Lived Islam: religious identity with ‘non-organized’ Muslim minorities

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to show how a focus on ‘non-organized’ Muslims in Europe can contribute with insights on the everyday lives and practices of Muslim minorities. The empirical foundation is interviews conducted in Germany and Denmark. I argue that by focusing on institutionalized forms of Islam we run the risk of reifying Muslims as being ‘all about Islam’. The article reflects and discusses the benefits of adapting the framework of lived religion methodologically to investigate how Muslim makes sense of Islam on a micro-level. I show how the interviewees in this study have reconfigured religious practices, or no practice at all, which is connected to attitudes of privatization, individualization and pragmatism. The everyday practices and identities can be seen as expressions of minority identities, and as a type of individualized religiositiy, and I discuss how these identities are different from the identities of activist and vocal Muslims.

Keywords: Muslim minorities; everyday religion; non-organized religion; lived Islam; religious identity; Islam in Europe.

Introduction

This article investigates how Islam is lived out in the daily lives of Muslim minorities in Denmark and Germany. By adapting the category ‘non-organized Muslims’ I analyse what identities, practices and feelings of being and belonging are relevant to Muslims in their everyday lives. I argue that the term ‘non-organized’ is useful as an analytical conceptualization of forms of Islam which are not dependent on organizations and institutions.

Olivier Roy (2004) has argued that Islam in Europe has become deterritorialized. Because Islam is not self-evident in the societal
structures in the diaspora and minority situation, Muslims are transforming the meaning of, for example, rituals. ‘Correct’ ritual practice, such as praying five times a day, fasting, reading the Qur’an and so on, becomes increasingly equated with being a good Muslim and, as such, practice becomes a moral virtue. Islam becomes a lifestyle for the individual and also a choice for the individual.

In describing the implications of the deterritorialization of Islam, organizations and their socio-legal implications have been the empirical focus of many studies on Muslims and Islam in the West (see, e.g., Silvestri 2005; Rohe 2006; Soper and Fetzer 2009). Other studies have focused on how Muslims are responding to the minority situation by being active in organizational structures, such as youth groups, Qur’an classes and various religious movements (Mandaville 2001; Roy 2004; Schmidt 2005, 2007), or on the Muslim ‘elite’ (Klausen 2005, 2009), contributing to our knowledge of Muslim minorities who are vocal, activist and visible about their religion and who live out their religiosity in the public space. These studies are often concerned with what has been termed ‘revivalist Islam’ or the ‘new Islam’ (Peek 2005; Kibria 2007), a Muslim interpretation of Islam which emphasizes ‘the significance of Islam for all aspects of life’ (Kibria 2007, p. 2). In this version of Islam, being Muslim becomes a public (and sometimes political) identity. By focusing on this particular expression of Muslim identity and life, we run the risk of reifying ‘Islam’ as the principal identity for Muslims and making Muslims ‘all about Islam’ (Abu-Lughod 1989; Jeldtoft 2009). Instead I suggest that we look at how Muslims make sense of Islam in their everyday lives in order to gain other perspectives on what it means to be Muslim.

Everyday religious practices can be seen as a relevant form of social action, although it is less visible and identifiable than social action related to more or less formal structures in the public space (Melucci 1985, 1989) While these types of practices are not solely bound to the private sphere because ‘the everyday’ is constituted by many different aspects and spaces of people’s lives, they seem to be underexposed in the study of Muslim minorities in the West. In order to show how Muslims (like everyone else) are making sense of the world we need to focus on micro-politics and aspects of identity which are not necessarily ‘Islamic’ but are constituted in people’s daily lives (Soares and Osella 2009).

Only a few studies have looked at how Islam is lived in the realm of the everyday in minority contexts (see, e.g., Østberg 2003; Jeldtoft 2008; Otterbeck and Hallin 2010). The Muslims presented in this research do not make a strict separation between Islam and culture nor do they know very much about religious texts and tradition. This research shows how young Muslims have other identities and concerns
other than just being Muslims, and how being Muslim intersects with
and relates to other identities (Jenkins 1994; Baumann 1999). Some of
the findings of, for example, strong individualization in relation to
religion, authority and identity formation are similar to findings in the
literature on revivalist Islam with activist Muslims and institutional-
ized forms of Islam. But some of the findings differ from the findings
of the ‘revivalist youth’: Islam is not a ‘primary identity’ (Schmidt
2003, p. 163).

In the present study I tap into the overall existing research on
Muslim minorities and deterritorialized Islam with a particular focus
on the relative neglected issue of everyday forms of Islam among
Muslim minorities. I will argue that Muslims who are not visible and
activist about their religiosities are also influenced by the objectifica-
tion and deterritorialization of Islam, but that this is expressed in
different ways than those we see in the studies of ‘revivalist Islam’.
I choose empirically to focus on Muslims who are not activist, vocal
and part of the Muslim elite because I think is safe to argue that there
is congruence between vocal and visible Muslims and Muslims who are
active in Muslim organizations. I have thus pragmatically selected
interviewees according to two main criteria: (1) they are not active in
formal and organized/institutionalized religious context, and (2) they
self-identify (and are understood by others – internal and external) as
‘Muslims’. This does not mean that I see all Muslims who are active in
Muslim organizations as being ‘the same’, but that I see empirical
potential for obtaining knowledge of the everyday life of Muslim
minorities outside the institutions.

**Everyday lived religion: a framework for analysis of Muslim minorities**

I combine the theories about majority/minority relations with theories
of everyday lived religion. The first perspective scrutinizes how
identities and strategies are concretely adapted and contested by
both minority and majority. These theories are further useful for
pointing out that the basic condition for minority/majority interaction
is framed by an asymmetrical power relationship in which the majority
has the power to define who belongs to the minority (Tajfel 1978;
Brubaker 1995; Krag 2006; Amireaux and Simon 2006). This in turn
does not mean that minorities cannot speak for themselves or self-
deﬁne on their own terms, but that these exercises of contestation
always take place within the framework of the asymmetrical power
relation to a majority.

To enhance this focus on minority agency, I utilize the theoretical
framework of ‘everyday lived religion’: how Muslims as minorities
make sense of Islam in their everyday lives and practices. As such this
is also a study of minority internal discourses and practices which
focuses on the diversity of Muslim identities (Hutnik 1991). This perspective is particularly relevant in the study of Muslim minorities, because everyday life is one context which can show other forms of minority agency than those which have often been the focus of much research on Muslim minorities.

In order to define the concept of ‘everyday lived religion’ (Ammerman 2007; McGuire 2008) we need to acknowledge the close connection to the concept of religion utilized by many scholars in the study of religion, including Islam. One theoretical assumption behind my use of everyday lived religion is that non-institutionalized types of religiosity do not present themselves immediately to the analytical gazes of scholars engaged in the study of religion (Berger 2007). As such it can be difficult to approach these types of religiosity with the theoretical and methodological frameworks available to us (ibid.). Non-organized forms of religion are somehow ‘invisible’ (Luckmann 1967), and the invisibility creates what could be termed an ‘institutional bias’ where religious expressions within an explicit framework of organizations and institutions are seen as prototypes of religion. These types of visible religious expression are studied more frequently and as such they come to be regarded a priori as relevant expressions of religion, perhaps because there is no initial doubt that the object of study is in fact ‘religion’ (Jeldtoft and Johansen forthcoming).

Everyday religion has been characterized by researchers as privatized religion and spirituality (Bellah et al. 1996; Löwendahl 2005; Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Hamberg 2009). Spirituality is often characterized as individualistic, pragmatic and with a strong focus on autonomy and the personal experience as opposed to religious authority and fixed traditions. Everyday lived religion has also been described as ‘un-churched’, privatized and also quite pluralistic and inclusive in relation to the boundaries of the more established traditions. While some scholars argue that privatized religion is defined by taking place in the private sphere, others argue that privatized religiosity can also involve some form of attachment to religious institutions (Löwendahl 2005).

Sociologist Meredith McGuire (2008, p.11) has suggested one way of looking at everyday forms of religion, which focuses on the religiosity of individuals. McGuire underlines that the religiosity of individuals is not necessarily a microcosm of more established religious expressions, which are often presented in more institutionalized and organized structures. Lived religion further contains a focus on embodied practices, i.e. practices which are not reflected upon, and some of these practices do not appear to be ‘religious’ (ibid., p. 13). These practices are defined by making sense in everyday life while at the same time contributing to the production of people’s identities and sense of belonging (ibid., p. 46). In line with McGuire, sociologist
Nancy Ammerman argues that ‘everyday implies the activity that happens outside the organized religious events and institutions. … Everyday religion may happen in both public and private life’ (2007, p. 5). She stresses that everyday religion is not necessarily the same as ‘private’ religion.

While many studies use the framework of lived religion to describe the changing religious landscape in relation to Christianity and New Age religions, this perspective on Muslim minorities is strikingly absent. The conceptualization of the everyday religious life which I adapt is an attempt to analyse how Muslim minorities make sense of Islam on their own terms. This means that I look at forms of Islam which are not dependent on institutionalized settings. The everyday is where people negotiate identity on a micro-level; it is where ‘the larger frameworks of Islam’ are lived out. As the analysis of the interviews will show, going to the mosque, celebrating ‘Eid in a religious organization and attending Qur’an classes are of course also part of people’s everyday religious practices. By focusing on the (religious) practices and identities that are not dependent on institutions, we are able to sharpen our methodological and empirical outlook and thus contribute knowledge on how religion makes sense for people on a micro-level. As such the concept of everyday lived religion can contribute to a sharpening of focus on minority identities and practices that make sense in people’s ordinary lives.

The methodology of lived Islam

I conducted qualitative life story interviews with twenty-two ‘non-organized’ Muslims in Denmark and Germany from November 2008 to May 2009. All interviewees were aged between 19 and 67 and lived in Copenhagen, Aarhus (Denmark) and Hamburg (Germany).

All interviewees have immigrant backgrounds; most are children of working immigrants and have been born and raised in Denmark or Germany, while others arrived in Europe in their childhood. One interviewee was a refugee who had lived in Denmark for eight years. Their countries of origin are Turkey, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan and Morocco. The mean age of the interviewees is 36.2. I interviewed ten people in Germany and twelve in Denmark, and slightly more women than men (thirteen of the twenty-two). The German interviewees are generally more highly educated than the Danish interviewees: eight interviewees have BA (including three current students) or MA degrees, one has a shorter advanced qualification (one to two years) and one interviewee has only basic schooling. In Denmark three of the twelve interviewees have BA or MA degrees, five have shorter advanced qualifications (one to two years) and three have only basic schooling. Of the twenty-two interviewees, six are students, three are
retired and thirteen are employed. I purposely selected the informants from very broad inclusion criteria, because one of the things I am interested in studying is the diversity of what it means to be Muslim in Europe in the everyday life. I have thus included all ethnic groups and age groups.5

For the recruitment of potential interviewees I adapted a variation of what is usually termed as ‘the snowballing method’ (Russell 2006). To avoid the obvious biases that this method carries in relation to the representativeness of age, occupation, sex, etc., I made sure to spread my contacts across a wide variety of networks. Some interviewees were found through my personal network (professional and private), others through persons connected to a mosque in Hamburg and others through contacts who work in a Turkish cultural centre in Hamburg. Some interviewees were asked for referrals to other potential interviewees, and I made a particular effort to recruit interviewees who would expand the range of the sample in terms of ethnic background and socioeconomic status. Although there is a certain spread in terms of socioeconomic status, age and sex of the interviewees, this snowballing method is also responsible for demographic biases, because the interviewees and the contacts in my network are most likely to know people who are similar to themselves in terms of socioeconomic status. With these reservations in mind, I argue that this method of recruitment is both a valid and useful way of recruiting interviewees, because the type of religiosity that I am interested in is not easily accessible.

The life story interview was applied as the main method. The framework of lived religion demands a close look at everyday life. It was initially my intent both to do interviews and to conduct participant observation in ‘non-institutionalized’ religious contexts. The intention was to gain access to these sites for observation by asking already interviewed interviewees if I could join them in activities outside the religious institutions, such as cultural clubs, leisure activities and so on. This type of extensive and in-depth method seemed obvious to get a sense of how the interviewees live Islam in their everyday lives. Some time into the field period I realized that I would have to abandon the latter method. I started to wonder how in fact to observe my interviewees’ practices and discourses, because the interviewees were not actually doing very much of a religious nature. When applying the life story interview, the narrative structure of the interview is treated as the central element of the interview and thus not seen as something that blurs or destroys the ‘actual meaning’ of the interview (Bruner 1986; Riessmann 2008). The narrative structure is further a good strategy to gain information on types of religiosity which are not normally accessible to the eye of the observer. This type of interview will of course primarily capture expressions of religion
which can be verbalized and reflected upon. In the analysis I will also show how the discourse and narratives of the interviewees have contributed to an understanding of their often invisible religious practices.\(^6\)

The interviews were centred on the interviewees’ own formulations of their lives, and I asked probing questions into religious practice and its significance at different stages of their lives. I also asked questions about family and migration histories. This means that the interviews have very much been framed in relation to both family and individual life history.

**Lived Islam**

I focus the analysis of lived religion on three main topics: religious practices and non-practice, attitudes towards and use of authority and tradition, and lastly belonging and being. All three themes tell us something relevant about what happens to deterritorialized Islam. This is so both because these issues are important narratives in the interviews, but also because these themes relate to the findings on revivalist Islam and activist Muslims. As the focus of this study is to look at the everyday, the findings differ somewhat from these studies.

**Practice, non-practice and being a ‘good Muslim’**

The issue of practice is inevitable in this analysis of the everyday lived religion, because religious practice is central to the way the interviewees understand themselves as Muslims. The interviewees roughly fall into two groups: some do not practice at all, while others have highly individualized ritual practices which are not practised as described by the Islamic tradition. Practice was brought up by me but also by the interviewees themselves – sometimes as early as in the recruitment process. Many of the interviewees initially questioned their own qualifications as ‘representative Muslims’ for a study of Muslims – an attitude that I find interesting in itself, because it expresses something about the categories and boundaries of what it means to be Muslim. The interviewees responded to my categorization of them as Muslims with statements such as ‘I don’t practice’ or ‘I’m not a good Muslim’. Very few of the interviewees practise Islam in a ‘normative’ way, i.e. they do not pray, go to the mosque, fast, etc. as prescribed in the Islamic tradition.

The interviewees navigate and negotiate between different discourses on Islam and what it means to live your life as a Muslim. Being a Muslim is not just something that you are, but also something that you can actively choose to do. In this interpretation the issue of doing, i.e. *doing Islam* as in practising Islam, becomes a relevant theme for the
One prominent discourse relates to the revivalist conceptualization of Islam in which correct ritual practice is rendered as a central moral aspect to being a good Muslim, or even being Muslim. The interviewees’ contest this discourse. This attitude is followed by different expressions of ‘doing Islam’.

I use the terms ‘non-practice’ and ‘reconfigured religious practice’ to describe some of the expressions of how Muslim minorities live and negotiate Islam in their everyday lives. ‘Non-practice’ describes a discourse and a (lack of) practice which is characterized by the individual’s self-definition as Muslim and belonging to a community that is taken to be Muslim in one way or another, and 2) a minimal or non-performance of religious practices combined with a relatively strong awareness and notion that ‘real’ Islam is about practising. ‘Reconfigured religious practices’ describe how Muslims reshape and reformulate religious practices in highly individualistic, inclusive and pragmatic ways. They ‘cut a heel and a toe’ in order to make Islamic rituals make sense for them at a personal level.

I will discuss how the focus on the everyday can show us alternative expressions of the deterritorialization of Islam in which ritual practices are not equated with good, Islamic moral behaviour. These types of ritual practice emphasize individualism-as-pragmatism: Islam is seen as something that can be shaped into fitting to your life and not the other way around.

Reconfigured religious practices: non-practice and internalized practices

Religious practice is described by some interviewees as a contested subject. Hafsa’s (49) family arrived in Germany from Iran in the 1960s and Hafsa was born and raised in Hamburg. She stresses that Islam must be ‘pragmatic’:

Some things are extremely important for the new Muslims . . . and these things are not so important for me. For example the fast . . . I say: I will have my entire life to fast. I will not do everything to fit into a group. I can give you a concrete example: when it is Ramadan, I only fast on the weekends. . . . It is the same with praying. I do it in the morning, but because I can’t wash [for the other prayers], I just pray inside myself and say ‘I am doing it now’.

Hafsa’s religious practice is something that she has taken up again, because she has not practised since she was a little girl. She explains that she has had to adapt her religiosity to her everyday life with work and so on. It is interesting to see that Hafsa is interested in fasting and praying, for example, as part of her religious identity, but she is not willing to let the daily rites interrupt her working life. In her mind,
being Muslim is not about what you do, but about living as a Muslim by making concrete choices that fit into your everyday life. Hafsa’s praying and fasting is something that she does for herself and, as such, the reference point of legitimacy is based on her own judgements. This type of individualism is very typical of the interviewees.

When initially asked about practices the interviewees told me that they do not practise at all, but, when I probed, quite a few of them talk about what I term reconfigured ritual practices: personal, pragmatic and individualistic but at the same time these practices are connected to something that the interviewees see as ‘Islam’ on an abstract level. Some of these reconfigured religious practices could be described as internalized ritual practices: ‘doing Islam’ inside yourself such as meditating, saying prayers to yourself with your inner voice or having internal conversations with God. Others are connected to a sense that Islam is a part of a system of universal values.

One example of reconfigured ritual practice that struck me as particularly interesting was the ritual practices of Fadime (45) who is a Muslim – and a Reiki healer. Fadime was born in Turkey, but came to Germany with her parents when she was a child. She explains that her family were ‘not very religious’, and to Fadime this means that they did not go to the mosque, pray, fast and so on, although they did celebrate ‘Eid and other religious holidays with family and friends. While Fadime still lived in Turkey she attended Qur’an classes in the local mosque. After her family moved to Germany, she did not attend any religious education and has never been to the mosque in Germany – in fact, it has never occurred to her to go there. She travels regularly to Turkey for holidays, funerals and family visits, and, when she is there, she goes to the mosque that she used to visit as a child. Islamic religious practice is confined to Turkey for Fadime. Although there is no formalized ritual practice of a formal Islamic nature in Fadime’s daily life, her life is filled with other types of ritualized religious practice. Her home in a suburb of Hamburg is decorated with healing stones and crystals, plants and herbs. In her bedroom there is a massage bed that she uses for Reiki healing two to five times a week after work. She explains that Islam to her is this healing energy and love, and that God is the same universal power no matter what people choose to call him. She says that she inherited healing powers from her late grandmother, who was a very pious Muslim. Fadime sees continuity between her grandmother’s religiosity and her own relationship to Islam.

The reason why I find the example of Fadime interesting is that it challenged my academic concept of religion – and Islam. During the interview, I was constantly thinking ‘This woman is not Muslim.’ Even though she self-identifies as a Muslim, I had trouble bending my own concept of religion to fit with her practices, because she did not do
anything formally Islamic, but she did practice healing from a Japanese religious tradition. The key issue here is that Fadime herself did not regard this as problematic at all because, to her, Islam is part of a universal structure to which she has access through her ability to heal. This inclusive and pluralistic interpretation of Islam determines her individualized religious practices. This shows how Muslims have other fields of navigation and motives than the ones that are regarded by scholars as ‘Islamic’. In the pluralistic and inclusive mode of Islam, the boundaries of halal/haram and sunna are not so important. The defining point for Muslims like Fadime is the individual approach where she is the interpreter and utilizer of a religious tradition that she can manage to make sense of her life.

The other type of reconfigured religious practice is also orientated towards the individual, and this internalized ritual practice is sometimes explained as pragmatic (as is the case with Hafsa) and sometimes as deeply spiritual. Many interviewees, including both Fadime and Hafsa, use meditation practices instead of actual performance of praying five times a day. For Fadime it is a question of gathering energy for her healing practices, while for others the internalized ritual practices provide them with a sense of contemplation in their everyday lives. These meditation practices might not be used every day; rather, they are performed when the individual feels a need to do so. The interviewees use whatever verses they know from the Qur’an or they speak with God in their own words.

Jamileh (25) has an Iranian background and was born in Germany. She is enrolled in Islamic studies at the university and she explains that gaining knowledge about Islam has led her to become more religious or perhaps more conscious about Islam, but has not made her practise more. She does not fast or pray on a regular basis, but she sometimes meditates on Qur’anic suras to be able to contemplate and concentrate.10

Hamza (28), a Danish-born Muslim of Palestinian descent, explains that he started saying small prayers that he had memorized from the Qur’an school he attended as a child, when his first child was born as a kind of protection, an amulet of safety. This initially internalized ritual practice has now developed into a bedtime ritual for Hamza and his children: every night before bedtime, he says verses of protection from the Qur’an to his children before they go to sleep.11

These types of ritual practice are spiritual, individualized and inclusive both in relation to the boundaries of Islam and in relation to other religions. The practices have been adapted to fit into everyday life. They are spiritual because they provide the interviewees with a space of their own to practise Islam on their own terms. As some of these practices are not directly accessible because of their private and sometimes internalized nature, I would not have learned about them if I had not probed with questions about this sort of practice.
Just as important as the reconfigured ritual practices are the ‘non-practices’. Many interviewees have no religious practice at all, and for them practice is not necessarily part of self-identifying as Muslims. They are aware that other Muslims might not see them as Muslims, or at least not as ‘good’ Muslims’, because of their lack of practice, but this does not affect their feeling of belonging to groups that they identify as Muslim. One example of this attitude is Yunus (33). He was born and raised in Denmark by Afghan parents who immigrated to Denmark in the 1960s. As a child Yunus went to local Qur’an classes with all the other Afghani children every Saturday, but he was never taught to practise by his parents at home. During Qur’an class they were taught to memorize suras, but it is not the religious aspects of the Qur’an classes that Yunus remembers most clearly: ‘The breaks were good. You could play football with your friends and it was all about having fun. … We didn’t understand any of the suras because it was all in Arabic.’

When I ask him if he practised in his youth, when he still lived at home, he says: ‘No, I didn’t. I just lived my life with my own group of friend and played basketball. Religion did not mean much to me; I was not extreme’ (italics added). Practice is also a matter of some contestation for Yunus: if you practice as a person of his generation, you are extreme. When he was younger his parents did not pressure him to practice, assuming that he would get around to it later. Both of his parents practise in what he describes as ‘a traditional way’, and they sometimes express regret that he does not ‘live an Islamic lifestyle’, i.e. practise more. Although Yunus sees himself as Muslim, practice is not something that is a defining aspect of his Muslim identity: ‘I am not very good at it [practice]. I don’t maintain it properly. I only know the first two verses [of the Qur’an]. I only do it [practice] for holidays, and I don’t read Arabic.’

In a situation where Islam is deterritorialized and as such is changing, these findings on ritual practice are relevant in describing how Muslims who are not vocal and visible, and who are not partaking actively in Muslim organizations, are living out Islam in their everyday lives. These findings on ritual practice suggest that another trend can also be detected in Muslim minority contexts. Individualism is not connected with being active and public about one’s religion, but rather to a reconfiguration of Islamic practices to make them fit your daily life. Sometimes the internalization and reconfiguration of these practices make them private because they are removed from the public sphere. The lack of practice and the individualism-as-pragmatism is also connected to attitudes towards authority, dogma and tradition, which I will discuss in the next section.
Authority and tradition

Roya (53), a mother of three children who were all born in Denmark, explains that she regrets not sending her first two children to the local Qur’an school, because they are now ‘unable to defend themselves’ against the at times harsh majority debates about Islam and Muslims. She thus decided to send her youngest daughter to Qur’an school so that she can learn what Islam is ‘about’, and thus be able to argue with proper, theological arguments. This attitude to theological, Islamic knowledge has been generated in relation to majority contestation. In this way Islamic knowledge and authority is something that you can seek out when you need it in your life. Reading the Qur’an is not regarded as a personal moral virtue, but you can make an informed choice in being Muslim by building on your knowledge of Islam. A similar wish to gain knowledge about Islam is expressed by Jamileh. She did not go to Qur’an classes as a child, but she did learn how to pray at home and she read bits of the Qur’an with her mother. She explains that, although her family in Iran are ‘religious’ and her mother prays, she did not grow up with a strong sense of what Islam actually was, and this led her to study Islam at the university: ‘Because I am from Iran and the family of my father is religious and he is from a religious family, I wanted to see and know more about it, than just what others tell me. So I started to study Islam in university.’

Another interviewee born in Denmark, Aisha (27), says that ‘[k]nowing Islam is hard. For me it is about feeling Muslim. I probably should read more [about Islam], but it’s just one of those things that you never get around to’.

Generally the interviewees, regardless of age and ethnic background, use and know very few, if any, theological arguments and know very little about the central dogmas of Islam. Some interviewees have been taught basic knowledge about Islam, e.g. how to pray, read bits of texts from the Qur’an, and about dietary regulations, either by their parents or other family members, or in the Qur’an school some of them attended in their childhood. Most of the interviewees do not read the Qur’an or other authoritative texts from the Islamic tradition and very few interviewees use the Internet to search for Islamic knowledge. This does not mean that the gates of *ijihad* are open or that individual interpretation of the sources is prospering with these Muslims, because the fact of the matter is that, for the vast majority of them, reading of the classic Islamic texts such as the Qur’an, *Tafsir* and *Hadith* simply does not take place. *Fiqh* is regarded as equally unimportant (if known at all). These individualized approaches to tradition and ritual practice reflect an orientation towards one’s own ability to make personal judgements, which are often founded on self-formulated principles that Islam must be pragmatic. Authority to pick, choose and reinterpret
Islamic practice is thus placed upon the individual, and authority and tradition are regarded as less important. What is important is your own individual relationship to God — whatever shape or form that might take. We thus see a different outcome of the reconstruction of Islam that the deterritorialization of Islam brings with it. While many studies on the ‘new Islam’ have shown how individualization leads to self-taught interpreters of Islamic dogma and law as students of Islam, the expressions and attitudes of the interviewees are different. Islamic law, dogma, authority and tradition are regarded as tasks that you could engage in if you wanted to invest time in it and thus add to your personal achievements. Others say that it is a general principle that can guide your life on an abstract level and which should not be taken at face value. To others it is something that you really do not care much about. What lies behind these attitudes is the clear-cut notion that Islam must be pragmatic; it must fit with your daily life and so authority, dogma and tradition are not central parts of these Muslims’ lives, because other things are, if not more, then equally important.

*Lived Islam as being and belonging: morals and values*

Another central theme for understanding everyday lived Islam is that, for many, Islam is merely a question of being Muslim, and belonging and self-identifying as part of a community that you and others take to be Islamic. This version of lived Islam often takes the shape of being about morals and values; about what is fundamentally good and bad. Islam thus becomes a value system. It is about how you raise your children, how you treat other people and how you go about your everyday life trying to do your best. When I ask Roya what Islam is to her, she answers: ‘Islam for me is a feeling that I am Muslim. It is about values ... you can’t be mean, and you can’t make others sad. You can’t do anything illegal. It’s about values when I think about it.’

Yunus restates this attitude when saying: ‘Islam for me is about values and being a good person.’ He is married to a non-Muslim and for him it is important that his children grow up to learn what he describes as ‘the core values of Islam such as tolerance and respect’.

These inclusive demarcations of Islam as primarily values and morals, which in many cases are very similar to the Golden Rule, reflect that issues of practice, theological knowledge and religious institution are not regarded as particularly important for what it means to live as a Muslim. Self-definition and certain more or less ‘universal’ and abstract morals are the key issues for being Muslim and living Islam. The boundaries of Islam are rather loose in this interpretation. Being Muslim and living as a Muslim is not dependent on certain practices or interpretations.
In this sense of being and belonging, family and culture, ethnic and national ties also play a big role for all the interviewees. They do not separate Islam from culture or national colours; they all stress that one cannot be separated from the other. Being Muslim is being Turkish, Afghani and Danish, etc. This is a different attitude than we have seen in the many studies of the new Islam – here the separation between Islam and culture is very articulated (Mandaville 2001; Johansen 2002; Roy 2004; Peek 2005; Schmidt 2005, 2002). Notions of the global *Umma* and making Islam distinct by separating it from the culture, tradition and national colours of their parents’ generation are essential for the Muslims in the studies of the new Islam. In contrast this study shows that for many of the interviewees the celebration of religious holidays such as ‘Eid, Bayram, and Ashura is closely connected to senses of cultural, ethnic and national belonging. These holidays are celebrated in either ethnic cultural clubs (mostly first-generation immigrants) or in private homes with family and friends. Religious holidays are associated with the family and group identity as both Muslims and, e.g., Afghans. These findings of being and belonging thus problematize and develop the theory of deterritorialization and show that it can have other implications: being Muslim for the interviewees is very much about belonging to certain ethnic and cultural communities which are understood in continuance with the religious identity.

**Private or public religiosities?**

One clear benefit from adapting the general framework of everyday lived religion is that it shows minority agency on a micro-level: the everyday practices, identities and negotiations can be seen as expressions of minority identities, which opens up the perspective on what it means to be Muslim. Being Muslim is not just about Islam, but about making sense of the world. Other benefits include the possibility of comparing Muslim religiosities to other types of individualized religiosities. In this way we can escape the conclusions which explain Islam and Muslims *sui generis*. The findings of this study are not specific for Muslims, but can be understood better as an expression of a *type of religiosity* which can be recognized in other religious traditions.

It remains to be seen how far this comparison can be taken. The studies of privatized and everyday forms of religion made by, for example, Bellah *et al.* (1986) emphasize autonomy and individualism as central elements in this type of religiosity. The difference in this study is that choice, individualism and autonomy are relative concepts for minority groups. Although this study also shows minority agency, it is important to keep in mind that being Muslim in a minority
context is not an identity that you can choose freely. Being Muslim is strongly related to majority contestation and acts of categorization. In this way being Muslim is a somewhat public and politicized identity which is placed upon you by others as well as by yourself. When the Muslims in this study describe how they are adapting and reformulating Islam in a way which is emphasizing pragmatism, individualism, privatization and eclectic religious behaviour, this also tells us something about the minority status of Muslims in Europe. While studies on everyday and privatized religiosities within Christian and New Age religions emphasize how individualism is strongly connected to autonomy, which characterizes the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, we must be careful not to transplant these explanations directly on to the study of minority groups. Living Islam for this particular group is all about the everyday life, and making sense of their world. Being private about your religion, and thus being less visible in the public sphere, can thus also be a minority strategy which works for Muslims to give them greater space to navigate in relation to critical majority discourses on Islam. This problematizes how we can conceptualize public and private religiosities. When the motives for bringing religion into the private sphere are based on minority strategies, it is because being ‘Muslim’ is already a public identity given the harsh political and public debates on the role of religion and especially Islam in Europe in the past ten to fifteen years (Allievi 2005). This is an important aspect for understanding the everyday religiosities which have been presented in this article.

Conclusion

In the analysis of the ‘non-organized’ Muslim minorities we have seen how individualized practices and interpretations, spirituality, mixing and matching of religious traditions, being and belonging are all characteristic for the ways in which the interviewees shape, reshape, negotiate and make sense of Islam in their everyday lives. This article has presented novel information on the shapes and depths of everyday forms of religiosity for Muslims in Europe. It also problematizes how these religious expressions can be understood when we are looking at minority religiosities.

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Notes
1. While anthropological studies of everyday forms of Islam have been conducted with Muslims in Southeast Asia and Africa, the focus on everyday and ordinary Muslims is surprisingly absent in present research on Muslims in the West. For an anthropological study on ‘ordinary’ Muslim Malays, see Peletz (1998). See also Marsden (2005) for a study on lived Islam in Pakistan. Schielke (2009) has worked with the everyday religious life of Muslims in Egypt.
2. I use the concepts of everyday religion and lived religion interchangeably.
3. These practices are of course also embodied because people use their physical bodies to enact them in various ways.
4. The study is a PhD project and connected to a larger research project on Islam in Europe. My study thus empirically focuses on Muslims in Denmark and Germany, two countries with similar migration history and ethnic origin of Muslim populations. At the time of writing interviews are still being conducted.
5. Converts to Islam are excluded from the study as the conversion experience is often not understood as an everyday experience, but as a break with one’s former life (see Jensen and Østergaard 2007).
6. All names of interviewees have been changed.
8. Interview 27 February 2009.
9. Japanese healing practice in which the healer is a medium for universal, healing energy that can be channelled through the hands of the healer to a person in need of healing.
10. Interview 27 February 2009.
15. Interview 26 March 2009.
18. See also Peggy Levitt’s chapter on ‘Values and practices’ in her study (2005) of the relationship between transnationalism and religion for similar narratives on Islam as values and morals.

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