen as extremely religious in Turkey, as her Iraqi father is not. “He lets me travel the world by myself, he never gave me any issues. Not all Muslim parents or men do so, it’s important to understand that.” (73-74)

Nazrin is well aware of the sociological theories in Turkish notions that see religion as a matter of society and a structure that brings people together (5-7), but she sees it otherwise. “Practicing in my opinion is a personal matter and even when I practice my beliefs in common areas –mosques or churches, as they are both God’s houses – I never experienced a negative feedback.” (27-29) Moreover, she believes there is gender equality when it comes to practicing in Istanbul: “Turkish culture has egalitarian roots concerning how one gender is expected to perform an act whereas the other one is free.” (45-46) She therewith added another dimension to the reality of practicing in Istanbul I had not noticed myself.

Esma sees Istanbul as perfectly balanced, “many believers and non-believers live in Istanbul”. (31) She wanted to draw attention to the generational difference, stating that “women are making more free choices in the new generation”. (8) Objecting the generalization that Muslim women have limited rights, she elaborates: “in Turkey, they can decide if they want to marry, what they want to wear, they live with boyfriends, don’t tell everything to their family, they drink alcohol.” (9, 15-16) She also did not deny the oppression that some women still face, and shed light on some cases in which they feel the need to secretly disobey their parents’ demands. “Today, I observe [the taking off the hijab] of girls who are covering their heads with the pressure of their families”. (14)

Bilge also emphasizes the importance of differentiating between older and younger generations of Muslim women in Turkey, as the fixed, generalized perspective “makes it harder to keep up with the novelties of the age”. (19-20) She elaborates, “I

believe that newer generations are growing different from the stereotypes, of course some carrying the legacy of the older generation” (13-15), she exemplifies “I see that the majority of young girls and women wear also short and open clothes, don’t cover hair, don’t connect everything to religion and have open-minded thinking.” (15-17) She lay focus on the fact that younger Muslim women know and fight for their rights. “In today’s world, women started to have a place in every area, and the young ones know what they can and want to achieve, so they don’t let anything stand in the way.” (22, 25-26) She verbally protested against the assumptions revolving around women of her generation, saying that younger Muslim women are rebels, “they show much skin, they share intimate details, have public affection in the street, drink a lot even on weekdays.” (75-77)

Lastly, Betül asserts Istanbul to be the exact opposite of what it is imagined as in Bremen. I found her defending Turkey and advertising Istanbul as the metropolis of liberal, open-minded and free people, as “everything is accepted in Istanbul”. (33) She repeatedly threw objections like “Turkey is not like you think”, “it is just like here [in Germany]” and “but that is not the case of Turkey.” Narrating from her own experience, she adds,

A family does not say anything to a girl. They don’t say marry this man, they say if you don’t want to marry at all, it’s okay. They don’t say wear a headscarf, wear this or that; you can wear anything; there’s no problem in that with most families. Girls and women can study, go out at night, they can do whatever [they want] (21; 29-33).

She said “you saw yourself” to me in complete confidence and pride, because the things she mentioned were indeed hard to not notice, things such as “in Istanbul, girls have green hair, blue hair, pink hair, even no hair! More girls shave their hair than wear headscarves, but Germans think we all have to cover our hair.” (33-36) She pointed out the reason for her last statement being comparing liberal, modern Turks in Turkey to the conservative Turkish-German community that held onto traditional rituals and beliefs. (57) Being very displeased with the stigma following her to Germany, she objects: “I know maybe some German Turks are like that, but Turkish women [in Istanbul] don’t care about such things. Some Turks fit the stereotype, but I don’t, I am different”. (45)

This highlights the importance of taking the time to listen to different Muslim women, letting them narrate their own stories, and individualizing their realities. As can be concluded, they are very different from how Muslim women are collectively represented in Turkish, German and other Western notions.

The conflict of practicing in a secular country with a Muslim majority

When asked if they found practicing Islam to be difficult or troublesome in Istanbul's secular society despite the majority being "Muslims", the replies of the young women bounced back and forth between yes and no. More specifically described by Ayşe, "I can practice in Istanbul, but with difficulties, and the most important thing is, I feel lonely because not many practice openly." Comparing it to Canada, where she spent some years, she adds "I feel like I belong here because I can practice emotionally like most people, secretly within myself, but in Canada, I can practice socially, in public, more openly." (3-6) In analysing their experiences, I found myself in a real dilemma. As opposed to Bremen where all women mainly agreed on everything, the women in Istanbul had contradicting opinions. I had some women affirm things others deemed false news and it added more dimensions to reality.

On one hand, Nazrin stated that "bearing in mind the Muslim population is the greater part of the whole population in Turkey, I do not think there will be any negative prejudices" (10-12), which my conversations with Ayşe, Bilge and Esmâ, on the other hand, proved wrong. Ayşe specifically points out that because of the division of believers and non-believers in Istanbul, it is harder for her to practice than in western countries, because of the judgment and pressure one receives. This means being judged by the non-believers for practicing on one hand, as that is seen as a sign of anti-modern backwardness, and on the other hand being pressured by believers to be the perfect, model Muslim.

Ayşe's confusion comes from a place where she feels that she can never win, because it is impossible to please both sides. In reference to the judgment by the non-believer part of society, she expresses a feeling I understood as disgust: "That's the thing about our Turkish society, they want everyone to respect they are secular but they don't have respect for other beliefs". (197-198) In reference to the pressure by the practicing part of society, she also expressed anger: "I feel like the Muslim community judges me so much, [...] they pressure me." (8-9) She exemplifies with covering her hair:

The hijab in Turkey symbolizes many things, not just that you are a practicing Muslim woman. If a woman wears it, everyone, not just the religious ones, expect her to "act like an angel". Everyone has some expectation and they force you to fit that expectation. Just because I wear it, I can't enjoy my time with my male friends, I cannot go to a bar; people will talk even if I don't drink (102; 115-117; 200-201; 139-142).

In Turkey, for obeying one responsibility, one is expected to fulfil all others, she says.

Another contradicting experience I had during the data analysis is how Nazrin believes that religion became a political quest, and that there are people who use religion “to rub the dirt under the carpet” and “exploit religion to make money”. (14-15) Betül also addressed it briefly; “The real reason is the Turkish government and how they present us to the rest of the world.” (86-86) Ayşe, however, strictly reprobates linking religion to politics. She discusses how if a woman wears hijab or follows an Islamic dress code, “everyone assumes she is from this wing or that party” (46-48), which is an ignorant act. To underline the shift in relating to religion to politics, she confesses that in the past, “people expressed belonging to a political group with dress styles or how men style their moustache, but this is *outdated*, no one cares now.” (56-58) The reason why this should not be generalized is simple: “I don’t relate my hijab to politics, I want to be free from that, because I can change my political view every now and then, but my hijab stays the same”. (48-49)

The trend towards “Westernization”

Realizing the struggle practicing Islam has put these women through, I knew secularism and society’s pressuring and judgmental mentality were not the only reasons causing it, there had to be something greater behind it. I noticed the development of a pattern in my conversations with the young women in Bremen; the terms “European” and “Westernized” popped up often. I had briefly mentioned the concept of Westernization in the theoretical chapter about Turkish women, but its repetition led me to read more into Turkey’s journey towards secularism and modernity, which was often seen as a procedure of Westernization. “It has been said by many scholars that at the present the Middle East is grappling with the problem of Westernization. This is true; yet there is a need for a clarification of terms and ideas before one proceeds with such a study.” (Edmonds & Berkes, 1945) The terminology is problematic to me because I do not see how secularism and modernity are “Western”. When I mentioned that to some of the interviewees, I gained their complete and immediate agreement.

It has often been said that Istanbul aims to follow the same steps as cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Berlin and Bilbao, but it has not reached its full potential because of the negative portrayals of Turkey in international media, which includes pessimist images of Islam, due to “its incompatibility with the West and with European

and American values”. (Göktürk, Soysal & Türeli, 2010, p. 297) This is where my disappointment mainly lies. “Incompatibility with American and European values” should not be a concern let alone a problem Turks need to solve. For example, “Turkey, as the only country among those with a mainly Muslim population, has worked steadfastly to bring its education system up to Western standards” (Karakaşoğlu & Tonbul, 2015) is also a problematic statement, as good educational standards are seen as “Western”, when historically much of what is now taught in Western schools is knowledge that originated from regions where Islam is the principle religion.

As Klinkhammer argued, “the religious Muslim consciousness is always understood solely as a counter-movement to modernity.” (2003, p.2) Deeming religiousness as anti-modern is understandable but deeming modernity as Western is illogical, such as when Esmâ added that “society shows more interest in Western accessories; places of worship and clothing have been modernized”. (Esmâ, 51-52) Modernity should not be at the cost of giving up parts of one’s religious identity, such as the hijab ban in workspaces. Esmâ shocked me when she pointed out that Kadir Has University is one of those, as she watched a cleaning lady with her hair out while working, but covering it outside the campus. (36-37) The hijab ban is a strictly discriminative rule justified by Westernization in the name of a “journey to modernization”, whereas the hijab does not necessarily contradict modernity.

Because Istanbul is geographically partly located in Europe, understandably “people try to be European.” (Bilge, 73-74)

When I was in my twenties, I tried to be westernized, I wanted to look European, I was traveling a lot in Europe that’s why. I dyed my hair blonde, I dressed like them, maybe this was also why I stopped caring about religion. When I was traveling in Europe, I met people who don’t care about religion either. Just in Istanbul, not all of Turkey, people are westernized, not only me. We are also in Europe, we are not like the rest of the Middle East (Betül 80-81).

This is where I realized how the self-representation of Muslim women in Istanbul goes in a completely different direction from the ones in Bremen, as they do not stray away from religion under Western pressure despite actually living in a Western country among Western peoples. It seems to me, through my observations living in Istanbul over the past one and a half years and from generalization concluded from the interviewees’ explanations, that most Turkish Muslims would rather lose their religion, values and traditions to fit into the Western world than to demand acceptance for what they are, as

they are. I am in no way suggesting that that is the only reason they may shift away from religion, as that would be a generalized, ignorant assumption, but there definitely seems to be a pattern. Ayşe gives a brief historic explanation:

After the Ottoman Empire became the Republic of Turkey, they were basically trying to be like European countries, so people were confused because the ideology shifted. They were in love with the idea of being in the European Union, so everything related to Europeans was seen as good and everything related to Arabs was seen as negative. If you're too religious, they say you try to be like Arabs. If you're not religious, or you don't wear hijab, they say you're trying to be more European, trying to be Western (218-222; 240-242).

The next subchapter elaborates and discusses the influence on the self-representations of Turkish Muslim women in further detail.

6.3.2 Ben kadını - Istanbul shatters the stereotypes

“Ben kadını” (= I am a woman) is a title I chose in honor of the Gender Center at Kadir Has University, who used the slogan to defend women's rights and therewith introduced me to Turkish feminism. This chapter summarizes generalizations drawn from my interviews with five young women in Istanbul on a feminist, religious matter and displays their self-representations as women with an Islamic background in a secular country.

To begin with, when asked what they would do if they came across a verbal or written representation they deemed wrong, they mostly agreed that something has to be done about it, but answers varied, from women should support, defend and stand up for other women (Esmâ, 27) to not preferring to fight over it because it would not change anything anyway. (Ayşe, 98) When asked how they represent themselves or more specifically if they do anything to change the popular perception of “the Muslimwoman”, the answers can be summed up in four vivid ways: explaining their realities, temporarily providing a different version of themselves, (similar to the women in Bremen), but while permanently straying away from religion and/or “westernizing” their self-images.

The perhaps most innate reaction is to want to prove stereotypes wrong by simply explaining reality. I myself always find myself defending Muslim women with simple words like “most of them are not like that”, or “I actually do not know one single one who does that”, etc. I had focused so much on more prominent behaviours during the research that I overlooked how small acts can change much, too. Bilge admits, “I sometimes just want to prove the people who think certain stereotypes wrong by

explaining the truth.” (54-55) When Nazrin is asked why she does not wear a hijab, implying that all Muslim women do, she simply explains that in her interpretation, “religion itself does not order you to wear it; the performance of religion is rather a cultural matter”. (42-45)

In other cases, some of these women found themselves carrying out aware steps to change the popular perception. To exemplify, “I just try to be more open-minded”. (Bilge, 52) Whereas this kind of behaviour helps the cause and does not harm her personally, for women who find themselves torn between being “too halal for the haram people and too haram for the halal people” as I call it, it does. They have to keep two different personalities and alternate between them depending on their surrounding environment. Indeed like a cultural chameleon, with a “compartmentalization” identification on the CDMSII, identifying with two different levels of religiosity can lead to a paradox and dilemma complexities.

As Ayşe’s family is divided; her mother’s side does not practice at all whereas her father’s side perform most religious duties, she finds herself having to adapt to each side by pretending to be a different version of herself. When she is with her father’s side, she presents herself as very religious.

Sometimes I have to act different than I actually am in some communities. I have to pretend to be an angel so they don’t talk. I don’t care about many things like shaking hands, with my male friends but when I’m with certain Turkish people, I avoid it because I don’t want to have all eyes on me (175-176; 159-160; 165-168).

Logically, her behaviour changes accordingly when she is with her mother’s side who “do not pray or fast, drink, just celebrate Eid” (183), and therewith “consider her too religious, extreme, even” (184;185). “Even when I wanted to pray, I didn’t, because of shame that they would see me like I’m not a fun, cool girl anymore. After wearing hijab, I had the feeling that I had to show my cousins that I am still *one of them*.” (188-189; 184) This points out how negatively this affects the well-being of these young women. In fact, this even creates counter-stereotypes and often leaves them judging themselves. “I’m just wearing [a hijab], but I feel extreme compared to them”. (187) The exact same person who thinks wearing a hijab does not mean extremism now sees herself through the eyes of the criticizers, as an extremist. The danger becomes real when the represented see themselves through the representer’s gaze.

Still, in this case, Ayşe changes her self-image only temporarily in the name of adaption. In other instances, some of these women have strayed away from religion or at least tried to hide belonging to it, permanently. “Instead of saying “inşallah” which is a phrase that I’m in a habit of using, I say “I hope” in order to look a bit less religious.” (Bilge, 60-62) While I still consider this a minimal change to escape the negative image following Muslim women, I found Nazrin’s reaction rather unusual. As soon as I asked about stereotypes she had heard, she replied, “I have never experienced any form of stereotype” (10) within seconds, as if wanting to cut the line on the topic, which I believe could be understood as a way of self-defence, self-distancing from the hurtful issue.

In addition, much of their reactions can be drawn back to Turkey’s journey to “Westernization”. My conversation with Bilge addressed it directly: “I try to break the stereotype by choosing Western methods over traditional ones, even if I’m attracted to the traditional idea.” (52-54) While I cannot speak for the effectiveness of this defence method, I see it as a double-sided blade. By saying things like “I try to represent myself as civilized and Western in order to not look like reactionary” (55-56) she is actually only confirming that non-Westerns, therewith the majority of Muslims, are uncivilized and reactionary. By wanting to solve one problem, Bilge and others like her, is creating an even bigger one. Again, this creates counter-stereotypes in which they, unaware, stereotype and discriminate against themselves.

In the most extreme case I have encountered, if I may say so, is Betül trying to numb certain ideas about Muslim Turks, even as a non-believer. Normally, I would admire this selfless act to better the image of one’s people, but I do not quite approve of how she chose to do it⁷, as she is presenting not alternative, but false images of herself to fulfil that goal.

I try to be like German women so they see me like them. I drink a lot of alcohol because I want to show them that Turks can drink too. I come home late at night because I want to show this is also normal for a Turkish woman. I party, I dance, I act like them so they understand I am not different from them. I started to be westernized and I thought this means I don’t get hate from Germans and other European people, but I was wrong in that (61-65; 77-78).

⁷ I do not to criticize her or any of my research participant as a person; I am in no position to do so as I do not know what it is like to be in their shoes. I simply criticize the behaviour as I deem it unnecessary, and I personally would choose a behaviour that leaves me true to myself.

In this case, the act is just for show, and this is where my disapproval lies; the aim does not justify the means. She thought a “westernized”, different her, would be the solution. Fortunately, in other instances, she provides a real image of herself to prove a certain stereotype wrong. “I show them my boyfriend, because they say you never have relationships, only when you get married, but I want to show [them that] I am not like that.” (Betül, 66-67) This is a normal step to take in order to fit into a new environment, as I understood of her “anticipatory categorization” on the CDMSII.

While the reactions and methods used by the women from Istanbul were similar to the ones carried out by the women in Bremen, they contrasted in their directions towards conserving and holding onto religion; the ones in Bremen moved closer to it, whereas the ones in Istanbul strayed away from it. The slogan “ben kadını” was not chosen arbitrarily; these Turkish women defend their rights as women before they defend them as Muslims, as above anything they are worthy humans despite their religious beliefs. Thereby, I have clarified why and how the self-representations of young women with an Islamic background are different in the two cities and answered all research questions.

In the following chapter, the study is concluded; findings are briefly summarized, the research is evaluated and implication for further studies are suggested.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 Summary of Findings

To begin with, the findings of the guiding research questions can be summed up with the following: to this very day and probably for the foreseeable future, the stigma of the oppressed Muslim woman stands, and to a widespread extent. However, the wide scholarly attention to stereotyping and othering Muslim women sharply contrasted with the responses of my research participants to them. They do not deny some truth behind the prejudices, they just do not wish them to be generalized and hope for more focus on alternative images of Muslim women in the nearest future. In addition, it is important to disentangle the negative aspects of culture and individual behaviour from religion and not attribute the oppression of some women to Islam. If I were to answer Abu-Lughod's question "do Muslim women need saving?" through this research, the one and only answer would be "no".

Moreover, when representing Muslim women, their cases must be individualized, and culture and religiosity must be taken into consideration. This and other stigmas have a great emotional impact on young Muslim women and their well-being and acceptance in society. It often even negatively affects the way they see themselves; the danger lies in the represented viewing themselves through the representer's gaze. More importantly, it influences how they represent themselves in society in return, to escape the bad image and free themselves of the stigmatization. This also shows that stereotyping and self-representation are also feminist issues and should be seen as political issues of belonging and social acceptance.

In summary of the answers to the main research question, my study reveals that young Muslim women in Bremen and in Istanbul alike try, aware or unconsciously, to break stereotypes and eliminate ongoing stigmas. They actively try to change the public perception in similar ways, yet while moving in different directions. They feel an urge to monitor their behaviour and a pressure to provide alternative images of themselves. The main motives behind that is to prove the image wrong, shatter the stereotypes and better the overall image of Muslims. In other instances, this is done out of feeling guilt and shame as if responsible for the stigma, or an innate human instinct to fit into society and be accepted. Whereas the young Muslim women in Bremen manage to do so while staying

true and loyal to Islam, acting as ambassadors of their religion, even if not in its traditional meaning, the ones in Istanbul tend to give in and stray away from religion under pressure and often “westernize” their self-image to escape the stigma. While the women in Bremen write against integration, the ones in Istanbul write against culture.

7.2 Evaluation of the Study and Implications for Further Researchers

This thesis is part of a journey to highlight the disjuncture between my experiences with Muslim women and public attitudes and notions stigmatizing them. By presenting women’s self-representations and relevant perspectives through their eyes and in their words, I hope to lay to rest some negative betrayals. “The individuality of these women’s experiences and their reflections on life and relationships challenged what I felt was anthropology’s tendency to typify cultures through social scientific generalizations.” (Abu-Lughod, 2013, p. 5) Realizing the matter I chose to discuss and the problem I tried to solve are far deeper than to be hugged in a eighty pages, it is still a beginning.

A significant variation of perspectives with regards to representations even within the small sample of nine interviewees defies the oversimplification of stigmatizing women with an Islamic background as a homogenous group, let alone as an oppressed one. As their voices received only scarce scholarly attention so far, it was my aim to shift focus from what has been said about them to what they say about themselves. This is an important contribution to my study fields Intercultural Communication and Transcultural Studies because it eliminates prejudices and other obstacles that stand in the way of the communication between cultures and nations.

As with all studies, however, this one has its limitations. These limitations occurred primarily in time and space. The lack of depth in examining the cultural, religious, social and emotional context of the women under study was indeed due to the limited duration of the research time. The selection of four young women only to represent each city is indeed a weak mean. The second time constrain is the up-to-datedness of the bibliographical sources underlining my theoretical framework. In today’s fast-paced world, things change over a very short time span and things written in pages can be outdated months after. As for space limitations, results are based on the cities I studied in and would probably have provided richer data if it were in other or more cities. Istanbul is not only a secular, but a “religion-rejecting” city and is no way comparable to

other places in Turkey, where there is a higher concentration of religious and/or conservative Muslims. The same can be said about Bremen, where results could have been different in Germany's more international cities like Hamburg, Cologne or Munich.

In addition, results of my research were similar because all interviewees were in their twenties, had a good education and had cultural ties to the Middle East even if geographically located in Europe. Another limitation I criticize myself for is my choice of terminology. While trying to be as politically correct as I can and fending for a globalized, not international but *transcultural* world, where no borders should be drawn between cultures, I mentioned the word “West” and its derivatives, “Western” and “westernized” exactly seventy times throughout this thesis. I am aware that such precedence is hypocritical and underlines double standards, but it seems that one cannot eliminate these cultural borders and write against them without writing about them.

Moreover, additional qualitative research must be done to weigh the self-representations of Muslim women from different parts of the world over their representations in Western notions. There is much potential and need for further research on the matter of individualizing the cases of women with an Islamic background across the globe, and which other biographical factors that influence perspectives might be useful to enhance the understanding of different Muslim women's reflections on the matter.

To conclude, I want to emphasize that it is not easy having to speak for or defend a whole nation or religion, and even more overwhelming to feel like one carries that weight on her own. It is to hard hear through the noise of the familiar, single stories, but it has to be done, and it is a common responsibility. What I wanted to highlight with my research is that with a simple explanation from me, and an honest contribution from her, we are already one step closer to freeing Muslim women of injustice. If we went from “veiled Muslim women look like trash boxes and bank robbers” to “a woman who wears a niqab or a burka is still our sister” (Trades Union Congress, 2018), then there is hope and we are moving towards it. If these sentences of mine touch the nerves or open the eyes of one single person, then my mission is –if yet unaccomplished– satisfactory for now.

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APPENDIX

A. Interview Questions

IN BREMEN	IN ISTANBUL
Has Islam ever stood in the way of your “integration” into German society? How?	Has practicing Islam ever been troublesome in this secular society? How?
What stereotypes and stigmas have you heard about Muslim women in? Where do you think these come from?	
Which of these do you agree with and which would you deny?	
Would you say you could see these betrayals in the majority of Muslim women you personally know, some of them or in none at all?	
Which has the biggest effect on you?	
If you would hear, see, read etc. these stereotypes, how would you react?	
Can you tell me what it truly feels like to a practicing Muslim woman in?	
How do you personally represent yourself as a Muslim woman in? Is it affected by the stereotypes you told me about? If yes, then how? Does your self-representation confirm or challenge the dominant image?	
Do you actively try to change the popular perception?	
Do you feel the need to correctly or alternatively represent Islam?	Do you try to distance yourself from Islam or practicing it publicly?

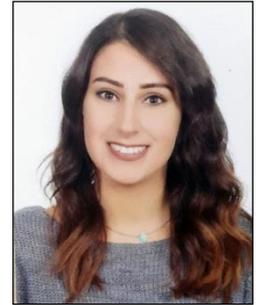
B. Pre-interview model running

Name	Age	Study Field	Multic. Ident.	CDM SII	BDMA	Klinkhammer
Hiba	24	Int. Finance	Egyptian and Dutch parents	4	2	2
Luisa	20	Health Manage.	Convert	1	2	2
Zehra	27	Business	Turkish-born	2	2	1
Scherihan	26	Political Sc.	Kurdish descent	4	2	1
Betül	28	Computer Eng.	Turkish expat	1	1	-
Bilge	23	Electric Eng.	Grew up in Dubai	3	3	3
Ayşe	25	Arabic & Shari'a	Half Iraqi, Canada	3	2	1
Esma	24	Industrial Eng.	Quarter Greek	4	2	2
Nazrin	23	Anthropology	Half Azerbaijani. Half Sunni/Alevi	4	2	2

C. Color-coordinated codes

Feelings Frustration Sadness Anger	Representations Oppression Uneducated Dress code Sugar-coating	Reasons Media Misinterpret Islam Culture German Turkish community	Integration Belonging Not seen as equal
Reality Have rights Educated Bear skin Modern Open-minded	Reaction to Stigma Denial Confirming Ignoring	Self-representation Break stereotypes Do not practice publicly Westernization	Religiosity Practicing Wearing hijab Non-practicing Faith only

D. Curriculum Vitae



Biographical Information

Name Surname : Sirin Dureidi
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Education

Undergraduate Education : Tawjihi: Jordanian High School Degree in Scientific Stream at Al-Omariyah Secondary School (May 2013)

Graduate Education : - Master's in Intercultural Communication at Kadir Has University (September 2018 - June 2020)
- Master's in Transcultural Studies at the University of Bremen (October 2017 - September 2018)
- Bachelor's in Translation and Interpreting: German, English and Arabic from the German Jordanian University (October 2013 - May 2017)

Foreign Language Competence : English (C2), Turkish (A2)

Professional Experience

Workplace and date : - Teaching assistant for English conversation at the Prep School of Kadir Has University (October 2018 - March 2020)
- Translator and editor at KIMM Marketing Communication in Istanbul (January - May 2019)
- Project Manager at Gusour - Cultural Bridges in Bremen (February - May 2018)
- Interpreter for United Muslim Relief in Jordan (March 2017)
- Translator at the Bonn Institute for Migration Research and Intercultural Learning (August-September 2016)
- Interpreter at Gifted Autistic Children Society in Amman (March 2016)

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