

# Counter-Islamophobia Kit

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**Workstream 2 : Dominant Counter Islamophobia Narratives - Germany**

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**Working Paper 11**

Countering Islamophobia through the Development of Best Practice in the use of Counter-Narratives in EU Member States.

**CIK Project (Counter Islamophobia Kit)**

Dr Luis Manuel Hernández Aguilar

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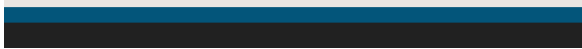
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Counter-Islamophobia Kit



## **About the CIK Project**

The *Countering Islamophobia through the Development of Best Practice in the use of Counter-Narratives in EU Member States* (Counter Islamophobia Kit, CIK) project addresses the need for a deeper understanding and awareness of the range and operation of counter-narratives to anti-Muslim hatred across the EU, and the extent to which these counter-narratives impact and engage with those hostile narratives. It is led by Professor Ian Law and a research team based at the Centre for Ethnicity and Racism Studies, School of Sociology and Social Policy, University of Leeds, UK. This international project also includes research teams from the Islamic Human Rights Commission, based in London, and universities in Leeds, Athens, Liège, Budapest, Prague and Lisbon/Coimbra. This project runs from January 2017 - December 2018.

## **About the Paper**

This paper is an output from the second workstream of the project which was concerned to describe and explain the discursive contents and forms that Muslim hatred takes in the eight states considered in the framework of this project: Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Portugal and United Kingdom. This output comprises eight papers on conditions in individual member states and a comparative overview paper containing Key Messages. In addition, this phase also includes assessment of various legal and policy interventions through which the European human rights law apparatus has attempted to conceptually analyse and legally address the multi-faceted phenomenon of Islamophobia. The second workstream examines the operation of identified counter-narratives in a selected range of discursive environments and their impact and influence on public opinion and specific audiences including media and local decision-makers. The third workstream will be producing a transferable EU toolkit of best practice in the use of counter-narratives to anti-Muslim hatred. Finally, the key messages, findings and toolkits will be disseminated to policy makers, professionals and practitioners both across the EU and to member/regional audiences using a range of mediums and activities.

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## 1. Introduction

This report provides an overview and discussion of counter narratives to Islamophobia in Germany, while mapping the actors, initiatives, and institutions engaged in challenging the growing reality of Islamophobia and its manifold ramifications. Moreover, this national report on Germany correspond with the second workstream of the research project *Countering Islamophobia Through the Development of Best Practice in the Use of Counter-Narratives in EU Member States*. The purpose of this research project involves a critical engagement with the most dominant narratives of Islamophobia, and their comparison vis-à-vis the most salient counter narratives standing against this form of racism.

This report contains three sections. While the first one lays out the methodology informing the research, and maps the different actors and institutions countering Islamophobia in Germany, the second one succinctly recalls the dominant narratives of Islamophobia analyzed in workstream 1 (Hernández Aguilar 2017) as the background for the third section, which analyses the most important counter narratives to Islamophobia and their discursive content as well.

Before continuing with this outline is important to highlight the sociopolitical context in which the research took place, in particular the looming presence of Islamophobia as one the most significant political currencies to achieve political “success” in electoral processes, something that each one of my interlocutors worryingly voiced. I am referring to the rise of the far-right Islamophobic, anti-refugee political party Alternative for Germany (*Alternative für Deutschland*, AFD). Germany held Federal elections on September 2017; I conducted almost all of the interviews (see below) informing this report between May and September, precisely at the peak of the political campaigns. The AFD, its hateful and Islamophobic political platform, and overall envisioning its success in the elections deeply shaped not only the conversations I had, but also preoccupied my interlocutors in regard to the prospect of escalating waves of violence and discrimination, funds being cancelled, or a backlash against their projects and initiatives. After the elections the AFD emerged as the third political force in the Bundestag taking 12.6% of the votes, and thus entered for the first time to the German Parliament. This electoral “success” also represented the first time a political party openly predicating a chauvinist nationalism and racism accessed the Bundestag since the end of the

Second World War. The rise and political gains of the AFD cannot be understood without considering the enlarging influence of Islamophobia in the country.

## **2. Methodology**

Methodologically, the report is informed by David T. Goldberg's (2009) proposal regarding the study of race and racism through a relational and interactive method. Departing from the idea that "racial conception and racist practices are relational" (Goldberg 2009, p.1273), Goldberg appeals for an approach that rather than seeking to compare national units in their differences and similarities, looks into "how state formations or histories, logics of oppression and exploitation are linked, whether causally or symbolically, ideationally or semantically" (Goldberg 2009, p.1275). To this extent, the appearance, development and operation of anti-Muslim racism and the counter narratives to it should be weighted in their relationality across national contexts.

Goldberg (2009, p.1274-75), furthermore, points out that while the local context may provide a "particular timbre and color" to a racial content, its "influences and applications" do not remain anchored in a national reality given that "racial ideas and arrangements circulate, cross borders, shore up existing or prompt new ones as they move between established political institutions". Racial formations and ideas have never been contained within a national frame, for they predate and inform the articulation of national-states (Goldberg 2002), "Ideas and practices emanating from elsewhere are made local; local practices that appear home-grown more often than not have a genealogy at least in part not simply limited to the local" (Goldberg 2009, p.1275). An interviewee in this study, Yasemin Shooman, a leading scholar on anti-Muslim racism in Germany, during our conversation stressed the point raised by Goldberg in relation to how anti-Muslim racism operates across borders particularly in the era of the Internet:

...the first thing I observed [during her research] was that the internet gave the opportunity for people—something I would call the Islamophobic scene—to connect without meeting each other face to face, and exchange ideas, arguments and argumentations very fast, really worldwide. In Germany, there was an adaptation of a lot of arguments from the US, fantasies of an infiltration of Muslims in Europe and Germany ... right-wing populist groups really had a platform for exchange. We observed that the same symbols and pictures were used in Switzerland when there was a call for a ban on Minarets, and later in

Poland, in Warsaw, against the mosque-building project. The Internet really gave the tools for hate speech to circulate very easy and freely (Interview with Yasemin Shooman).<sup>1</sup>

The data for this report is the outcome of 30 semi-structured expert interviews conducted from May 2017 until October of the same year. Semi-structured experts interviewing is a method of qualitative data collection where a set of predetermined questions does not delimit the range of responses to each query or into issues raised during the course of the interview. The interviewees were selected on the basis of their expertise regarding Islamophobic narratives and counter narratives to it, but also representatives of Institutions dealing with discrimination in general such as the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (FADA), and the Berlin's State Office for Equal Treatment - Against Discrimination. The selection also considered the wide range of practices and perspectives regarding Islamophobia.

Moreover, all the interviews were conducted under informed consent. An information sheet was provided before the interviews detailing the aims of the research and the reasons why the participants were selected. Likewise, I provided and explained an informed consent declaration, in which permission was requested to digitally record and securely store the audio of the conversation. If agreed, then, the interviewee and interviewer signed the informed consent declaration. Precautionary measures were taken in order to safeguard the interviewee's anonymity when they preferred so. Subsequently, the interviews were transcribed, in some cases translated from German into English, to then be analyzed through critical discourse analysis (Jäger 1999; Jäger & Maier 2010) as an approach analyzing how power and domination are practiced in social and political contexts through discourse (Wodak & Meyer 2010).

Since one of the aims of the report involves mapping and covering the wide range of practices countering Islamophobia in Germany, I interviewed different actors and representatives of institutions, NGO's, activists, journalists, artists, and scholars dealing with and involve in countering discrimination and Islamophobia. In Germany, the General Equal Treatment Act (*Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz*, AGG) operates as the federal institutional and legal framework delving into discrimination.

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<sup>1</sup> Mohamad Hajjaj from the Network against discrimination and Islamophobia also pointed out the transnational character of Islamophobia, "The only topic that links all of the right wing political parties through Europe is the rejection of Islam, this is just getting stronger, this creates an atmosphere of fear".

The German government implemented the AGG in 2006 as the first federal and comprehensive law combating different forms of discrimination, accordingly, “the purpose of this Act is to prevent or to stop discrimination on the grounds of race or ethnic origin, gender, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation” (Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency 2006, p.4). Furthermore, the AGG operates and governs specifically the realms of civil law and labor. However, as Aleksandra Lewicki (2014, p.150) points out, from its very inception the AGG allowed the Christian Churches, “the largest publicly funded provider of health services in Germany ... to violate the basic rights of their employees”, through the paragraph §9, which allows “Permissible Difference of Treatment On Grounds of Religion or Belief” (Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency 2006, p.8). Therefore, “the German Churches were endowed with a legal privilege to maintain employment *practices* that do actually violate basic rights to non-discrimination on grounds of religion and sexual orientation” (Lewicki 2014, pp.150-151).

The institutionalization of the AGG also prompted the creation of the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency (FADA), within the Federal Minister for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ). The FADA, as an executive body, offers counseling and support to persons affected by discrimination, but also funds and develops research on discrimination, and public relations regarding discrimination and anti-discrimination. In the federal state Berlin there is also an anti-discrimination agency within the Department of Justice. This office funds around 50 organizations in Berlin and functions as a nodal point of networking. Through the funding it delegates counseling (anti-discrimination, victims) to organizations of the civil society, while promoting diversity (Interview with Lorenz Korgel).

Within this institutional framework, *Live democracy! (Demokratie Leben!)* is the most important project with nationwide reach dealing with, inter alia, the prevention of discrimination (BMFSFJ 2017). *Live Democracy!* operates within the BMFSFJ, and supports organizations of the civil society “actively working towards their aim of a diverse, non-violent and democratic society” (BMFSFJ 2017). Programs being funded by *Live democracy!* focusing on the fight against hostility against Islam and racism run under the umbrella of *pilot projects* shaped by the concept *group focused enmity* (Heitmeyer 2011; Zick et al. 2011). As a result of this structures, Live Democracy! funds many of the organizations and initiatives that I interviewed for this report.

The Federal program, *Live democracy!* started in 2015, although as the spokesperson from the institution I spoke with explained, there is a long tradition of federal programs dealing with right-wing extremism, particularly, after German reunification and the ensuing racial violence against those deemed as non-Germans, in this sense,

...the federal programs have been a tool to develop preventive pedagogical approaches in order to work with young people and to deal with such ideological extremism, and how to strengthen their democratic attitudes and values. They developed over time, I mean, the projects got more sophisticated, more need-based, and in 2015, the federal program Live Democracy! started and it had a very broad, or let's say holistic understanding of prevention. First and foremost, it has a proactive-positive approach, that is to say, you are not against something, rather we want to strengthen their democratic attitudes, support people in living democracy, in active participation, and embracing diversity teaching, or how to deal with diversity, or how to deal with conflicts that derived from diversity. This is one part, the positive approach. And then also looking where are problems and then go with preventive measures, or interventions into conflict driven milieus.

In regard to the media sector, in the last years some organizations have emerged as counter balances to mainstream media discourses on integration, migration, refugees, Muslims, and Islam, offering a well-rounded picture on these issues, such as the *Neue deutsche Medienmacher* (NDM 2017), the *Institute for Media Responsibility* (Institute für Medienverantwortung) (IfM 2017), and *Mediendienst Integration* (Mediendienst Integration 2017).<sup>2</sup> In addition to this, some Muslim independent journalists have also started to gain positions in established media outlets providing a different media coverage on issues related to Islam, Muslims, integration and migration.

I interviewed as well scholars, whose research focus centers on Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism in Germany. Although in the last years more academics have engaged on the topic thus expanding our understanding of this phenomenon, still the number is very small when compared to other national realities, and especially against the background of the prevalence of Islamophobia throughout the country.

Finally, I also interviewed artists dealing directly or indirectly with Islamophobia through their decidedly creative expressions. Arts as one of my interviewees put it, "is the only way forward if you want to create a sustainable way. A sustainable strategy against islamophobia is by humanizing experiences" (Interview with a Muslim activist and journalist). For Frantz Fanon (2008; 2004), racism was precisely the process of de-humanizing human

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<sup>2</sup> The *Neue deutsche Medienmacher* describe themselves as, "a nationwide non-profit association of journalists with diverse backgrounds and competences as well as language skills. As the only interest group of this kind, we are committed to furthering diversity in the media – both in front of the cameras and microphones and behind the scenes, on the editorial as well as the executive level" (NDM 2017).

beings, and bringing forth experiences through artistic expressions can help to counter this historical process. Not only the artist I spoke with are defying this reality, but also many of the initiatives and projects described below have taken a stance against Islamophobia. Furthermore, arts and creative expressions tap into one of the most effective Islamophobic strategies, namely, its tactical use of emotions and affects, particularly, fear and hatred.

### **3. Background: the formation of counter-narratives to Islamophobia**

In the research report of workstream 1, I categorized the most dominant narratives of hatred against Muslims (Hernández Aguilar 2017). This section sketchily recalls that discussion as the discursive soil for the formation and development of counter narratives.

Against the backdrop of integration as a national policy addressing and dealing with all those subjects, ideas, and religions constructed as non-German, **the lack of integration of Muslims** appeared as a metanarrative and organizing principle comprising and interlocking a variegated set of Islamophobic argumentations, all of them referring back to the lack of integration as the explanation of “Muslim problems”. Integration, by and large, functions as a discourse problematizing the existence of Islam and Muslims and as such it also serves to create and sustain a discursive **distinction, a categorical border between German and Muslims**, which is another of the most dominant narratives of Muslim hatred. Here, Muslims and Islam are represented, discussed, and constructed as different from and opposed to German identity and culture. This discursive differentiation furthermore depends upon building a different set of opposed and hierarchized values such being democratic vs. non-democratic, secular vs. religious, modern and enlightened vs. backwards and benighted, gender equal vs. gender unequal, etc.

The allegation concerning **gender inequality as a principle orienting Muslim communities and subjectivities** is, as in other European national realities, another prominent medium to demonize Muslims in Germany. This narrative not only positions Muslims in a distant and atavistic time zone, but it has also the effect of deflecting discussions regarding gender violence and discrimination in general from the majority society towards the Other. The accusation of **Muslim or Islamic homophobia** has also gained attention during the last decade, in brief; it postulates an inherent aversion, which can escalate into violence, from Muslims towards sexual orientations outside the heteronormative frame. Both the accusation

of gender inequality and Muslim homophobia, in turn, relate to the construal advancing the idea that Muslims exhibit a **deviant or abnormal sexuality**.

**“Islamic terrorism”** and the political instrumentalization of violent acts perpetrated by Muslims have become part and parcel of Islamophobic discourses, as it were, one of its primary sources of legitimization. As different studies have shown (Zick et al. 2011; Heitmeyer 2011; Sociovision 2008), the perception that Muslims in general see terrorists as freedom fighters, or supporting these heinous attacks is widespread among significant parts of the German population. This narrative is informed and crisscrossed by the idea positing an **innate sense of violence in Muslim subjectivities**, particularly Muslim masculinities, which can “explain” gender violence as well, but also so-called **Muslim anti-Semitism**, another of those narratives being disseminated on different arenas about Muslims.

From being discussed and restricted to the fringes of right-wing media outlets at the beginnings of the 2000s **conspiracy theories about the “Islamization” of Germany** have now become part of mainstream discussions about Muslims and Islam in the media, on the streets (PEGIDA), and within political circles and platforms (AFD). The underlying idea, heavily borrowing from anti-Semitic patterns of argumentation, describes a concealed plan designed by Muslims to, gradually and slowly, replace German laws, customs, norms and identities by its Islamic counterparts.<sup>3</sup>

Finally, all of these alleged acts of violence and problems occur in the theater of the **Islamic parallel societies**, enclaves within the German landscape where allegedly Muslims self-segregate, live, reproduce and enact their own—archaic—rules and norms, generating rowdy and dangerous neighborhoods, where likewise processes of radicalization and extremism are harbored. Similarly, as with the narrative regarding the “Islamization” of

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<sup>3</sup> During our interview, Constantine Wagner from the Institute of Media Responsibility and the University of Basel elaborated about the patterns of similarity between anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, “On the one hand, there is of course a danger of relativizing the Holocaust or the Shoah, because it could be read as if you are saying that it was not so unique, that is of course the danger, but on the other hand, there is certain sensibility for what can be the most drastic consequences of racism. And if you compare anti-Semitic texts from the 19<sup>th</sup> century and actual articles about Muslims the similarities are really striking. Of course, analytically speaking, anti-Semitism and anti-Muslim resentments are different because anti-Semitism is anti-Elitist, a discourse against elites, and the other one is more against the groups which are not part of the elite, so is more like defending privileges. Analytically speaking, of course, there is a difference, but if you compare the discursive strategies, or the mechanisms in making people not human, in demonizing, and so on, well, that is absolutely striking for me, when you read old texts, or newspapers is striking how similar these have been”.

Germany, the construal of the parallel society bears a strong resemblance to anti-Semitic tropes of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Moreover, the idea of the parallel society tends to be applied uniformly to communities and groups deemed and constructed as non-Germans. One of my interviewees, Anna-Esther Younes, a scholar engaged in the study of anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim racism, theories of race and psychoanalysis, elaborated upon the functional character of anti-Muslim racism for German society,

One way of thinking this could be the Cultural Studies perspective. When it comes to Europe, Jews and Muslims or the Middle East, it is obviously the 'Orientalist' (racist) argument that comes to mind, which entails that you project outwards everything that you think your culture does not have anymore – here most prominently Edward Said as a scholar and thinker comes to mind: Meaning, issues such as homophobia, sexism, anti-queerness even racism are projected onto the Other. In another move this 'Other' is then positioned as culturally inferior and therefore unfit for integration/assimilation. These therefore constructed 'cultural binaries' of the Other and the Self are, as me and other scholars have already argued, not existent in and out itself as essential, or even real categories. Another way of arguing would be a more materialist and post-Marxist way of thinking: When Edward Said so tellingly wrote, that 'the East [serves] as career', it is exactly the interstice between personal strife, global and national economies, and discursive-cultural trends that define what is definitely beyond the subject's free will. Meaning, when power and privilege in the form of money and economic assets (and thus safety!) come into play, the argument becomes fuzzier. We can have for instance local non-white elites profiting from imperialism (exploitation, humanitarian aid, etc.), colonialism (mining, slavery) and even racism abroad and at home. I think the question is not how does 'OTHERING' work, because we know how it works, but the question is rather how come it is still working today. In order to answer that, we have to think through the political economy of 'class' and global structures of inequality as well as through culture and stigmatizing markers that define group belonging.

During the course of the interviews all of these narratives became part of the conversations, some of the projects and initiatives purposely appeared to counter one of them, though, more often than not, many of the counter narratives and projects contest and engaged Islamophobia on different levels.

#### **4. Categorical list of most dominant counter-narratives to Islamophobia**

The following counter-narratives, although analytically distinguished, tend to entangle and work in synergy, or become successive steps in the process of countering Islamophobia. For instance, processes of self-reflection, sharing, and self-care—named as **empowerment** by some of my interlocutors—preceded some of the initiatives **making Islamophobia visible**. Which afterwards became the setting for the development of narratives **telling a different story and offering a different view** on Muslim life in Germany. Moreover, the reach and success of some of the initiatives uncovering Islamophobia rested upon networking with other communities and groups affected by racism. In other words, **alliances and processes of building solidarity** underpinned the success of these campaigns. In this section, I present an

overview of the counter narratives to Islamophobia in Germany, the motivation behind them, the ways they challenge and subvert the dominant Islamophobic narratives discussed above, as well as my interlocutors' assessment about their influence in countering Islamophobic discourses and actions.

#### **4.1. Making the realities of Islamophobia visible**

Against the background of the dominant forms of representation in the media about Islam and Muslims as problems (Schiffer 2007; Schiffer 2004; Schiffer 2005; Hafez & Richter 2007; Hafez & Schmidt 2015), in addition to the sociopolitical German context where racism and Islamophobia are not recognized as structural problems with manifold repercussions, one of the most important counter narratives has been the task of making Islamophobia visible.<sup>4</sup> Thereby, bringing up to the public attention and political debates the many experiences of discrimination and violence Muslims experience in their everyday lives, in accessing the job market, in the course of their studies at schools and universities, or in the search to find a living space, to mention just a few.

This counter narrative, in turn, comprises different layers where the positioning of Islamophobia as a societal structure takes place. First, different scholars in the academic field have devoted their work to produce knowledge regarding what is Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism? How does it function? And through which narratives it operates? Second, during the last years, Muslim activists have utilized social media as channel to unearth and raise awareness about the realities of living under Islamophobia. Third, since the federal system of collecting data about hate crimes did not consider Islamophobia until 2017, NGOs have been collecting and publishing statistics regarding the extent of Islamophobic incidents in the country.

##### **4.1.1. Academic-scientific discourse**

Iman Attia (2007a; 2009; 2011; Attia & Shooman 2010; Attia et al. 2014), professor for migration and racism in the Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences in Berlin has been

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<sup>4</sup> This construal and sociopolitical context might help to explain the reasons why the enactment of the AGG and the FADA appeared only recently—2006—despite the fact that discrimination and racism have been, historically, an integral part of German society, “From the 1950s until the late 1990s, there was a consensus among the mainstream political parties that the existing protection from discrimination was sufficient ... There was critical engagement with ‘*Fremdenfeindlichkeit*’ (xenophobia), which, however, was narrowly conceived as right-wing extremist physical aggression towards ‘foreigners’. More subtle or institutionalized manifestations of discrimination, such as condescending attitudes, stigmatization and unequal treatment were hardly contested” (Lewicki 2014, pp.48–49).

undoubtedly the leading scholar on anti-Muslim racism in Germany, introducing the term in the German context and stressing the interlocking of this form of racism with gender, and sexuality, while being deeply informed by Orientalism. Her engagement with the topic harks back to almost 30 years, although as she recounted in our interview, it was not until the late 1990s that the topic started to be seriously discussed against the background of the rising violence from right-wing and neo-Nazis groups against different communities in Germany, as she put it, “the environment change in the 1990’s with the arson attacks, the situation in the society changed a lot, the situation [racism] had become more urgent, and then counter movements, and more voices started to intervene in the political debate”.

Talking and discussing about racism in general and anti-Muslim racism in particular has been a complicated issue in relation to the definition of post 1945 German identity as utterly opposed to the National Socialist era, which may help to explain why making Islamophobia visible constitutes one of the most important task in the process of countering Islamophobia. Iman Attia experienced this epistemic, politic and societal straightjacket first hand, when in the 1990s she wanted to write her PhD on anti-Muslim racism, but at the time the topic was not took seriously, and thus she could not pursue it. However, she kept working on this phenomenon and in 2007, she edited a path breaking volume on anti-Muslim racism (Attia 2007b), and her dissertation on the same topic was published two years latter (Attia 2009).

In regard to the question of how counter anti-Muslim racism, she told me about her experiences in universities classrooms, where a critical engagement with history and examining the sources of prejudice have been valuable tools to contest common sense anti-Muslim racist stereotypes. Knowledge production and movements countering forms of racism have been crucial first steps in defying historical racial structures. Thinking about how the discussion of anti-Muslim racism have changed or surfaced in the last decades, Iman Attia considers that the existence of a debate and a counter movement has been a much-needed intervention “to move forward in research, politics, and society” in general.

I have already mentioned the academic work of Yasemin Shooman in regard of anti-Muslim racism in the Internet. Shooman currently leads the Academy Program of the Jewish Museum Berlin.<sup>5</sup> Along with Iman Attia, Shooman has been pioneering the study of anti-

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<sup>5</sup> Speaking about the work of the Jewish Museum in Berlin and her projects, Shooman detailed, “we have build an Islamic-Jewish forum, we try to look for similarities, for common experiences as religious minorities in a secular

Muslim racism and has published extensively on the issue (Shooman 2010; Shooman 2011; Shooman 2012a; Shooman 2012b; Shooman 2014). During our talk Shooman underscored the relevance of the Internet “as a second public sphere” in propagating hateful and racist speech against Muslims, which, moreover, tended to create the impression of this content as being espoused by the majority society, but also “what this blogs and websites are contributing to is the dehumanization of Muslims, not being able to see Muslims as humans, only as a threat, as perpetrators, terrorist, and so on” (Interview with Yasemin Shooman).

Furthermore, according to Shooman, in Germany, as in other national realities, *key witnesses* or *native informants* have played a significant role in legitimizing prejudices and hateful speech towards Muslims. For the last decade, Muslims, ex-Muslims, or people with a Muslim background holding negative views on Islam and Muslims have been at the spotlight in public discussions about Islam and Muslims in Germany, ratifying, but from “within”, the repertoires of Islamophobia to a wider audience.

The first Islamophobia report on Germany, written by Anna-Esther Younes (2016), was an important and much needed step to bring the realities of islamophobia into the limelight. In our talk, she stressed that during the years 2015 and 2016 anti-Muslim racism became an irrefutable force on account of the unprecedented rise of violent attacks against Muslims and refugees,

In that regard anti-Muslim racism only became acknowledged as a force because violence became so apparent that you could not negate or whitewashed it with other narratives anymore. I think that was one of the most crucial findings: Eventually, Islamophobia was thus accepted by the political establishment as a fact, or shall I say the violence against immigrants or so-called Muslims was not negated or downplayed or overseen anymore.

In the report of workstream 1, I detailed the escalating violence that Younes described specifically in the context of the so-called refugee crisis and the arrival of approximately 1,000,000 refugees in the course of 2015-2016, and which operates through the discursive

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Christian environment. For instance, the circumcision debate was one example where Jews and Muslims were targeted by the same debate and law, or the whole discussion on Kosher and Halal. Now the AFD wants to ban religious slaughtering, we try to strengthen the relation between Jews and Muslims, but also between Jews and other communities of Color, to normalize the Jewish life because when it comes to Germany very fast you are talking about the Shoah, about dead, but there are living Jews here in Germany. We try to show the diversity of Jews, we try to use this opportunity for a dialogue and also for another view on Islam and the whole question of Islam in Europe, to contextualize, to historicize it a little bit, that is not the first time that you are dealing with a non-Christian minority and the question on how to integrate this minority into the society. This is something we can also find in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century, we can learn maybe a little bit from these debates. This is what we try to do here, we organize events, and workshops, and conferences, but also cultural events, book presentations, to build a relationship because, I would say, it needs to be build”.

conflation of Muslims with refugees and problems.<sup>6</sup> The publication of Younes' report received nation-wide echo and coverage and as she put it Islamophobia started to become an undeniable reality in the country. Speaking about the report, Younes further elaborated on two other central findings,

...the arguments around gender and Muslim masculinity or, so rather fantasized Muslim masculinities. Around the New years event in 2015- 2016 there where a lot of racist tropes that have already been applied to People of Color for hundreds of years and where yet again mobilized against the so-called asylum seeking population in Germany. And the other finding, recently, although it is also not new, but at least in academia and public debate it is new, is the argument anti-Semitism allegations are appropriated to mark Muslims as anti-Semitic, and thus un-assimilable to our society.

Academic work focusing on Islamophobia not solely entails the production of knowledge and a grammar to understand its roots and functioning, but also the dissemination of such a knowledge in the universities, among students, and future teaching staff for schools, a task that expectedly can have multiplying effects in countering Islamophobic perceptions and attitudes. Karim Fereidooni is professor of social sciences and didactic in the University of Bochum and specialist in research pertaining to racism in pedagogical institutions, schools and universities (Fereidooni 2011; Fereidooni 2016; Fereidooni & Meral 2017). Schools and universities, furthermore, as many of my interviewees explained are key arenas in fighting against Islamophobia in particular and racism in general because within these spheres the experiences of discrimination and disparagement of Muslim are very frequent and virulent (Peucker 2010; Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes 2012; Antidiskriminierungsstelle des Bundes 2013; Fereidooni 2011; Mecheril et al. 2010).

During our conversation Fereidooni stressed the difficulties of talking about and discussing racism, especially in the universities' classrooms, where the myth of post-racial Germany is especially strong. Against this background, Fereidooni, has actively engage in developing curricula whereby racism and inequality can be thematized and discussed thereby providing tools to conceptualize classes and seminars, in particular, sociopolitical events racially charged such the systematic killings against "migrants" and Muslims by the National Socialist Underground (NSU), the rise and political platform of the far-right party Alternative for Germany, and the issue of racial profiling in Germany.

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<sup>6</sup> "The discrimination of refugees is mostly fuel by anti-Muslim racism" (Interview with Celine Barry).

In a similar vein, Eva Kalny, from the Leibniz University Hannover, sees the university's classroom as a space to discuss, challenge and counter anti-Muslim prejudice.<sup>7</sup> According to Kalny different methods can be used to counter Islamophobia in the university setting. First, the stereotypes at hand can be used to reveal the underlying structures of domination sustaining the stereotype. Second, teaching about and using human rights has proven in her experience as key tools to humanize experiences while providing a differentiated view on Muslims and Islam. Third, historical knowledge, especially the widely unknown historical relationship between Islam in Germany can help to contextualize some of the current and in circulation stereotypes. However, Kalny underscored the need to have a differentiated and tailored approach regarding how to counter Islamophobia, while for some groups and individuals confronting the stereotypes might work, for others humor may be a better fitting option.

Despite the fact that this body of work could be seen as addressing academic audiences, it has been of paramount importance in providing a set of tools, concepts, and ideas about the operations and deployments of anti-Muslim racism; therefore, academic knowledge is part of the counter narrative making Islamophobia visible and legitimizing the ensuing discussions.

#### **4.1.2. Social media**

Social media, in particular Twitter, Facebook, blogs, and Instagram, have increasingly become notable instruments to make the realities and experiences of Islamophobia visible. While blogging and Facebook have allowed different individuals to recognize and "realize how many similarities there were within the experiences of different minorities" (interview with a Muslim journalist and activist), Twitter has served a more open political function, namely, as the medium to catapult experiences of racism and discrimination into the public debate, problematizing racism among a variety of setting and arenas, for instance, experiences of anti-Muslim racism in the university.

During our interview, Emine Aslan (2017), a scholar and activist engaged in the issues of anti-Muslim racism and intersectional feminism recounted and analyzed her experiences as a Muslim woman wearing a hijab in the university,

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<sup>7</sup> Eva Kalny wrote the Islamophobia report for Portugal in 2016 (Kalny 2017), as well as articles systematizing the different methods to counter Islamophobia in the classroom (Kalny 2014; Kalny 2016) .

...the campus was always a very violent place for me, epistemically, in language, because whenever I will be in a seminar, I will be either asked stupid questions about Islam, or when it was about gender stuff, then the professor would make fun of the so-called uncivilized Muslim civilization ... I always felt so fucking visible in these seminars, I didn't feel like I was part of the intellectual part of the seminar, but I was like the object of the seminar. I also had different encounters with the sociology professor, for example, a huge fight to explain to me that if I, as a student of sociology, would have understood sociology I would not believe in Islam, I would not have a religion, and I would not wear the headscarf, because I am stigmatizing myself by doing some blah, blah, blah, stuff like that, it was very usual to have stuff like that, so the feeling of isolation, the feeling of being hyper-visible in a White campus, led us to the decision of starting an empowerment workshop.

The empowerment workshop served as a safe space where different students of Color shared their experiences, their feelings of alienation, hyper-visibility, and exclusion within the university. The group behind the workshop, then, decided to uncover these realities in a context where racism has never been acknowledged, i.e., as an issue deeply permeating the universities.<sup>8</sup> This was the rationale behind the hash tag campaign #Campusrassismus, (campus racism). Emine Aslan narrates the purpose of the campaign as well as the rationale informing it,

...so, let's use Twitter, let's use Facebook to make our narratives visible because I don't want to wait for someone to ask me to write an article, I don't want to wait for someone to give me a platform, I will take the platform. With the Internet I have the possibility to do that. Because I believe pretty much on the power of narratives, and using your own voice to create your own narrative, that was the very core of the idea behind this campaign.

When the campaign started on Twitter it took only an hour to become a national trending topic. The campaign was widely disseminated and swiftly became viral, leading to established media outlets, such as the weekly nationwide *Die Zeit* (Gerstlauer 2015), to pick up the story, and publicized it even further. Emine Aslan attributes the success of the campaign to the networking and alliances behind it, previous to the launching of the campaign, the group did extensive network with organizations such as Initiative Black People in Germany (*Initiative Schwarze Menschen in Deutschland Bund e.V.*), Copwatch Frankfurt, and SchauHin, among others,

...so we got all this people together and we said: 'we will use all of our channels to push this campaign', so we had a lot of people who have been waiting to launch this campaign for a week, everyone knew that they would push the narratives to their own networks, and when the campaign launched we created a big trending topic ... we were trending topic within Germany in less than an hour, so when you go to twitter and look what's trending you will see #campusrassismus, so that's how the narrative

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<sup>8</sup> Only on November of this year two cases of Islamophobia in German universities against Muslim women wearing hijabs happened, these were first reported on social media and then in established media outlets. In the Technical University of applied sciences, a professor made derogatory remarks against the student (IslamiQ 2017a). In the University of Würzburg a professor requested to the student to remove her headscarf during the lecture (IslamiQ 2017c; IslamiQ 2017b). In both cases after the coverage of the incidents the professors made public apologies. Making visible Islamophobia in the universities has raised awareness on the issue and created at least certain degree of accountability.

was pushed online, so, journalist who do research and go on the internet for research saw that, and they saw, oh something is happening, there is dynamic happening right now, that's why it became important to them to write about it.

Whereas Campus racism specifically targeted and unearthed experiences of racism in German universities, SchauHin (look at this) unraveled racism in general and its different expressions nationwide. SchauHin (SchauHin 2017) started in 2013 as a collective of Black and People of Color, Muslims and Jews, precisely as a medium to share and thereby expose everyday racial discrimination. A member of the collective explained to me that through SchauHin,

...we wanted to talk about racism in our society without someone being killed, without a building being burned down, without having this shocking violence. And I also see this tendency to discuss racism only when something shocking happens and then it is reduced to this kind of extreme, violent, obvious events, and what is happening daily is being neglected ... firstly, we wanted to show that sharing it in masses will be empowering, and secondly, there is not only a lack of understanding of racism with the rest of society but even within those who experience racism, they, themselves are often not aware of the fact that what they experience is racism.

The regrettable normality of Islamophobia in Germany has caused that some Muslims tend to accept discrimination as part of their reality, or even not recognized it as my interlocutor put it. Experiences of anti-Muslim racism and discrimination more often than not are dismissed, as I will argue below, for a long time they were not even recorded by the police as actions informed by hatred, let alone racism. The member of SchauHin with whom I spoke also highlighted that the neglecting of these experiences, their misrecognition as normality may lead to their internalization, that is to say, some Muslims interiorizing the allegation that they are “oversensitive, or you are hypersensitive or maybe just maybe misunderstood someone”. SchauHin precisely pursued to actively defy this narrative,<sup>9</sup>

...so, what we wanted is to show that this is a structural problem, is not just individuals who are hypersensitive, but by showing thousands of experiences of daily racism you show that there is a structural problem, you can't talk of this on an individual level unless you highlight that there is structural racism behind this that enables it. So that's exactly what happened by having thousands of people twitting about this, sharing their experiences, no one could say that thousands of people are hypersensitive, but it was obvious it was just screaming into your face. And then you see the necessity to talk about structures, so the experiences of the individual was then moved up to a structural level, and that is important to have this kind of debate, because that is where the solution lies,

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<sup>9</sup> Philomena Essed (1991) in her seminal work *Understanding Everyday Racism* already in the 1990 addressed the construal of over-sensitivity of those persons experiencing racial discrimination, an allegation that has had a functional character by promoting and sustaining the idea of societies rid of racism, “Counter to the common-sense belief that people of color are overly sensitive to discrimination, research has indicated that most people of color are reluctant to label a given situation as racism before carefully considering all other possible explanations to account for unfair treatment. On the contrary, the common-sense belief that racism is a problem of the past makes members of the dominant group insensitive in recognizing when and how racism permeates everyday life” (Essed 2008, p.448).

Emine Aslan joined SchauHin shortly after it had already started. She explained that the campaign was more than only bringing to the surface experiences of racism, since it also served “to bring different People of Color together, to work together, speak about our realities, and make the realities we are experiencing with racism visible”. Therefore, SchauHin also functioned as a platform helping to build community and to highlight the manifold expression of racism affecting different communities, groups and individuals in Germany, in this sense, “SchauHin was a good tool for non-Muslim communities to get in touch with the realities of Muslims, as well as non-black Muslims to get in touch with lived experiences of black people in Germany” (Interview with Emine Aslan).

Moreover, SchauHin was not only restricted to operate as an online campaign. From the very beginning, the collective did also offline work, following the same principle, that is to say, through the lived experiences of individuals affected by racism and discrimination the collective sought to have a wider discussion about structural and everyday racism in Germany and the topics related to it,

...we organized storytelling salons like having storytelling saloons in Berlin, one we had in Cologne, in Heidelberg, in Frankfurt, in different cities, where we would pick a political topic as the framing of the evening, and then find speakers around that topic, and ask them to tell a story about that topic. These stories were mostly about belonging in Germany, about racism, about religions, stuff that was important for certain communities of color in Germany, and that was very interesting and actually very, very cool because soon we had different evenings where a Muslim person would speak about an experience, and a non-Muslim person of color would speak about their experiences, and they could connect, they could bond, they could have a platform to share their realities and their experiences (Interview with Emine Aslan).

Campus racism and SchauHin can be seen as political interventions problematizing and challenging everyday racism, those quotidian forms of racial oppression that tend to work subtly, while being deeply engrained in social relations and institutions. As Philomena Essed (2008, p.448) argued, everyday racism does not refer to isolated and dispersed cases, rather to the systematic “accumulation of small inequities” in relation to each other.

Essed (2008, p.448) further pointed out the interlocking character of strands of everyday racism producing the marginalization of those racially characterized, the problematization of their identities, and the control and suppression of resistance against racism. Precisely, this later point, as my interlocutor explained above, occurs through “accusations of oversensitivity about discrimination, continuous ethnic jokes, ridicule in front of others, patronizing behavior, rudeness, and other attempts to humiliate and intimidate can all have the effect of discouraging action against discrimination”. Many of my interlocutors

pointed out towards this problematic tendency, the acceptance of discrimination and therefore its underreporting. Thus, the campaigns SchauHin and Campus racism appeared as political interventions against anti-Muslim racism, while building networks of solidarity and making visible the phenomenon, as such the lived experiences and stories of racially characterized individuals “have become a mosaic of the debate about racism in Germany” (SchauHin n.d.).

#### **4.1.3. Collecting statistics**

Another crucial venue in making Islamophobia visible has been the systematic compilation of Islamophobic incidents, violence—physical and verbal—assaults to property identified as Islamic such as a mosque or a graveyard, etc. The system of collecting data regarding Politically Motivated Criminality established in 2001, and its complementation with Hate Criminality in 2009 until the end of 2016 neither considered nor counted crimes motivated by anti-Muslim racism or Islamophobia, despite the fact that religion could be taken into account, or that the police collected as a separate category; anti-Semitic crimes. In 2017 the category hostility towards Islam (*Islamfeindlichkeit*) has been included in the system of hate criminality, therefore official and nationwide statistics on the issue have started to be collected.

The result for the first quarter of the 2017 have been made available after the political party Die Linke requested information to the federal government through a minor request (*kleine anfrage*). During the first quarter of the year there were 208 acts of violence motivated by hostility against Islam (BMI 2017, pp.15–22), in the second quarter a total of 274 attacks were recorded, while in the third so far there have been 217 incidents (NOZ 2017). A legal scholar working on Islamophobia told me during our interview that legally speaking; the inclusion of hostility against Islam is “one of the most significant development, now anti-Muslim crimes are collected in the data. This is very important, for many years this was criticized, why there was no data? Statistics can show that there is anti-Muslim racism and there is Islamophobia, these are real attacks, this is a very important development”.

Against this background, the task of collecting and systematizing data in regard to violence against Muslims needed to be undertaken by NGO’s. The registered association Inssan and its Network against discrimination and Islamophobia have been, since 2002 and 2010 respectively, in the forefront of collecting this data and by means of this making it visible to a wider audience. Inssan also reports Islamophobic crimes to the OSCE Office for

Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Furthermore, the significance of this data resides on its potential use for, first, have a better picture of the range and forms of this racial motivated violence, and second, as the basis for future work, policies, initiatives and strategies tackling this phenomenon. During our conversation Mohamad Hajjaj, the director of Inssan as well as the regional executive director of the Central Council of Muslims in Germany (ZMD), explained the relevance of collecting data in regard to Islamophobic incidents, but also touched upon the difficulties surrounding such a task,

...statistics are very important because they show practically the spread of anti-Muslim racism. Last year we had 150 cases, what we do then is to make public these statistics in cooperation with the OSCE. Here is important to mention that our numbers should be read carefully because the majority of cases are not reported. In my view, we cover only 2% of the cases of anti-Muslim racism, many persons are discriminated and they don't report it for several reasons including that they don't know where to report it, specially people who is not online, people who do not master the German language, for them is difficult. Interestingly in the statistics of the police the concept of *Islamfeindlichkeit* or hate criminality in relation to Muslims just started to be collected this year, before there was no register. We have fight through Inssan to change this system of data collection so that *Islamfeindlichkeit* would be counted; of course, this has power as well. To what extend this is successful? Is a good beginning, but the police needs to be trained, but there are still challenges, and regrettably this tendency has been only rising.

Daniel Bax (2015), member of the *Neue Deutsche Medienmacher*, author, and probably the most important journalist in Germany reporting on anti-Muslim racism, migration and integration shares Hajjaj opinion regarding the need to have statistics in relation to Islamophobia due to the constant allegations in regard to its inexistence or minor relevance,

I would say, after Thilo Sarrazin, especially after PEGIDA and the AFD it is very difficult to claim that there is no islamophobia, and if you have statistics that show you which violent effects islamophobia has is even more difficult, still there would be people who will say: 'there is no islamophobia, all this is exaggerated', but is more difficult for them to claim that there is no islamophobia if there are statistics.<sup>10</sup>

Hajjaj also mentioned that another challenge concerns the lack of organizations dealing with and collecting data on anti-Muslim racism throughout Germany.<sup>11</sup> In Berlin, in addition to Inssan, and ReachOut the Anti-Discrimination Network Berlin of the Turkish Federation Berlin-Brandenburg also gathers data about racial discrimination in general, including anti-Muslim racism. I spoke with Celine Barry from the Anti-Discrimination Network about their work, which in addition to collect data also offers legal and psychosocial counseling to persons

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<sup>10</sup> "The so-called Sarrazin debate, refers to the publication and ensuing public reaction to Thilo Sarrazin's book Germany Undoing/Abolishing Itself in 2010. Sarrazin's book conspicuously related statistics to eugenics and became Germany's best-selling book in 2011. Sarrazin argued in his book about Germany becoming dumber on account of the 'growing' Muslim population" (Hernández Aguilar, 2017, p.6).

<sup>11</sup> "The biggest problem and challenge that we see in Germany is that there are no organizations like Inssan, we are practically one of the very few German wide institutions that document anti-Muslim Racism" (interview with Mohamad Hajjaj).

affected by discrimination, empowerment workshops, while also trying to raise awareness among the society about racism and discrimination in general. Celine Barry pointed out that more or less 40% of the cases they received concern anti-Muslim racism. The Network moreover publishes yearly reports to the Berlin's State Office for Equal Treatment - Against Discrimination, where some cases are chosen as examples whereby discriminatory practices can be unraveled.

The different layers whereby Islamophobia has been made visible during the last years has been one of the most important ways of countering it, since it represents a medium to produce knowledge and disseminate it, while bringing forth the experiences of those affected by it to the attention of the media, politicians and German society in general. In this sense making the realities of Islamophobia visible constitutes a crucial first step in the processes of challenging them. Analytically, the three spheres making Islamophobia visible can be seen as complementary political interventions. First, academic knowledge legitimizes and produces a vocabulary to address Islamophobia, second, the engagement in social media creates a powerful and undeniable discourse about the range and effects of this racial reality, and finally, collecting statistics sets the conditions for an accountability to come.

#### **4.2. Empowerment**

As Mohammed Hajjaj mentioned, in the fight against anti-Muslim racism working with Muslim communities in order to eradicate the idea that discrimination is part of normality should complement collecting data. To this end, individuals and communities need to know about their rights, learn more about the anti-discrimination law (AGG) and agency (FADA), and the possibilities they have to report or received counseling after a discriminatory act happened. Some of my interviewees regarded these processes **as empowering Muslim communities and individuals**. Empowerment was a recurrent topic during the interviews especially as a tool to counter the micro and macro effects of Islamophobia. However, the meanings of empowerment varied in accordance to the interlocutors that mentioned it.

Furthermore, empowerment should be seen as an instrument seeking to counter and to certain extend heal the psychosocial effects of growing up and living in an Islamophobic society and environment. From the pioneering work of W.E.B. Du Bois (Du Bois 2005 [1903]) to the painstaking Fanonian examination of the dehumanizing effects of racism upon racially characterized subjects (Fanon 2008; Fanon 2004), we know for a fact that racism has profound

effects into how racialized subjects see themselves, see others, how they navigate and maneuver through society and its institutions, how a racist environment restricts or even shatters their self-esteems, aspirations and dreams, to name just very few items of the long list of racial effects. During our conversation Yasemin Shoorman, highlighted that nowadays in academic circles dealing with the issue there is a growing knowledge and awareness about how Islamophobia operates, its main narratives, and yet little is known about how these reality affects Muslims and young Muslims in particular

...what scares me the most is that we have now a generation of young Muslims coming to school where this image of Islam and Muslims is so normal, where you have among teachers such a negative attitude and for most of these kids this is part of their identity, for some is not a very important part but becomes a very important one because you are confronted constantly with something. You are confronted with the news, with the media covering these topics. We need more research on what does it mean to live with Islamophobia. We know how it works, we know all the stereotypes, we can make a list, what we don't know is how can we empower the children and the youth, the most vulnerable people, you can face it everywhere, in the hospital, while sitting in the U-Bahn [metro]. The question then is what does it mean to live under these conditions? People also start to feel foreign to their environment, to have a kind of alienation to the society.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to the many forms of discrimination experience by Muslims, a powerful and widespread narrative has been circulating ascertaining that they don't belong to the country and that they are not *real* Germans. In 2006 and in the context on the inauguration of the German Islam Conference, the former Minister of the Interior Wolfgang Schäuble for the first time acknowledged Islam as part of German society (Schäuble 2006). This recognition somehow went unnoticed. Afterwards, in 2010 the former President Christian Wulff declared in the ceremony to commemorate the 20th anniversary of German reunification, "Islam also belongs to Germany" (Dowling 2010), and this time the declaration flared up a debate still ongoing in which all the narratives of Islamophobia have been deployed to prove that Islam and Muslims do not belong in Germany (Hernández Aguilar 2018).<sup>13</sup> This debate thus has been

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<sup>12</sup> I interviewed a spokesperson from the federal program Live Democracy!, who shares the same opinion, especially after receiving feedback from the organizations the program funds "what is needed, on the one hand, is for young people who is affected by *Islamfeindlichkeit* to give tools about how they can deal with it, how to empower them, how to strengthen their self confidence, strengthen their capacity to react to the situation when they are confronted with *Islamfeindlichkeit*. But also strengthen their legal competence in terms of getting legal advice, to fight back, or the competences they need in order to that they don't get in a victims feelings, to be overwhelmed by it, specially young people, and depending of which social class they are coming from, it can be very draining".

<sup>13</sup> In 2011 the former Minister of the Interior Hans-Peter Friedrich in his first speech as Minister declared "To say that Islam belongs in Germany is not a fact supported by history. The *Leitkultur* (guiding/leading culture) in Germany is the Christian-Jewish Occidental culture. This culture is not Islamic and it won't be one in the future (Reuters 2011). After this statement the debate took an even more Islamophobic air by being legitimized by a high-profile politician.

fueling the narrative positing an innate difference between Germans and Muslims, and German culture and Islam. A Muslim journalist and activist shared her/his experiences and feelings regarding this debate,

We've been discussing whether Islam belongs to Germany a sixth year in a row, right? And it got worse every year, it was so humiliating just watching how people would engage in a debate that will question a religious minority *in* Germany their right to exist ... it has become so humiliating to be part of these discourses, like why would I engage in a debate where the outcome might be that I don't belong, that my very existence in this country is being questioned, why do even engage in these debates, it is so humiliating. Why would I have a discussion with someone who neglects my humanity, who neglects my very existence, and I just realized that it's become so humiliating, but we just kept a nice face, and smiling and nodding, and you know trying to be reasonable, when it was actually time to say shut the fuck up (laughing) you know, I had enough of this.<sup>14</sup>

Against the backdrop of the psychosocial effects of Islamophobia in the lives of Muslims, empowerment workshops and safe spaces operate on different levels; for instance, as spaces for sharing experiences, and understanding that racial discrimination is in fact a problem.

#### **4.2.1. Safe spaces to share and understand**

Mona El Omari, a hip-hop artist, poetess and facilitator of empowerment workshops, conceives of them as places “where we can learn that we deserve whatever you define as a good life, and to feel certain securities”. According to el Omari, empowerment workshops have a crucial role in helping persons affected by racism to understand it beyond their lived experiences, she told me that acknowledging the existence of anti-Muslim racism was a first important step for herself,

...the acceptance of the fact that it still exists was very important for me, up to a certain point I didn't have words for it, I didn't understand it on a rational level, I understood it at the level of being looked at differently, of being treated differently in kindergarten, having this additional way of knowing that for a lot of people you don't belong, or you are not fully human, coming back to emotions, I think there was an emotional understanding before there was a rational understanding, or a theoretical understanding of what I have been emotionally understanding for a while, somewhere along the way, if we come into the struggle, one important piece of the puzzle is actually understanding the workings of it.

I spoke with Ouassima Labich, board member of the Muslim Youth in Germany (*Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland*, MJD), a nationwide organization welcoming and working with Muslims from different backgrounds. The MJD provides different forms of empowerment workshops, among them those focusing on Islamic knowledge and traditions, teaching about “the beauty of our religion” (Interview with Ouassima Labich), workshops about intercultural and

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<sup>14</sup> Kofi Ohene-Dokyi also considers that this particular debate can have negative outcomes: “Is Islam part of the German culture? This discussion is absurd, what does it tell to the people that consider themselves part of the Muslim community, what signal does it send out to these people, specially to young people. This is also why we addressed Islamophobia; to have a space where we can discuss about the issue”.

interreligious dialogues, programs for young Muslims, conferences on topics decided by them, and travels and excursions. Empowerment workshops are part and parcel of the organization and its projects. My interviewee furthermore explained that in all of these activities, anti-Muslim racism is always an issue discussed by the members, these discussions, in turn, raise awareness among young Muslims in regard to racial discrimination,

I've never been in an event, conference or meeting where there has not been talks regarding the experiences of discrimination and anti-Muslim racism. What I mean by that, the fact that we just are who we are and creating these rooms and meetings, the possibility to, first of all talk, about it, is not that easy to talk about that without being labeled as a victim, or not being taken seriously. I do talk a lot about safe spaces because I do believe in this concept, because then you have all these perspectives and all these experiences, but this moment of talking about that is liberating. First, is out and then having a lot of people that understand you, and then you said the struggle is real, understanding is the next step.

The very existence of the MJD can be seen as a direct counter narrative to the construal positing being German and being Muslims as two complete different and opposed identities. From its inception, the MJD's message was to function as an organization with national reach for German Muslims. Ouassima Labich chronicled that the MJD was,

...founded 23 years ago with the idea to have an international organization, Muslim international, which is 100% in German, until that time there were programs only in the mother tongue of different people, the MJD had this idea until today of being Muslim and German and thousand other things you want to be, and convey that is ok and not a contradiction.

In this context and within this counter narrative the empowerment workshops as safes spaces can, not only be a place for the development of self-esteem, and their identities, but moreover, these spaces can have a positive effect in terms of how to deal with everyday racism and discrimination,

...we do have workshops about anti-Muslim racism, we talk about it, but what I found interesting in our approach, is to give all these voices to be reflected in projects in programs in conferences, *be who you want to be and not busy in rejecting who you are not*. This makes you powerful and this is something that you need on the streets, on the university, in any space where you are the Other or labeled as the Other, you need power and strength, because if not you won't be able to walk down the street, because people will stare at you, and it will always takes a lot of energy out of you, we give ourselves all the power we need for the outside (Interview with Ouassima Labich).

#### **4.2.2. Empowering through laws and creativity**

Empowering workshops moreover can function as channels to disseminate knowledge about rights and thereby legally challenge Islamophobia. Mohamad Hajjaj disclosed that one of the advantages Inssan has in its work is the particular relation they hold with Muslim communities in Berlin. Inssan is trusted, and through this trust Inssan not only collects data about discrimination, but also helps to disseminate knowledge about how to fight discrimination

...we go weekly to the communities, in the different circles, in the mosque associations and we talk about our project, and we talk about the rights they have, what is discrimination? What does the AGG says in Germany? What does the Basic Law say and thereby to empower the Muslim communities and make them conscious about their rights. We also try to let people know that they have to report these experiences of discrimination, is important because we take all of this information to the media, to politicians. In Berlin there are approximately 80 mosque organizations, and we have access to the half of them, they know us, they trust us, we do raise awareness work.

Kofi Ohene-Dokyi, the chair of the project *Hear Me Out! For Democracy and Diversity*,<sup>15</sup> opined that one of the most important tools to counter hostility against Muslims is by means of empowering through legal knowledge,

The law is a good tool to convey the idea about what it is our democracy, and also to learn about discrimination, and what is this law? In my view, is the most important way to challenge discrimination. What I found very effective is to empower people who are discriminated, to give them a space where they can speak about their experiences, personal experiences, very easily we talk about a group, but when you hear from an individual is easier to identify. To create space where people can talk about their experience of discrimination, a protected space, first of all help them. And highlight that they are laws, and they should be respected, what also helps is to give information, differentiate and deconstruct these images it will change some people. Providing knowledge figures different experiences and ideas.

In the German landscape nowadays, there are different spaces helping to understand discrimination and to a certain degree helping to heal some of its effects. In addition to the workshops of the MJD, Inssan, *Hear me Out!* or independently run, other organizations and projects such as *Not in my name! Together against discrimination, anti-Muslim Racism and the misuse of religion* also facilitate empowerment workshops. *Not in my Name* provides educational workshops about racism and discrimination, discourses about Islam, and differences within Islam. To achieve these aims they also employ different techniques like theater as a medium to talk about discrimination in schools through the narration of experiences. Hanna Attar, the head of the project explained to me that young Muslims write the script and play roles in the theater, which are about their everyday experiences but also about discrimination. Through the theater play they go to festivals where they have a space to talk about their experiences while performing. The theater then functions as a creative space in which young Muslims can express their ideas and show a different way of seeing Islam and Muslims.

Saboura Naqhsband is an activist working on the fields of anti-Muslim racism, intersectional Islamic feminism, and queer Muslims. She works with different organizations

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<sup>15</sup> The complete name of the project is: Hear me Out! For Democracy and diversity – against hostility against Islam and group focused enmity in the professional context (*Hör mir zu! – Für Demokratie und Vielfalt – gegen Islamfeindlichkeit und Gruppenbezogene Menschenfeindlichkeit in der beruflichen Bildung*).

such as *LesMigraS* and the *JugendtheaterBüro Berlin* providing counseling and facilitating empowerment workshops for young Muslim women, “where we talk about Islam and feminism, they talk about their experiences as inner-city young Muslim woman, both about sexism and racism through the theater”. Saboura Naqhsband considers that breaking with Islamophobic and racist narratives is an extremely difficult task; these narratives moreover take a hard “psychological toll” on young Muslims producing self-hatred, withdrawal, among other effects. However, according to her one crucial step to challenge Islamophobic discourses is by creating your own narratives, “finding creative spaces where you can express yourself, find forms of expression, find that you are not alone, and leave some traces of your life, those are the creative parts of resistance, is **creative resistance**”.

#### **4.3. The creative resistance, narrating a different story**

Creativity and artistic expressions have become mediums whereby young Muslims, on the one hand, make sense of their biographies, experiences, and selves, and on the other hand, create different stories and narratives about their lives, their communities and views upon society. This counter narrative thus critically engages with the most dominant Islamophobic narratives such as gender inequality, lack of integration, innate violence, and the distinction between German and Muslims by **offering a different perspective** on Muslim life in Germany, while also appropriating, subverting, and playing with Islamophobic stereotypes as a way to reveal their flaws, inaccuracy and their racial imprints.

##### **4.3.1. Beyond Stereotyping**

I.Slam is an organization founded by young Muslims in 2011, in the context of the so-called Sarrazin debate, when racism against Muslims became normalized in public debates by being openly discussed and avowed (Butterwegge 2014). Zuher Jazmati, member of I.Slam described that the focal mission of the organization concerns the empowerment of Muslim youth through the medium of art. During its first years, I.Slam worked with poetry-slam and writing, but for some years now they expanded and also foster artistic expression through videos, visual arts, and music. Moreover, according to Zuher Jazmati, I.Slam purposely appeared as a platform to create counter narratives regarding the experiences of young Muslims in Germany,

Basically, what we want to transfer is the idea, to offer, for me as a political scientist I would say, to offer counter narratives of a very dominant discourse that is leading in Germany, which is very negative, and maybe offer alternative perspectives on Muslim realities in Germany. It is a fact that so many people after

2011 suddenly wanted to do, and wanted to express their art through poetry, and who said, 'I was writing so long, but I thought no one is interested in me, and suddenly I realized that people are very interested and people listened to my story and so on. But my experience is to be discriminated about my whatever', about all these different experiences that you had in Germany from Muslim perspectives, and these different realities is what we want to offer to the society.

One of the targets of Thilo Sarrazin were precisely young Muslims, who Sarrazin depicted as underachievers, criminals and their mere presence making "Germany in average dumber" (Faiola 2010). Discussions ensuing his racial and eugenic views did not include the voices of those being targeted by the discourse. In Germany, Muslim youth are often talked about but not part of the conversations. I.Slam precisely emerged as a platform where young Muslim voices could be heard. Furthermore, "being a young, self-confident Muslim artist in public always has something to do with combating racist stereotypes. The development of healthy self-confidence in the context of structural racism and everyday racism is not a matter of course and therefore requires special support" (I.Slam n.d.). Mona El Omari, hip-hop artist and poetess, argued along similar lines, stressing as well the gendered dimension of being a Muslim artist in Germany,

Just me, being a Muslim woman of Color in Germany basically taking a voice on stage, I think is political in and out itself ... the fact that I do write and perform, and shift focus about whom I address is part of my fight against anti-Muslim racism, obviously I am not the first person to voice this feeling, but there is something deeply political out there in a system that does not want you to speak, does not want you to be heard, that wants to speak about and for you.

Apart from being a medium of expression supporting and fostering young Muslims, arts can also have effects on a wider audience, as Zuher Jazmati explained,

...art can tell a story, but also leaves a rest behind where people have to think about it ... you look at something, you try to understand, then you leave with questions, what we also want is to leave people asking themselves question about what society do we want to live in. Here, art is really a good method for people to empower themselves, marginalized groups in Germany, but also for the majority part of the society to think about what message is that we want to offer.

Soufeina Hamed (2017), a social psychologist penname Tuffix, is another prominent Muslim artist in Germany. Her tools of expression are comics, which nowadays illustrate the work of different national and international institutions, exhibitions, and campaigns against discrimination.<sup>16</sup> She began drawing very young, and when confronted with racism in the

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<sup>16</sup> Soufeina Hamed's drawings have illustrated the report of the European Network Against Racism, Forgotten Women, the federal exhibition of the *Bundeszentrale für politisches Bildung, Was Glaubst du den?!*, exhibitions on the Jewish Museum Berlin, among many others.

school and growing frustrated about the discrimination she experienced, she turned to art and drawing as mediums to deal with and empower herself,<sup>17</sup>

I felt that this art is really working, comic art is really working, then I started to upload more pictures that show my personal life, I slowly move to showing my religion, where I started to explain what prayer is, or what Ramadan, the fasting month. In the beginning it was, yeah, explaining my religion, but I felt this is really not what I wanted, I don't want to be explaining, I don't want to teach people about my religion, I wanted something more, emotionally connecting people, so I started telling more about my everyday life, about my struggles as a hijabi and as a Muslim, about my struggles in school, wherever I am. I also started to show the similarities of us, that we are like everyone, showing these things, so people can relate to those who they think they are different like 'ok, oh my god, this Muslim is doing exactly the same thing that I am doing'. I think psychologically it makes them relate to that person more. I started showing my religion, discrimination, and showing that we are the same, I always said.

Her comics touch upon different topics such as identity, discrimination and Islamophobia and currently she facilitates workshops on comics and art to both empower and counter islamophobia.<sup>18</sup> In the same vein as Muslim youth, for more than a decade now Muslim women have been the protagonists of uncountable debates in which their voices are not heard let alone even considered. A myriad of articles, TV-shows, and policies have constructed an archetypical Muslim woman as a passive and oppressed victim. Soufeina Hamed's comics turn upside down this narrative, by positioning herself at the center and as the narrator of her stories she tacitly counter not only the Islamophobic representation of the voiceless Muslim woman, but also by portraying simple and quotidian experiences she humanizes the dehumanized and incorporeal "Muslim ghost" (Tyrer & Sayyid 2012), while revealing everyday racism without being confrontational. She sees her work functioning "maybe like a window for them, a glimpse into my life, and what it means to be a Muslim here, and that it means I have a super normal life".

The rapidly widespread and anchoring of Islamophobia has relied, among other factors, in the production and recruitment of socially constructed emotions. Fear, suspicion, hatred and anger have been powerful emotional and affective devices to dehumanize Muslims while demonizing Islam, and according to Soufeina Hamed storytelling peppered with humor

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<sup>17</sup> In our talk she recounted instances during her school formation when some of her teachers try to free her from the oppression of her hijab, "I was drawing all the time, and I started to uploading my work online, and there was a moment where I decided I want to share something personal, it came out of frustration, where a school like a random moment at school I felt, of this particular teacher she tried to free me from my hijab, and make me more self-confident or whatever, and I felt like this is not the way, and she was getting into my privacy and I didn't feel comfortable, so I drew this moment, and I realize that this sparked a lot discussion and debate on the platform that I uploaded on" (interview with Soufeina Hamed).

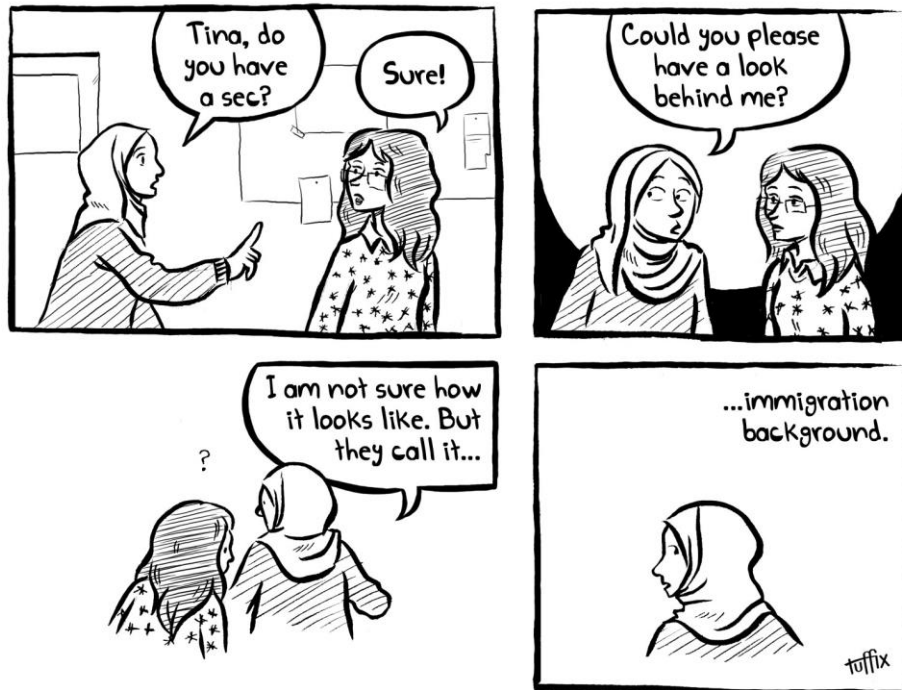
<sup>18</sup> "From my community, again, people feel empower, they feel represented, and I do some comic workshops where I try to motivate people to draw they racist experiences. We use it as a means to reflect our experiences and I feel people are really using it, and I feel it works" (interview with Soufeina Hamed).

and empathy can precisely have a counter effect to this emotionally charged realm, “That is the beauty of art, is that your storytelling is an argument, basically, this is what is lacking everywhere storytelling in terms of telling your story through draws, through movies, through music, through poetry, through whatever, because storytelling is the only way to emotionally connect with people easily”.

Soufeina Hamed, furthermore, explained that besides empathy, humor is one of her favorite and most powerful channel to convey her stories. Humor can precisely help to build bridges of understanding and empathy, without provoking violent or negative reactions,

...I think humor is something that makes people connect easier and faster, I try to draw short stories, things that happened to me, to my family or friends, and put them in a comic art. So the motivation was making people connect to it ... I think humor is a way to connect people, humor breaks down the super serious topics, people usually get very serious when it comes to talking about these topics, and as soon as you make them laugh, and you laugh together about something you have common ground, you have a common ground where you can start talking, we have at least one perspective that is similar, so let's move on from there. I think people are more willing to understand, and are more willing to accept criticism, for example, when they are smiling, basically. Some of my art, exactly the *immigration background*, I had an exhibition in my working place, in the foundation, and the people smile usually when they see that, and I know that they understand and they feel like ‘ah, I do that too, I use the word too’, but because they are smiling they don't feel they are being blamed, so they are more willing to reflect on that. I think that is the main point for me, makes things easier, easier to digest.

Below is the piece she recalled in the excerpt, entitled *Background* (Hamed 2015), in which she wittily deconstructs the category “immigration background”. An official category distinguishing between “real German” those who nationality comes from “blood”, and those who acquired their “Germanness” after the changes in the naturalization and citizenship law at the beginning of this century. Although the appearance of the category is relatively new, 2005, nowadays it has become part of the institutional and everyday vocabulary to denote and explicitly differentiate between two kinds of “Germans”. Moreover, schools, neighborhoods and persons onto which this category has been imposed more often than not are deemed as “problematic”.



#### Immigration Background

Soufeina Hamed. Reproduced with permission of the artist

During our conversation Soufeina Hamed also recalled another piece that she likes very much. The comic below, *The Other Day in the Pharmacy II* (Hamed 2014), narrates an encounter her sister experienced working as a pharmacist, in which Soufeina tried to show that racism “lies in the small words, in the small things”, in minor gestures and expressions that construct Muslims as not being part of the country, as not being (completely) German. The comic illustrates one of these experiences where a gesture that although could be seen as a welcoming sign can simultaneously denote that there is “something wrong, because it means something, it means I am not part of the country. I like making people think, and let people understand what I mean with it, but they don't feel blamed, as you said, they can relate to my sister at that moment”.



The Other Day in the Pharmacy II

Soufeina Hamed. Reproduced with permission of the artist

Furthermore, Soufeina told me that in her work she tries to avoid fighting or countering stereotypes about Islam and Muslim, which seems a monumental task given their omnipresence, instead she creates and depicts her narratives and thus offers different views underscoring the regularity of Muslim life, while trying to spark empathy through fleshing out the similarities of certain experiences.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Constantin Wagner also recounted a experience about the power of empathy while doing field work for his research on racism in institutional settings (Wagner 2017), “I remember for me a very interesting situation with a social worker. Before the clients arrive the social workers get a dossier, and in the sheets there is a picture, and why they applied for social assistance. Is just before the counseling session begins, and the social worker opens the sheet and says, ‘Oh my god’, and closes it again, and is a woman with headscarf, and then she says, ‘I don’t have to read I already know what it will be about, her husband does not want to pay, is always the same with them’ and so on and so on, just like all the racial stereotypes you can imagine. And then, the woman comes in session, and after one hour she goes, and then the social worker said ‘that is a sympathetic young woman’, what did happened in this hour between was that the social worker discover herself in this young woman, because the social worker was also a single mom with daughter, she was also a single mom, and before having the education as social worker, was also working in bad conditions poorly paid, and then she realized more and more how similar the situation was to hers. It made clear to me that they are shared experiences of social justice, this is not to say that each and every experience is the same. Is not the same if you are discriminated on the basis of gender or religion,

#### 4.3.2. Reversing the Stereotype

Feriel Bendjama (2017), another artist interviewed, was born and raised near to Dresden, where the far-right anti-Islam organization Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamization of the Occident (PEGIDA) first appeared. She told me that the appearance of PEGIDA made her feel very threatened, but simultaneously she also realized that besides hatred, angst was the mobilizing factor in PEGIDA's rise, and "I can imagine that there is a mean to challenge this fear, because is a diffuse angst, it is not based on lived experiences".

In Dresden, the stollen, sugarcoated bread filled with dried fruits, holds an important symbolic value as it allegorically relates to German identity and Christian traditions. This city yearly celebrates the stollen festival in which a colossal bread of almost 4 tones parades through the streets on the second Sunday of Advent. In her piece, *Original lemon stollen from Dresden* (Bendjama 2015), Feriel Bendjama visually and symbolically disturbs the racially constructed binary where a German cannot be a Muslim and vice versa, while fleshing out her own view as a *Dresdner* artist. By fusing bordered symbols Feriel Bendjama offers her own view upon herself, what it means to be German, while appropriating and subverting symbols to defy opposed binaries.

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is really something different, but maybe there are experiences that make you sensible for the question, because she as a single mother also experienced discrimination, and that may be a starting point for understanding, for a sort of empathy for other subject positions".

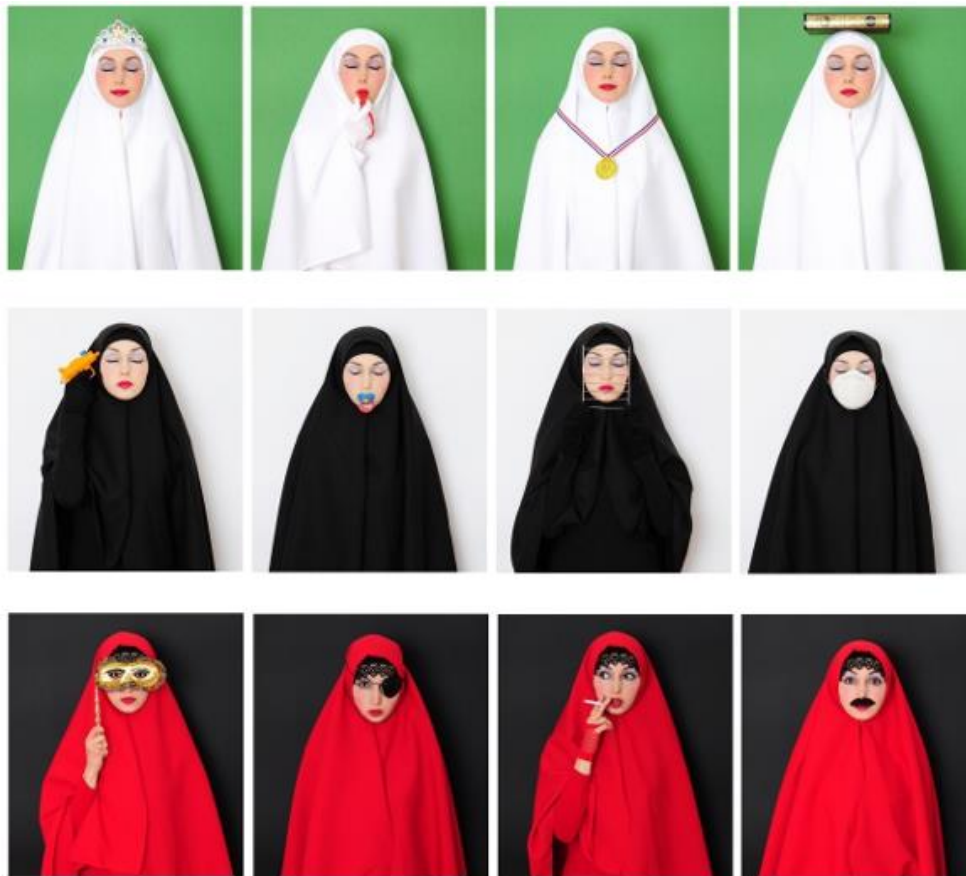


Original lemon stollen from Dresden

Feriel Bendjama. Reproduced with permission of the artist

Similarly, as Soufeina, Feriel Bendjama uses humor to incite reflection and try to change perceptions in regard to certain topics, perceptions that, according to her, often had nothing to do with actual experiences, such as the views, ideas and representations of women wearing headscarves.

Feriel Bendjama recalled that when the first headscarf debate began more than a decade ago, she was perplexed of the one-sided representation on the issue. Then, she developed a photographic work, *We, They and I* (Bendjama 2011), not only problematizing this partial view, but also deconstructing and challenging the binaries dominating the debate about Muslims and Islam in Germany, namely, the construal “we” and “they”,



We, They and I  
Ferial Bendjama. Reproduced with permission of the artist

*We, They and I* was the outcome of these reflections, an assemblage of 12 portraits arranged in three different rows. This piece presents “different ways Muslims can be seen” (Dornhof 2014, p.179), and invites the viewer to reflect upon different perspectives on the hijab and Muslim women. This piece won the third place in the first Zenith photographic contest *Islam in Germany* (Zenith 2011). Ferial Bendjama explained to me that she chose the title very carefully in order to problematize and unravel the meanings around those considering themselves of as “We” and deeming others as “They”, and how often the “I” gets lost in between them. She also told me that during the exhibition of this piece she noticed that “the visitors felt a bit irritated but also free, I utilize humoristic elements, and humor to open emotional layers. Humor can be an entry to open and exchange about sensible topics, or where the opinion is very fixed”.

Contrary to Soufeina, who prefers not to engage stereotypes, Ferial willingly uses the stereotypes, in a process that can be seen as trans-coding, “taking an existing meaning and re-appropriating it for new meanings” (Hall 1997, p.270). Reflecting upon *We, They, and I* in particular and her work in general, Ferial told me that through her art, she wants to “present

a different way to see. It is my aim and wish to show the manifold perceptions by using the stereotypes, because these stereotypes are in circulation, I am trying, in effect, to deconstruct them, so that at the end there are more and different views”.

Sara Dornhof (2012, p.180) argues that the last row of *We, They and I* can be seen as intending to show that “the woman behind the headscarf is a woman like any other rather than a reflection of idealized or stereotyped ideas, playing different roles often with ambivalence”. Dornhof (2012, p.180) furthermore highlights that Bendjama’s open eyes in the last row reveal a subject returning the gaze to the viewer. Bendjama told me that in the third row, when she has the eyes open, serves to underscore the first two rows as ascription coming from the outside of the I, the moment of being and object and subject of representations, while the last row brings back a defiant “I” looking back and moving outside of the roles and position ascribed from the outside.<sup>20</sup>

Bendjama’s (2016) latest exhibition diverged from the rest of her work, since it is devoid of humoristic elements. To the contrary, it can be seen as gloomy and apocalyptic. The exposition is called *Blue Years (Blaue Jahre)* and it was presented in 2016. The aim of the exhibition, according to Bendjama, was to initiate a critical engagement with right-wing populism, in particular, with the political party AFD. During our conversation, Bendjama recalled the moment that triggered and motivated this exhibition,

...the rise of the AFD frightened me, and I was astonished how in such a short time could win such popularity in the population. In September [2016], there were [local] elections, and there were billboards that said ‘Berlin need Blue’, ‘Berlin will be blue’ [Blue is the color of the AFD], that totally frightened me. I was long time in front of that placard, and I imagined it, I wondered how would it be when Berlin, and Germany turns blue. What would happen when the AFD seize power, and when they would implement the political platform they are propagating now.

Bendjama, then, embarked on an uncommon journey, a time-travel 10 year forward to Berlin in 2026 in order to see and experience firsthand how Berlin, and Germany would look like after its blue unbecoming. Eventually, she returned to the present, and brought with her traces of that future, pieces of clothes, photographs, installations, and video. By combining pieces on black and white extrapolated with deep blue, by coloring desolated, and familiar landscapes, and matching them with simple exclusionary rules Bendjama’s doomed vision of the future appears as a historical and temporal critique of racisms, and their German

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<sup>20</sup> “The challenge of seeing Muslims in Germany and Europe differently cannot, it seems, be resolved simply through subjective documentary work, but needs moments when looks are exchanged, when commentary is reciprocal, and when ambivalence and multiple meanings emerge” (Dornhof 2014, p.181).

historiography. When preparing the exhibition, Bendjama often pondered “when is too late? Would we notice it? When a humanistic society is broken, when people on the basis of their religion or cultural background are being discriminated”



Views of the city Berlin 2026<sup>21</sup>

Feriel Bendjama. Reproduced with permission of the artist

Arts can fulfill different and complementary purposes in countering Islamophobic narratives, creating different narratives and thus supplementing the discursive archive on Islam and Muslims. Arts can also articulate a thorough critique towards racism, while attempting to leave a trace of (self-)reflection. Arts and creative expressions can be seen as minor gestures (Manning 2016) transforming the field of relations and political action, gestures, “small breaks, one scratch in the paint at the time, and when you keep going, and keep scratching every small scratch creates rust, and then rust spread itself” (Interview with Iman Attia).

#### **4.4. Conviviality**

For some time now, the construal of the parallel society has become part of the political and cultural vocabulary in Germany, imagining while “describing” enclosed “ethno”-religious urban spaces self-isolated from the majority society and filled with delinquency and violence. The concept of parallel societies thus has become part of the racially inspired common sense

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<sup>21</sup> The inscription reads: “Only for Germans”

for talking about dangerous and unruly neighborhoods with high percentage of “foreigners and immigrants”. In short, parallel society means trouble. And this has been one dominant narrative so far, against which some initiatives and programs have appear to counter it, in particular through practices and ideas that can be approached as conviviality.

Following Paul Gilroy (2004, p.xv), conviviality refers to “the processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made the multicultural an ordinary feature of social life in Britain’s urban areas and in postcolonial cities elsewhere”. In Gilroy’s conceptualization, conviviality does not mean or entail the vanishing of racist practices and ideas “and it does not assume that cohabitation is free from intersectional power relations” (Thompson 2016, p.255). Rather, conviviality stresses “that alongside these workings, or within these workings, modes of activities and social practices emerge that have the potential to generate emancipatory interruptions in the realms of everyday living together and ordinariness” (Thompson 2016, p.256).

#### **4.4.1. Conviviality, everyday live and urban spaces**

Conviviality as a counter narrative to Islamophobia has been used as a direct challenge to some of the most dominant Islamophobic narratives such as the idea of the parallel society or the allegation of an inherently anti-Semitic character in Muslims. The initiative Salaam-Shalom was founded in 2013 by a group of Jews and Muslims in the district of Neukölln, one of those neighborhoods constructed as a parallel society in Berlin, as a counter reaction to the accusation of “Muslim anti-Semitism”, one of his founders, Armin Langer, described to me the motivations behind the initiative,

In the summer of 2013, there was a very vivid public discussion in the German public media whether Jews should avoid Neukölln. This particular neighborhood in Berlin, Neukölln, is often described in right-wing media outlets as a Muslim neighborhood, as a place where the integration has failed, etc. ... Amid these discussions the anti-Semitism’s officer of the Jewish community in Berlin say that Jews should avoid Neukölln because of the Muslims that live in here, and I am Jewish and many of friends who live here are also Jewish, some of them are even religious Jews, or observant Jews, which means you can recognized them on the street, many of them are Israelis, which means they speak Hebrew on the street, and even if we have experiences with anti-Semitism we don’t make more experiences here regarding anti-Semitism that in other neighborhoods of the town, and also if you checked out the statistics of the police , there are less anti-Semitic hate crimes committed here than in other neighborhoods like Mitte or Charlottenburg.

It is precisely against this background that the initiative emerged to counter these discourses, which are not restricted to Neukölln, and gained more prominence in the context of the so-called refugee crisis and the discussion in the media about “imported anti-Semitism” from the

refugees.<sup>22</sup> Langer considered that the success of the initiative and the echo has stirred resides in the simplicity of its message,<sup>23</sup>

The idea of the group is pretty simple, we just present cases where Jews and Muslims do get along, because in this part of the Islamophobia narrative is that Muslims would all be anti-Semites, inherently anti-Semitic and homophobic, and we just present case where Muslims and Jews do get along, and we do that in the form of public events, podium discussions, or workshops, or flash mobs, we also do a lot of online campaigns on Facebook specially, but not only in Facebook.

Immediately after the discussion Langer mentioned in 2013, the first intervention the initiative carried out was to shoot video-interviews with Jews living in Neukölln, and asked them one basic question

...what don't you like about Neukölln? And you know this is a kind of provocative question, because one might expect a Jew to say, I can't get along with my Muslim neighbors, or I am pissed off seeing all these Arabs on the streets or whatever. Instead all the answers were this - everyday, normal reactions, like: 'streets are too dirty', or 'the rent is too high', or stuff like that, and then we published the videos, and hundreds and thousands of people saw them within a few weeks, and then the media got aware of us, and that is how the group started, basically with a series of interviews.

Nina Mühe, cultural anthropologist, working on the topics of Muslims in Europe and Muslims in Germany, Islamophobia and anti-Muslims racism, also sees this type of approach as a formidable mean to challenge stereotypes, showing the regular lives of different groups living together. Speaking about the report she wrote for the Open Society (Mühe 2010), she told me the following,

...is powerful to show another kind of reality, a different kind of view. The Open Society chose this district [Kreuzberg, Berlin]. It was a really good choice, is not a perfect place at all, but it shows a different possibility, another reality, here it shows that something is possible, I don't know where it comes from, we interviewed Muslims and non-Muslim who live here, they said they value the multicultural character of the place, white Germans that cherish diversity and see it as something enriching, people from all kind of different backgrounds who value the fact that they are seen as something valuable, sounds pathetic, but they would feel they are disturbing in other places, and here they feel free. It doesn't mean that there is no racism, of course it exists, how many people vote for AFD is very low, still alarmingly

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<sup>22</sup> "In the summer of 2015, 800, 000 thousand refugees came to Germany, almost all of them from Muslims countries, and again, we had this whole discussion on anti-Semitism and imported anti-Semitism, etc. And then we invited journalist to our homes, the homes of Jews and refugees which were living together, I was one of the Jewish members who were living together back then with Muslim refugees, but we had another Jewish members who were like this, and then we just told our stories, how our everyday lives looks like as a Jew and Arab Muslim refugee living together, and for example I always told the media that my only problem with my flat mate, is that he keeps snoring, he snores pretty loud, and another member, she was a female member, that was an extra point, because we not only speak about anti-Semitism regarding Muslims, but also about sexism and homophobia, and she for example told all the media representatives that her biggest issue with two refugees, who she just welcomed in her flat was that they did not do the dishes, and that's it, why they would had any conflicts just because one is Jew and the two others are Muslims or Arab, or Syrian, it does not make any sense. That's how we tried to counter these narratives" (Interview with Armin Langer).

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Bax commenting on the initiative Salaam-Shalom and the positive reactions of the media towards it, told me, "to show normality, there was, and still is, this image in many heads that Jews and Muslims cant live together, so an initiative that says no, we can be friends was news because it was against the stereotype, the stereotype was still there but of course it was a really important initiative because it was opposed to the popular narrative"

high but compared with district with 30%. It sounds very easy, it doesn't not mean that there is no Islamophobia or that every school is the same. In general, you are another not the Other.

The significance of conviviality as a counter narrative showing the quotidian and even boring relations and interactions between different groups must be understood against the background of the dominant representations of Islam and Muslims in the media, which have dominated the headlines during the last decade. Daniel Bax considered that the media has played a significant role producing and circulating these representations, which in turn, relates to the economic impulse of selling more newspapers and magazines

...we don't focus on the good side or the many sides which may, I mean, democratic Muslims are only then portrait as the exception of the rule, otherwise it would not be seen as news, if it would be normal, then it wouldn't be news, because our self-image is that we focus not the norm, not what is normal, but on what is not normal, on violence, on special events, away from everyday life, and sometimes you paint a very strange pictures because we just write about wars and terror attacks, but life does not exist only on war and terror attacks, it exist of many different things but which are too boring, or too normal to be part of what the media talks about, and then you see that this issue is so controversial and controversy is good because creates attention and people buy newspapers, so if you have a newspaper title with an Islam story on the front, it may probably sell better than if you have another story on the cover, so is also not only media logic but secondly also economic reasons

Daniel Bax suggested that at least there are two crucial ways of countering Islamophobia. First, one can have a critical engagement with the dominant narrative, revealing its flaws and its contradictions. Second, "you can try to paint a different picture by showing different aspects of reality, a different reality to the one which is drawn by those who create a very dark picture of Germany abolishing itself [Sarrazin]". The initiative Salaam-Shalom can be seen as an intervention simultaneously engaging in both fronts, for they reveal the flaws of Islamophobic narratives by painting a different picture of their everyday experiences and realities.

#### **4.4.2. Conviviality and Identification**

According to Gilroy (2005, p.xv), conviviality as a concept and reality offers another advantage, which relates to a certain degree "of distance from the pivotal term 'identity'... The radical openness that brings conviviality alive makes a nonsense of closed, fixed, and reified identity and turns attention towards the always unpredictable mechanisms of identification". Or in other words, as the Ouassima Labich explained "because you know a person is more that only that [a Muslim], people might forget it, you just forget that you have a ton of other sides that you are and that you are interested in too".

The campaign *What do you believe then? (Was Glaubst du denn?!)* from the Federal Agency for Civic Education is an exhibition accompanied by peer educators touring German

schools throughout the country (Besand et al. 2015).<sup>24</sup> I spoke with Petra Grüne and Jutta Spoden about the exhibition, who told me that when the project was commissioned to the Agency the purpose was to lay the ground for the discussion of Islam and Muslims in Germany, while revising the negative portrayal on these topics dominating the debate. According to Grüne and Spoden, this presented a significant challenge, since it raised the question “How to do this without reconstructing stereotypes?” Instead of engaging with Islamophobic stereotypes or pursuing to transfer knowledge about Islam and Muslims in Germany, they opted for “make an exhibition which main goal is to inspire discussions and reflections about identities and belonging. The question leading the exhibition then is *who are we?*” In this sense, *what do you believe then?* is not an exposition about Islam and Muslims “rather about our society and different perspectives upon it. Religion or belief is only one aspect of an identity; there are several other aspects. Thus, we not exclusively talk about religion but also about love, work, and friends ... Looking at the society as a whole”.

The focus of the exhibition then centers on reflecting upon German society through the portrayals of young people answering to the question, *who am I?* And *What is important for me?* Through which the exhibition shows the wide range of experiences, dreams and ideas, religion being only one of these topics, and thereby showing “what is important to them [young people in Germany], where do they live, how old they are, hobbies. With this exhibition we want to show the multilayered aspects of identity, not only belief”. Grüne and Spoden assessed that the exhibition has been well received in schools, among students and teachers, and that often it triggers an aha moment, a moment of sudden insight about the ideas that students and teachers have about Muslims, “and then they see a young girl playing football, who wants to become a policewoman, or a young boy talking about his mom as the head of the family, I think, some images that people had on their heads about Muslims are irritated by the exhibition”. Without engaging with stereotypes, the exhibition is able to counter some of them by means of underscoring and portraying the everyday lived experiences of young Muslims, and their different mechanism of identification thus it largely expands the views on the Muslim subject, he or she is also a friend, a daughter or son, a student, a brother, and all

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<sup>24</sup> “The exhibition is accompanied by a peer-education program. Young people trained to work with pupils, and it has been very successful and very helpful. The exhibition also provides material for teachers, comprehensive information and also how to use it, how to deal with religious difference in the schools. For instance, if you have a Muslim student in your classes don’t make her or him an expert, in this sense is also sensitivity training” (Interview with Petra Grüne and Jutta Spoden).

of them with different dreams, desires and aspirations, and thereby, the exhibition contributes to humanizing the experiences of Muslims.

#### 4.5. Changing the frame of conflicts

Islamophobia as a form of racism deeply informed by the long tradition of orientalist forms of representation not only has discriminatory and violent effects on many arenas, but it can also be seen as a way of thinking of and comprehending social reality, functioning as an epistemological pair of lens offering racial knowledge to understand humans, social relations, and conflict. One prominent item of the palette of Islamophobic knowledge pertains to the (mis-)use of Islam as a decisive factor to understand social and political conflict. In other words, Islam has been strategically used as the cause and effect of everything that Muslims do and think.<sup>25</sup> Constantin Wagner from the Institute of Media Responsibility understands this mechanism as a key component of conspiracy theories, anti-Semitism, and Islamophobia,

This is a common core issue of conspiracy theories, what I mean is this discursive mechanism where Muslims and Jews are constructed as a group, and then everything that Muslims and Jews do is perceived and explained as done because they are Muslims or Jews, and this is at the hearth of each enmity or racism, but this also tells something about counterstrategies, because I think, there is this reaction of many Muslim actors when they are attacked as Muslims or when Islam is attacked, of reacting in ways like: ‘this is not the truth, the real truth about Islam is.., Islam is something beautiful’, I think this is what Spivak calls strategic essentialism, is of course a reaction but maybe is not a very good strategy, because what is at the hearth of this resentment is not deconstructed, this homogenous group, this identity. If you read this: ‘not this is not the true about us’, there is still this ‘we’ construction, is left intact.

In this sense, one strategy to counter Islamophobia entails **changing the frame through which we understand, explain and deal with conflicts**. Daniel Bax speaking about Islamophobia in general and how the media in Germany reports about Muslims and Islam considered de-religionize and de-Islamize the debate as a way to counter Islamophobic forms of representation,

...one has to de-religionize the whole discourse, and talk about religion only when it is really about religion and not to talk about religion when it is about other things, not to talk about religion when it is about terror, but also not to talk about religion when it is about how students are doing in schools, because if young people in school are behaving they way they are, it does not have to do necessarily with religion, because if a teenager somehow provokes his teacher, if it is a German pupil you would not think that has to do with their religion, it does have to do necessarily with religion when is about Muslims.

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<sup>25</sup> Edward W. Said (1978, p.93) speaking about a similar phenomenon in regard to how the Qur’an is understood, what he denominated as textual Orientalism, argued about this phenomenon as “the fallacy to assume that the swarming, unpredictable and problematic mess in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what the books—texts—say”

This way of framing and understanding reality, identified already by Edward W. Said (1978; 1997) as one orientalist mechanism of thought during European Imperialism and influencing how the media covers Islam and Muslims hitherto, has been a common trend escalating ever since 9/11. Furthermore, it can be seen as a medium to depoliticize social conflict where other issues such as racism or economic conflicts are the source by explaining reality through an appeal to Islam. Daniel Bax continues,

...the discourse is very much framed and situated, everything that someone with a Muslim background does somehow has to do with their religion, you have to get away from this, you have to not Islamize every topic, but to de-Islamicize the whole discourse, when I read two lectures from my book I have quite a few discussions about this with people who help refugees, and I always said please don't look at refugees through the lens of that they are Muslims, because this is only one part of their identity, and if you play football with them it doesn't really play any role, and it is better to play football or to cook or to do something together, which has nothing to do with religion, you don't have to put everything in the kind of interreligious dialogue ... I think this is really important to kind of less Islam in the whole public discourse, is just too much.

Kofi Ohene-Dokyi, head of the project *Hear me Out!* sees a similar trend in schools and among teachers, and appeals for understanding conflicts as part and parcel of a democratic society and an immigration country like Germany,

...because conflicts exist, but how these conflicts are interpreted this is the problem. This makes a big difference, do I see my intercultural conflict that I have with a student, do I see him, my student with Muslim background as the beginning of Islamization of the European world, or how do I see the conflict maybe I have with this boy and his family, differently? How do I interpret it? That makes a big difference, and there is where the hostility starts ... To bring this to a level that people understand we have to see the conflict that we have in a democratic, pluralistic, diverse and changing society, which is a good thing, a very young story of Germany as an immigration country.

Kofi Ohene-Dokyi's position concurs with Bax in recognizing the widespread discourse where "the root of the problems is religion". However, bringing up the constitution and the laws to discussions in the workshops with students and teachers can help precisely to counter Islamophobia while strengthening democratic values and attitudes,

...we have in our constitution the fundamental right to have your religion, although, people tend to forget the constitution, they are very willing to question that fundamental right just because people are taking this right. That is so important, first of all, accept the conflict as a conflict but not as a problem, as conflict of interest maybe, or as a conflict of not knowing, but a conflict based on the values we have this is what I found sometimes difficult, we say we want democracy, but here we have a tendency as soon as we have conflict, we try to change the whole game, when there is conflict with people with Muslim background, the question then is Islam and Muslims part of Germany? That means for me we play the democratic game, and maybe the other starts to win a little bit, and then you don't play anymore we should be very proud that we have a democracy that allows these kind of conflicts, and we have to go through these conflicts but in a fair way without creating enmity and fear, and this is basically what we are doing.

Another interviewee, Kola Maryam Hübsch, a Muslim journalist from Frankfurt, experienced this first hand; she in fact wrote an article deconstructing this narrative entitled "Alternatives

to the “Muslimification” of social problems” (Hübsch 2016). During our conversation she recalled that as pupil teachers usually told her,

...you are a Muslim girl, we know about your problems, maybe you cannot learn so much at home, the teachers have a lot of prejudices, and I was only shy, despite I had good notes, people is different in regard to temperament, I become calls of girls who suffered strong discrimination from teachers, anti-religious influence from teachers, neutrality is not neutral, issues are always framed differently when it comes to Muslims, it happens quite often and is strategy to depoliticize the conflict.

Changing the frames through which we understand and make sense of social conflict and relations between different groups is a manifold task involving education in schools, different ways of reporting about issues and events, among other things, but moreover it can have the side effect of producing a more accurate diagnosis about conflicts by understanding them as complex, and multifaceted phenomena that, as Kofi Ohene-Dokyi put it, are part of a democratic society.

#### **4.6. Alliances and Solidarity**

In 2012 the Regional court of Cologne ruled to criminalize circumcision. The law was affecting in particular Muslim and Jewish communities. This decision caused one of the most heated socio-political debates in the last years. After some months, the Bundestag approved by majority a bill guaranteeing and allowing the circumcision of boys under the requisites of being performed under professional medical care and without needless pain, thus, in certain way, closing what was then called the circumcision-debate. Some of my interviewees recalled this and other episodes to highlight the importance of engaging different communities, groups, and individuals in struggles against different forms of oppression and discrimination. Mohamad Hajjaj from Inssan told me the following,

I am of the absolute opinion that all of those who are discriminated should work together and build alliances, with LGTBQ, with Afro-Germans, with organizations against anti-Semitism. We have to create alliances and found networks, because when I fight for the rights of my Jewish fellow to wear a kippah, when I as Muslim step in and go to the streets, then he can stand for the rights of Muslim women, that is a social task, and is about social solidarity, if in 2012 the Jewish community would not have intervened about the issue of circumcision it would have been prohibited, is important for us as Muslims to build this alliances with other communities affected by discriminations and thereby show solidarity with them, and then people can also see that we are not egoistic, of course we take care and focus on anti-Muslims racism, that's our work, but we are against every form of exclusion, we are for an open society, that is our aim.

In addition to the question around circumcision, other issues can articulate different communities, as Yasemin Shooman mentioned, the AFD promised to lobby in order to ban religious slaughtering, which again will affect Jewish and Muslim communities, both of which have also been the targets of right-wing violence. Moreover, the Neutrality Law (see below)

reigning in Berlin and banning all public expression of religiosity for public servants is a legislation de facto blocking the access to positions of public service (teachers, police officers, public prosecutors) to Jewish men wearing the kippah and Muslim women donning the hijab. The already mentioned Salaam-Shalom initiative could be seen as an embodiment of the principle of alliances and solidarity standing against different forms of discrimination, pondering about the then upcoming elections in September Langer voiced the following,

We tried to achieve a solidarity or an alliance between Jews and Muslims and friends in Germany and we want to focus on our local environment ... I really do wish for a stronger alliance, especially now, shortly before the elections, Jews and Muslims should condemn the right-wing together, and stand up, stick up together, raise their voice together, because both are communities are affected by it.

Racial profiling is another of those issues affecting different communities and individuals. In 2010, the police controlled a German black student traveling on the train from Kassel to Frankfurt while they were looking for undocumented migrants. The student refused to show his papers, for which the police took him to the police station and charged him with criminal insult. The student, afterwards, decided to go to courts and sued the police for discrimination. It was precisely during the legal procedures that one of the officers declared that skin color is one criterion to select who is been controlled. Despite this, the local court in Koblenz ruled against the student claiming that the expertise and experience of the police were important in matters regarding the control of undocumented migrants.

The student then took the case to the Higher Administrative Court of the state of Rhineland-Palatinate, where this time the court decide on his favor and ruled that controls based on skin color as decisive factor were illegal and contrary to the spirit of the Basic Law. The federal state Berlin, however, has found a way to allow racial profiling through the figure of “crime-prone places” (*kriminalitätsbelasteten Orte*), or “dangerous places” (*gefährliche Orte*), where the police is allowed to control and inspect without suspicion. Racial profiling particularly targets Afro-Germans and those perceive as Muslims, Celine Barry from the ADNB told me that based on theirs and the work of other organizations, “we know that they [police] control mostly Black people, Arabs or those perceive as Muslims in Berlin”. Celine Barry and the ADNB are now part of the campaign *Ban Racial Profiling* trying to counter this police institutional racist practice,

...these controls support a racist environment, they promote the idea that these people are the problem, they are criminalizing them, so part of the campaign is also to go these areas and to speak to the people, to the neighbor and involved parties, what we found is that the sense of security is above everything. Above human rights, and the rights of others and is the same thing with Islamophobia, the fear of

terrorism, they don't care about humans anymore, that is when you see how strong this racism is, that they don't make the difference some terrorist, fundamentalist and the rest of Muslim communities.

In this case, the articulation of alliances between different organizations and community centers on fighting an institutional racial practice. Some of my interviewees, however, also acknowledged and voiced the difficulties of building alliances, for some it was an aspiration to strive for. Currently, there is particular alliance between Muslim youth organizations and the Protestant Youth in Germany having concrete results and structurally challenging Islamophobia.

The establishment of the Muslim Youth in Germany (MJD) in 1994 was, by and large, positively received. During its first years the MJD created different programs, among them, the interreligious dialogue project *Trialog–Together in Difference* in cooperation with the Federal Association of Jewish Students and the Catholic Youth Community. The project was developed as a strategy to “counter racism, prejudice and violence” (Schiffauer 2006, p.108), and received funds from a state agency. However, a couple of media outlets promptly accused the MJD of anti-Semitism, of using the state funding to proselytism, while drawing connections between the MJD and the Muslim Brotherhood, connections, which were also made by the German intelligence agency, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV). The Ministry of the Interior afterwards cut the funds of the project, and ever since the MJD has been unable to access any federal or local funding. For Werner Schiffauer (2006), what happened to the MJD perfectly illustrates the operations of moral panics and the logic and power of rumor in a sociopolitical context charged with fear and suspicion towards Muslims. The MJD has levered a lawsuit against the BfV, which is still ongoing.

Against this background, the project *Young Muslims as Partners, For Dialogue and cooperation against Discrimination*, run by the Protestant Youth in Germany has become one of the most successful examples of alliances and solidarity between different organizations. Onna Buchholt the head of the program explained their aims,

...we cooperate with Muslim organizations in order to support them, foster their organizations and help them to get more access to youth welfare structures in Germany. We are having a good network including contacts to politicians, political parties, funding organizations and have a good reputation. We also have paid staff countrywide, and this is something that is still missing among Muslim organization. Almost in all of the cases they don't have any paid staff, everything is being done voluntarily and they don't have real access or don't actively play part in youth councils, which are available on local, regional and also federal levels where at least part of the youth policy is being discussed and influenced by youth organizations,

Currently *Young Muslims as Partners* brings together the Protestant Youth and the MJD, the youth organization of the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs (DITIB youth organization Lower Saxony and Bremen), and the Union of Islamic Cultural Centers (VIKS). Buchholt also explained that the law obliges the German state to carry youth welfare, while the state operates different institutions and programs, organizations of the civil society, such as the Protestant Youth, conduct other tasks and thus received funds from different levels of government. This entail as well that youth organizations recognized as doing youth welfare become part of local, regional and federal youth councils where the youth policy of the state is regularly discussed and determined. Muslim Youth organizations until now have not being able to access neither to funding nor to all levels of the councils, and this is precisely what the project *Young Muslims as Partners* seeks to change. Because the suspicion and distrust towards the MJD has been a constant reality for Muslim organizations in general, acutely after 9/11,

... we observe that there are tensions against Muslims, the picture of Muslims in the media is awful and getting worse and worse since years, and Muslim organizations don't have full access to those policy-making councils. This means, there is a lack of representation, and we believe the better they are representing themselves as religious Muslim organizations, the better the image people have about them will be. We need to challenge the monolithic image of Islam, by showing that there are different organizations and that they are actually doing the same as other youth organizations. I think, the more respected the Muslim organizations will get, the better the whole image of Islam and Muslims in Germany, because there is just not enough participation. One of our organizations' main values is to help all youth to fully participate in Germany and gain their rights; this is one of the strong ideas that drives us forward, for me personally.

The Protestant Youth nowadays represents 1,35 million young in German and as Onna Buchholt told me the organization “has a good standing among politicians and funding organizations”. Given this influential position, the question of alliances emerges as crucial, “is important to create alliances, and that can help a lot, we can be something like a door opener for these organizations ... it is very integral for my job to defend our partner Muslim organizations of prejudices ... to claim that they are doing a good job, and I think we can definitely help to”. In this sense, *Young Muslims as Partners* can be seen as a form of brokerage (Jong de 2015; Jong de 2016) between Muslim youth organizations and government representatives, a process in which the knowledge and reputation of the Protestant Youth serves precisely to open the doors of funding and political representation to the Muslim youth.

In addition to assisting Muslim youth organizations in developing structures and navigate through the bureaucratic procedures to get recognition as youth welfare

organization, the project also works with the Protestant community offering workshops and raising awareness about Islamophobia. According to Buchholt, the partnership as well can send a different signal and view in regard to Muslim youth organizations, by stressing trust as guiding principle in the relation. In this sense, working and standing together can help “to dissolve mistrust, [while] creating new images; different positive views” (interview with Onna Buchholt).

#### **4.7. Using laws to counter Islamophobia**

A study from the *Religionsmonitor* (see below) of the Bertelsmann foundation revealed that Muslims living in Germany have close ties to the German society and the state and trust their institutions (Hafez & Schmidt 2015). I interviewed a legal scholar dealing with Islamophobia who shares the same opinion, “the Muslim population in Germany trust in governmental institution and that’s why people go to courts”. Moreover, claiming your rights and going to courts in order to defend them not only implicitly signals a degree of trust on the institutions and procedures, but also reveals a sense of belonging, “by going to courts you are acknowledging that you are part of the society you live in, you show I trust these institutions, I wanna be part of it, I sue my rights, I claim my rights, de facto you are saying this is my right, article 4 [freedom of religion] is mine” (Interview with legal scholar).

Moreover, according to Werner Schiffauer (2006, p.105) from the 2000s onwards “Muslim communities have been quite successful in turning to the courts in their fight for rights”. For instance, in 2002 the right to perform religious slaughter was won, and in 2003 after a process of 5 years Fereshta Ludin partially won “the fight for her right to wear the headscarf as a public-school teacher” (Schiffauer 2006, p.95). It was a partial success because the court emitted its decision based on existing laws regulating the issue, and thus called to the parliaments of the federal states to create legislation on the topic (Interview with legal scholar). This resulted, as Karim Fereidooni explained during our conversation in three different forms of legislation, federal states enacting neutrality laws, the laic model, banning all religious symbols in public service, (Berlins’ case); federal states enacting laws prohibiting religious symbols with the exception by privilege of those of Judeo-Christian tradition (Bavaria’s case); and the states not enacting any law at all (Brandenburg’s case).

After the 2003 court decision and the implementation of different legislation regulating the headscarf in relation to public service, two Muslim women went up to the

Federal Constitutional Court of Germany to challenge the ban on headscarf, and in 2015 the court overturned the previous ban applying in some federal states, although it did not rule out a prohibition in the case of a conflict of interests “if schools deem the person and the headscarf not to be a ‘direct threat’ (*konkrete Gefahr*) to the school or to the neutrality of the institution” (Younes 2016, p.191). All in all, the legal dispute on the headscarf can be described as to and fro, where a success can easily turn into a setback.

Currently three federal states, Berlin, Bavaria, and Saarland still uphold legislation banning the headscarf thus they have not conformed to the decision of the Federal Constitutional Court. For instance, in a press release the speaker of the Senate Department for Home Affairs declared that

Berlin sees no reason to change the Neutrality Law ... We thoroughly examined the decision. At the moment, we do not consider it necessary to change the Berlin Neutrality Act. That is why we refrain from changing the law. The previous regulation has proven itself in practice. It is a gain for living together in a diverse metropolis like Berlin. I consider it politically worthwhile and legally justifiable to stick to this rule (Bürgermeister 2015).

Ever since this legislative decision, different Muslim women have been going to the courts in order to challenge it. Inssan supports legal action against discrimination and assists Muslim women wanting to go to courts to challenge discrimination based on religious grounds. Hajjaj told me that they tend to win the cases, but the burden of the process is always on the shoulder of the one who has been discriminated on the basis of their religion, and this is one of the most important challenges, it rests upon the discriminated persons.

The ADNB also supports Muslim woman going to courts to defend their religious freedom. In cooperation with Inssan they went to court expecting that the case will reach the Federal Constitution Court and thus being able to abolish or amend the Neutrality law in Berlin, given the background of the 2015’s decision. Barry told me that the first process was lost, the judge argued that the “neutrality act in Berlin has a good reason to be, because the judge said, Berlin is such a heterogeneous space, that the headscarf would promote conflict”. Afterwards came an appeal to a higher court who ruled in favor of the plaintiff, however, the judge also argued that the Neutrality Act can be read “in a manner that is in conforming with the constitution” thus the court has to decide case by case, and even though the “court decision was in favor of this woman, the judge gave the possibility of interpreting the law in the right manner, which means, we won't be able to attack the law now”.

Barry told me that based on the experience from the cases they receive is clear that the

ban on headscarf or Neutrality Act has had long range effects (*Fernwirkungen*) expanding in other areas beyond public service, “compare to other forms of discriminations, anti-Muslim racism for Muslim women wearing headscarves, is that people say it openly, ‘you cannot work here, how would it look like’, our clients recount episodes like this”. The neutrality law has had as a side effect the legitimization of more open anti-Muslim racism in the access to labor, “which paradoxically also allows more legal interventions because is open”. Despite the relevance of legally challenging the ban on headscarf Karim Fereidooni argues that the problem is not restricted to the federal states upholding bans, “my personal opinion is that there is no difference between federal states that constrain the use of the headscarf and those who don’t, qualitatively there is no difference” because those federal states sans a specific legislation still can block the access to public services case by case by appealing to the figure of “concrete danger” without the need of a federal law.<sup>26</sup>

#### **4.8. Intersectional Islamic feminism**

The dominant Islamophobic narrative constructing Muslim communities and individuals as inherently gender unequal operates by drawing a caricaturized picture of Muslims men and women. Whereas the former is seen as hyper-masculine and violent, the latter is constructed as a voiceless and oppressed subject position in dire need of rescue. This narrative in relation to the one deeming Muslims as homophobes obliterates the existence of queer Muslims from the discursive field. Moreover, in the spread and consolidation of this narrative some White feminist such as Alice Schwarzer and *key witness* with Muslim background such as Necla Kelek

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<sup>26</sup> Furthermore, Constantin Wagner speaking about his book *Resentments against Muslims* (2011) told me that the discourses on the headscarf not only produce a racialized portrayal of Muslim woman but also fulfill a social function in terms of blocking social mobility, “what is the societal function of these anti-Muslim resentments, and all of these discourses? Through analyzing the actions of White feminists I was trying to show that the picture of Muslims or Islam is something that actors can use as a form of symbolic capital to stir controversy, I was working with Bourdieu, understanding racism as a form of symbolic capital, I mean, this what Alice Schwarzer and her friends are saying: that Muslim woman are not independent, and so on, and these are all values that you need in the labor market, and stating this again and again it becomes quite obvious that they are not trying to empower those women, but is about stating who and how they are, reiterating what they are and what they cannot do. Thus, like this first level of analysts was about understanding that is maybe not always about Islam when is talked about Islam, but is about social positions. If you are allowed to wear a headscarf and work on public institutions or not is pretty much for me, in my eyes, or from a sociological perspective is not only a discussion about religion and the state, but is also about which actors do have access to certain job positions and social mobility, and if you read like this, and if you read the debate or discourse like this, you of course see very different dimensions than before, if you have, I mean, is a bit, there is this sentence: ‘as long as the cleaning woman was wearing the headscarf no one was even interested’, of course, this meets a points, because is true, so I was trying to understand with this theoretical approach how this symbolic discourse is connected with social structures”.

have played a significant role. Saboura Naqhsband, a Muslim activist considers that these Islam critics with a Muslim background, as they are labeled in the German debate, have been not only propagating hate and fear towards Muslims and Islam, but also to certain extent blocking the possibilities of having a fair and needed debate in regard to gender inequality within different Muslim communities,

...our problem is more people like Ateş, the Islamic critics, woman with a Muslim background who have demonized Islam for a long time and added racial discourses about Muslims, specially about Muslim men, I am not saying that there is not a problem, there is, but we see it in an intersectional way, not us versus them kind of way, those are the people who are perpetuate White feminism.<sup>27</sup>

Against this background, different Muslim women throughout Germany have reclaimed feminism with an intersectional approach. Saboura Naqhsband translated into German the *Introduction to Islamic Feminism* from Lana Sirri (2017), which brought more visibility on the topic by being covered in newspapers, and discussed in workshops and talks, in this sense, she perceives that currently,

...there is growing public interest due to some well-known personas in social media that show that there are at least some Muslim woman who can speak for themselves, for me, is one of the many topics I've been dealing with, I am also queer, I have some allies, this group is a starting point, as well as queer Muslim networks

Saboura Naqhsband is also a member in two groups of intersectional Islamic feminist in Germany bringing together academics and activist, the first with a nationwide reach, and the second based in Berlin, the Berlin Muslim feminist roundtable. According to Saboura Naqhsband, the groups try to serve as spaces where they can support each other while “trying to empower and give space to each other as young Muslim women, try to be as intersectional as possible, talk about racism but also inner community racism”. Celine Barry from the ADNBB is also a member of this roundtable, who told me that as a Muslim woman the spaces when you can be spiritual and critical of structures of oppression are very scarce, and the roundtable has been precisely a place, “where we can be politically active against racism from a Color perspective but also spiritual, so that you have a space where your spirituality is recognized, because what you have in these People of Color movements, like in all the leftist movements is very anti-religious”.

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<sup>27</sup> Seyran Ateş is a lawyer and activist famous in Germany as critic of Islam. In 2017 she opened the *Ibn Ruschd-Goethe* mosque in Berlin, an event that was thoroughly covered in the media, since this mosque was presented as the “first liberal mosque in Germany”. Also in 2017, Ateş has been representing the Senate of Education Berlin against a case brought up by a young Muslim woman wearing headscarf after she was discriminated as teacher.

The discussions around the sexual harassments and sexualized violence against women during the New Year's Eve in Cologne in 2015-2016 were a high point in the instrumentalization of gender justice and equality as tools to racialize refugees and Muslims, Emine Aslan, who has been active as well around the topic of intersectional Islamic feminism, told me about how she and members of the collective SchauHin started to discuss about the way media outlets were reporting on the issue,

We already knew that a lot of people had a problem with that [refugees in Germany], we already knew that there was a political heated debate about safety, about these refugees being Muslims and these Muslims being potential threats to the Constitution, and the European and German values. So, when this report started on the incident in Cologne, we knew immediately what that would mean. How that would be instrumentalized for racism, to legitimize deporting refugees, to legitimize not let them in, to legitimize to talk a bit more about how inherently patriarchal and sexist Islam and therefore all Muslim are. So, we decided that we needed to do something, and then we tried to intervene in this discussion.

After that conversation some members of the collective SchauHin develop the political intervention and petition *No Excuses. Against sexualized violence and racism. Always. Anywhere (Ausnahmslos)*. A Muslim activist behind the drafting of the petition explained me that through it,

We were trying to prove to society that is possible, even when things and discussion seem to be impossible, to engage in a constructive and differentiated way. We try to prove it is possible to criticize sexism without being racist, that should not be undoable in today society and that we can expect politicians to fill their standards that was what we were trying to prove and I think successfully.

*Ausnahmslos* appealed in solidarity with those who experienced sexualized violence for a sustained fight against this phenomenon as a deplorable societal problem permeating every sphere of German society, while also highlighting that "it is wrong to highlight sexualized violence only when the perpetrators are allegedly the perceived 'others': Muslim, Arab, black or North-African men, i.e., those who are regarded as 'non-Germans' by extremists" (*#ausnahmslos* 2016).<sup>28</sup>

The petition was signed by 11,000 persons in only one week, including high-profile politicians like Manuela Schwesig the Federal Minister of Family Affairs, Senior Citizens,

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<sup>28</sup> "Combatting sexualized violence must be the political priority every single day, because it is omnipresent. A 2014 a study by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights found that more than 1 in 2 women experience sexual harassment. One in 3 women over the age of fifteen have experienced physical and/or sexualized violence. Statistics by the German Federal Police count more than 7,300 reported rapes and sexual assaults in Germany every year, amounting to more than 20 every day. Not to mention the many more that are never reported. We want a society in which everyone, independent of ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, religion or self expression, shall feel safe and protected from verbal and physical attacks: be it on the streets, at home, at work or on the internet. These are the foundations of a free society" (*#ausnahmslos* 2016).

Women and Youth, Claudia Roth the vice-president of the Bundestag, Gabriele Heinisch-Hosek the Minister for Education and Women as well as national and international scholars like Angela Davis, Chandra Talpande Mohanty, and Linda Sarsour. Emine Aslan narrated that this intervention was very important for the collective, given that trajectory of instrumentalizing feminism as a form of legitimizing racism

...we should be aware of not letting feminism getting instrumentalized for racism, we wanted to show how feminism has to be antiracist at the same time. We tried really to write a statement that which involve all these critical aspects but not to be too complicated for the mainstream to pick it up, so that was the intention so that we could take these feminists and intersectional feminists discourses out of the isolation from activism and academia and pushing them into the mainstream. Then, when we had the statement we started to use all of our networks to spread it internationally, we had people, Chandra Mohanty had been in Frankfurt so we had contact with Chandra Mohanty, we had workshops with her, so for example we approach her to get her to spread it into her networks as well, that's how we got Angela Davis to sign it, Linda Sarsour to sign it, all of the sudden, this statement we just wrote got international support from feminist all over the world, and that was a very important thing for the German context as well. Because I think If we wouldn't have gone so big internationally, the reports in Germany from certain scholars and activists and politicians would not have been that big. Because of that we suddenly had a different frame, a different approach to this topic, and because of this campaign we were able to go to different places, talk with different newspapers, radio stations, a lot of people invited, for example, people from the *ausnahmslos* collective to speak about intersectionality, of racism and feminism. So, because of that campaign all of the sudden we had the whole year with a lot of lectures, with a lot of workshops that were revolving around the intersection of racism and feminism, something I haven't had seen for a long time in the German context specially. That was the success of that campaign from my perspective.

According to another member of the collective, the process of the petition made her/him realized the need to keep intervening in political debates and provide to politicians tools, and vocabulary. She also realized that in the contemporary political climate is important to intervene in the debate, and not until someone else addresses the issue. The *ausnahmslos* petition therefore was an important political intervention reaching established media outlets, politicians and the majority society, and showing in practical terms how intersectional feminism can provide tools and vocabulary for a sustained struggle against interlocking systems of oppressions such as racism, sexism, and gender violence.

Another significant episode of intersectional struggle was the Women's March in Frankfurt in January 2017, which was organized as a protest for equality, diversity and inclusion in solidarity with the Women's March in Washington in the aftermath of Donald Trump's inauguration as president of the United States. Emine Aslan was one of the organizers behind the march in Frankfurt, which was the biggest one in Germany. She recounted that after following up the developments in the US and realizing that Women of Color were not

only involved but also pushing issues of racism and police violence she thought it would be of paramount importance to stand in solidarity from Frankfurt,

I said if that's possible, if they can have this feminist discourse pushing intersectional feminist perspectives, pushing migrations issues and racism in this kind of mobilization, then, that's something I would like to do as well. Because I saw there was a potential of bringing people together who would normally won't come together on topics of anti-racism and stuff like that, and we organized them around these topics, that was my personal motivation, the need of using a powerful platform to make it more and more inclusive and more diverse on the perspectives on intersectionality.

Furthermore, the March in Frankfurt not only was planned as a sign of solidarity with women on the US, but it also served to problematize racism, sexism, the instrumentalization of feminism in Germany, while also critically engaging with the national refugee policy, climate change, and minority rights.<sup>29</sup>

#### **4.9. Democratic and Political subjectivities**

The discursive distinction between Germans from Muslims rests upon a variety of contrasting values, including democratic vs. non-democratic. This form of differentiation is neither new nor exclusive of German discourses, rather part of the long process through which democracy has been defined in contraposition to despotism aligning this form of governance with the West (Sayyid 2014; Massad 2015). This powerful dichotomy interlocks with other equally ideological pairings such as religious vs. secular. The Islamophobic script affirms that Islam and therefore Muslims do not separate religion from politics, in other words, they haven't learned secularism or are unable to be secular and this discourse confronts many Muslims in their everyday life. Speaking about the need to become more political, Emine Aslan fleshed out how this Islamophobic narrative is an everyday reality for Muslims in Germany,

I think Muslims are really afraid of being political subjects because of the way is framed, for example, the biggest accusation we grew up with, I grew up with, is that my hijab is not my religious-spiritual whatsoever but is a fascist uniform, so people are always politicizing everything that has to do with my spirituality. So actually, is a really big fight for Muslims in Germany to reclaim this spiritual identity, to get not lost in the political debates and not to lose their attachment to their spiritual identity, but at the same time realize the fact that they can be political subjects, and that they are political subjects, right?

The campaign *Voting Initiative 2017, My Voice Counts Too* was organized by the MJD with the federal elections of 2017 in sight. The chief goal was to encourage young Muslims to participate in the elections, engage in the process, and cast their votes. The campaign utilized different mediums to reach out young Muslims, including social media campaigns, films, workshops and public talks and lectures. Ouassima Labich, although recognizing the existence

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<sup>29</sup> The whole speech of Aslan and her colleague in the Women's March in Frankfurt can be retrieved from: (Aslan & Isak 2017).

of the discourse opposing Islam and democracy, told me that the campaign was not aim at all to counter this narrative or prove the contrary, rather she organized this initiative because is what she wanted and was interested in, which is one of her ways to navigate in a society deeply marked by Islamophobia, to engage in projects not against the stereotypes but because they are important for you,

...you can imagine, there is this narrative Islam and democracy is nothing that comes along, and this is kind of an incredible narrative, very strong. But our approach is more positive, you *do* engage. There is this interesting momentum; you do projects just because you want to do that. When I did this project, and have my people working with me and when I strive for funding, and it has this positive effect that it reaches out to people, so all these White majority people would have their prejudices would say, 'ok, that's cool, they do that, Muslim youth people engage and they are empowering other to vote, this is cool', and this is maybe changing the view on us. This does not mean that we do projects to change narratives, this is not our first point in the agenda and it should not be, from my perspective. We spend so much time due to the fact that we have been labeled as extreme and been mentioned in the BfV and they just tell you that you have ties to organizations you don't have, you spend so much more time saying what you are not than creating the definition of what you are.

The culmination of the campaign was a podium discussion with representatives of all the major political parties with the exception of the AFD in the city of Dortmund on September 2017. The initiative invited the politicians to speak and have a dialogue with Muslims, "the approach was to give them [politicians] the chance to listen to us, and to listen to what we want and what we need". According to Ouassima Labich, the motivation behind the podium was twofold, on the one hand, to set a stage where politicians can hear about the issues that hinder youth in general and young Muslims in particular, and through this, on the other hand, to convey the message to young Muslims to trust the political system and encourage them to vote in the elections. The event, however was also an opportunity to bring issues to the attention of politicians that are important not only as Muslims but as young people in Germany as well,

...we also tackled education, of course migration policies, Islamophobia, but also about health care. This is another thing, we have so many topics we are interested in that are not related to our religion, because you know a person is more than only that, people might forget that while engaging in all these anti-narratives of a discourse. You just forget that you have tons of other sides too that you are interested in. If you don't bring Islamophobia, I don't like that word, but anti-Muslim racism on the table no one will, that is the thing, no one talks about it if you are not the one shaping, and who's forcing people to talk about.

According to the Ouassima Labich member of the MJD the event had an empower feeling, since many participants saw that politics are not far away for them, and created the sense that instead of being chasing the political agenda "we define the agenda right now, these politicians are not so far away, they are close to me, and I can talk with them and tell them what I need".

#### 4.10. Dismantling the narrative from within

The final counter narrative centers again on the issue of integration, and seeks to create a differentiated picture on the topic based on scientific research and empirical result. In other words, it challenges the narrative of the lack of integration of Muslims by showing the opposite, and how despite this reality Muslims are still perceived as Others and face significant barriers that are in fact the outcome of social structures, and related to the perception of Islam as a threat.

This is the case of the *Religionsmonitor* (Monitor of religions) by the Bertelsmann Foundation (Pollack & Müller 2014; Halm & Sauer 2017). The *Religionsmonitor* is an interdisciplinary research project analyzing the role of religions in processes of social cohesion. I spoke with Yasemin El-Menouar, which leads the *Religionsmonitor*, which this year title is *Muslims in Europe. Integrated but not accepted?* El-Menouar explained that discussions about integration tend to be emotionally loaded and mostly unfolding through normative argumentations, more often than not explaining social problems as cultural ones. Moreover, frequently the very concept of integration is barely defined, while Islamophobic narratives narrative have posited Islam as an obstacle for the successful integration of Muslims.

The *Religionsmonitor* intervenes precisely in this debate with empirical research, with data and facts. To begin with, providing a clear definition of integration as “the establishment of equal opportunities for everyone” (Interview with Yasemin El-Menouar), for instance in the labor market and the educational system, and “ideally Muslims should also feel at home in the country” (Interview with Yasemin El-Menouar), thus, the study offers a differentiated view on integration.

...what is always discussed under the rubric of integration are other topics, values, coexistence, and for us is important to have this differentiation, so that these dimensions don't get mixed and all of the sudden the headscarf is an index for bad qualifications, because is not like that. We also find out that Muslim are not well accepted not because they are not well educated or have bad qualifications, rather because they are still perceived as Others. The more they integrate of course they are more visible with their religiosity, and then there is this certain paradox, on the one hand is said 'you have to integrate', but when they step in in the public sphere with their symbols, graveyards, mosques, etc. these are all actually signs of integration, which paradoxically are taken as lack of integration. There is a juxtaposition of two different issues; the idea of integration, as equal opportunities, is transposed to ideological and cultural dimensions. There is a discrepancy between actual integration, scientifically conceived, and how the integration is perceived in the society.

Speaking about the key findings of the *Religionsmonitor* 2017, Yasemin El-Menouar highlighted that as has been the experience with different migrant groups, Muslims have become more integrated over time in terms of higher rates of education and access to the

labor market, in this sense, and based on empirical research it is possible to conclude that religion—Islam—does not play a negative role as it is often described,

...we show that Muslims have good education rates and therefore was an important finding, because for instance Sarrazin said that Islam is an obstacle for integration, we show that is not like this, but where religion plays a role is on the labor market. We saw that almost in every country visible Muslims or Muslims with a high religiosity by equal qualifications have worst opportunities, actually is a disadvantage, but not in the UK, in Germany and in France is very difficult. There are barriers to the integration of Muslims that don't lie in the religion but rather in the system, in the labor market or in the educational system.

In this sense, the empirical findings of the *Religionsmonitor* affirm that Islam is not a decisive factor in the integration of Muslims, rather the focus should center on the economic, social and institutional conditions generating dissimilar opportunities. One of these barriers relates to the integration of Islamic religious communities within the structures of the state, which according to El-Menouar is a different issue than the integration of Muslims as the conditions of equal opportunities, though these two dimensions, again, are often conflated in public debate.

## 5. Conclusion

Although very aware of the difficulties of talking about racism in general in Germany, when I began the interviews informing this report I could not foresee the centrality that many of my interviewees gave to the task of making the realities of Islamophobia visible. Denying and belittling experiences of discrimination informed by anti-Muslim racism can be seen as an effect of Islamophobic narratives, downplaying these realities or encumbering Muslims and the “problems” they allegedly represent as the causes of discrimination. Theodor Adorno and colleagues (1950) were aware of this discursive device and its functionality in legitimizing anti-Semitic attitudes, because “problematizing” the Other positions the resentful person in the spot of the one who is rationally discriminating.

The omnipresence and omnipotence of Islamophobia not only has created an environment of hatred and cemented discriminatory practices on different levels, but also has left a deep mark on Muslim subjectivities. Against these effects, safe places as locations of empowerment are as well of paramount importance as mediums to counter another effect of Islamophobia, its acceptance as normality. Furthermore, arts and creative expression can function as mediums of self-empowerment, to criticize and deconstruct Islamophobia narratives, and also to position different narratives and experiences that humanize Muslims.

This task is probably the most urgent one, for racialization as dehumanization serves as the ideological basis behind violence.

Another way of normalizing and humanizing Muslim experiences is by creating narratives simultaneously countering a narrative of hatred while showing the opposite, such as the narratives around processes of conviviality and urban cohabitation. In a sense, these interventions remove the “problem” from the narrative by fleshing out different experiences. Similarly, changing the frame whereby social conflicts are understood can have a positive impact into how Muslims are perceived.

All of my interviewees approach discrimination or racism as phenomena not only affecting Muslims in Germany but different communities as well, as such, the struggle against it should not be compartmentalized, and the experience has shown that alliances can be effective devices of solidarity against discriminatory practices.

Notwithstanding the back and forth in the legal challenge to Islamophobia, the juridical battle against discrimination informed by Islamophobia is one of the most important battlefronts not only to create a more equitable and fair society, but also as part of the formation of Muslims as political subjects. Intersectional Islamic feminism has proven itself as a powerful discourse able to shift the terms of the debate and reaching positions of political influence. Likewise, a medium to challenge the ubiquitous discourse on integration is by providing the tools to understand the concept differently, while undoing some of the myths and phantasies surrounding its dissemination.

Finally, is possible to distinguish between the characters of the counter narratives in regard to their aims, namely, between conventional and political strategies (Araujo & Maeso 2018). Whereas conventional strategies can be seen as a direct reaction towards Islamophobic effects, political strategies address and counter Islamophobia as a structural system of domination with long range affects (Araujo & Maeso 2018). Drawing on Gramsci’s distinction between hegemony and dominance, Anna-Esther Younes reflects on and ponders over countering Islamophobia as a reaction or engaging in a political strategy aimed to produce alternative narratives,

...the question is rather; do we follow into the trap of continuing with counter narratives? Because you are always busy on the receiving end, you are always busy reacting to an argument and hence, in time and space you will always only be reacting, and not creating, you will not be proactive. Obviously, the people in power have more data, means, even if it is fantasized data that you need to counter, you will

always need to counter things like Heller's 'Catch-22'. Thus, maybe the question is rather do we want to continue counter and refute racist arguments, or do we want to create other narratives? There is not one answer obviously, and we need data collection and refutations of racist arguments just as much as we need people who believe that 'creating; new visions is important. Alternative narratives however are not structured within dominant narratives, so their emergence is more democratic in a sense, which is great, but can also be problematic, because we need to find new ways of forming narratives, new forms of 'representation' so to say out of all the options we possibly could have. The reason why this is difficult is not only because we can come up with new options, but also because we are used to have one line of thought, when we have a counter narrative – that's a lot easier, one might think. We need to re-think our content and our ways of representing: not only what to represent, but also how do I get to that 'new-ness'? So, the first question is, if we engage in creating alternative narratives, then how do we get that into the mainstream, and do we want that at all? Do we care about the mainstream? If not, what does that mean for the entirety of society? And if we care, how do we convince the mainstream that this is not something scary or impossible?

The ranking of the counter narratives to Islamophobia was elaborated on account of different factors, first, my interviewees' self-assessment and discussions in regard to how the counter narratives have been received in their targeted audience. Second, I considered as well the success of the narratives in reaching their goals, e.g., to what extent some initiatives and projects have made Islamophobia more visible in the German sociopolitical landscape. Finally, I also investigated the reach and reception of the counter narratives in national media outlets.

#### **Categorical list of dominant counter narratives to Muslim hatred**

1. Making the realities of Islamophobia visible
2. Empowerment
3. The creative resistance. Narrating a different story
4. Conviviality
5. Changing the frame of conflicts
6. Alliances and solidarity
7. Using laws to counter Islamophobia
8. Intersectional Islamic feminism
9. Democratic and Political subjectivities
10. Dismantling the narrative from within

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## List of Interviewees

	Interviewees	Sector	Institution/Project
1	Anonym	Federal Institution	Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency
2	Anonym	Federal Institution	Demokratie Leben!
3	Jutta Spoden	Federal Institution	Bundeszentral für Politisches Bildung Was Glaubst du den?!
4	Petra Grüne	Federal Institution	Bundeszentral für Politisches Bildung Was Glaubst du den?!
5	Lorenz Korgel	Federal state institution	Senatsverwaltung für Justiz, Verbraucherschutz und Antidiskriminierung Landesstelle für Gleichbehandlung - gegen Diskriminierung
6	Onna Buchholt	NGO	Protestant Youth - Young Muslims as Partners, For Dialogue and cooperation against Discrimination
7	Hanna Attar	NGO	"Nicht in meinem Namen!"
8	Kofi Ohene-Dokyi	NGO	„Hör mir zu“ /OSZ für Demokratie und Vielfalt / JUMA
9	Celine Barry	NGO	Anti-Discrimination Network Berlin of the Turkish Federation Berlin- Brandenburg
10	Mohamad Hajjaj	NGO	Inssan/ Network against discrimination and Islamophobia /Central Council of Muslims in Germany
11	Ouassima Labich	NGO	Muslim Youth in Germany (member board)

12	Saboura Naqshband	NGO/Activist/facilitator empowerment workshops	JugendtheaterBüro/ LesMigraS
13	Yasemin El-Menouar	NGO	Bertelsmann Foundation - Religionsmonitor
14	Zuher Jazmati	NGO/Arts	I.Slam
15	Armin Langer	NGO	Initiative Salaam-Shalom
16	Nina Mühe	NGO/Academic	KlgA/ University Frankfurt Oder
17	Constantin Wagner	Media/Academic	Institute for Media Responsibility/ University of Bassel
18	Daniel Bax	Media	Neue deutsche Medienmacher / Mediendienst Integration
19	Anonym	Media/activist	Journalism
20	Kola Maryam Hübsch	Media	Independent journalist and author
21	Karim Fereidooni	Academic	University of Bochum
22	Iman Attia	Academic	Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences, Berlin
	Zülfukar Cetin	Academic	Alice Salomon University of Applied Sciences/University of Bassel
23	Anna Esther Younes	Academic	Independent researcher
24	Anonym	Academic	University
25	Yasemin Shooman	Academic	Jewish Museum Berlin
26	Emine Aslan	Academic/Activist	Frankfurt University/ SchauHin, campus racism, Ausnahmslos

<b>27</b>	Eva Kalny	Academic	University of Hannover
<b>28</b>	Mona El-Omari	Arts/activist/facilitator empowerment workshops	Independent artist
<b>29</b>	Soufeina Hamed	Arts	Independent artist
<b>30</b>	Feriel Bendjama	Arts	Independent artist

