

Contesting Religious Identities

Transformations, Disseminations and Mediations

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Contents

List of Contributors IX

Contesting Religious Identities: An Introduction 1

Anne-Marie Korte & Lucien van Liere

PART 1

Territories and Diasporas

Interpreting 'Movement' within Religious Studies: An Introduction to
'Territories and Diasporas' 11

Lucien van Liere

Home of the Mother, Exile of the Father: Gender and Space in the
Construction of Biblical Identity 18

Claudia V. Camp

Western Christianity as Part of Postcolonial World Christianity:
The 'Body of Christ with AIDS' as an Interstitial Space 39

Adriaan van Klinken

Religion, Media, and the Global 59

Patrick Eisenlohr

Beyond Blind Faith: Religious Identities under the Conditions of
Late Capitalism 74

Joerg Rieger

PART 2

Media and Texts

Broken Texts and Distorted Images: An Introduction to 'Media & Texts' 93

Bob Becking

Psychoapocalypse: Desiring the Ends of the World 97

Tina Pippin

Dangerous Enthusiasm: An Aspect of the Clash between Cartesianism and Orthodoxy at Utrecht University 118

Henk van den Belt

Islam Controversies and Humour: Responses to Comedic Vlogs on the YouTube Battlefield 136

Fadi Hirzalla, Liesbet van Zoonen & Floris Müller

Fulla, the Cover-up Girl. Identity Politics via a Doll? 156

Martha Frederiks

Resilience Beyond Mimesis, Humanism, Autonomy, and Exemplary Persons 175

Joachim Duyndam

PART 3

Bodies and Rituals

Embodied Faith as Bone of Contention: Introduction to ‘Bodies and Rituals’ 197

Anne-Marie Korte

Contesting Islam: The Making and Unmaking of Religious Faith 203

Niliifer Göle

Martyrdom as a Contested Practice in Rabbinic Judaism 219

Eric Ottenheijm

Conservative Evangelical Listening Practices and the Embodiment of Faith 240

Anna Strhan

A Material History of Catholic Precarity in Amsterdam 261

Markha Valenta

PART 4

Epilogue

**At the Threshold: A Panorama for Future Research and Challenges to
Religious Studies 277**

Lucien van Liere

Index 297

Contesting Islam: The Making and Unmaking of Religious Faith

Niliifer Göle

In globalized modernity, religious faith is less bound to a territory, but follows migratory flows instead, circulates among different cultural contexts, and is reshaped within religious diasporas. Muslims living in European contexts, independent of their national, ethnic, racial origins belong to such migrant communities in which religious faith is addressed in ways that are different than those living in Muslim-majority countries. In contexts of mobility, immigration and globalization the chains of religious transmission and authority are broken; the way Muslims learn, transmit and practice their religion engenders new articulations between personal faith and collective identity. Religious claims of Muslims who are not living in a Muslim-majority country enter into confrontation with the prevalent national norms (both secular and religious) of the host countries. The visibility of migrant religious faith in national publics raises a set of issues that are debated not only among Muslims and religious authorities, but become a concern for all citizens. De-coupling of religious faith from national communities is a process that is further reinforced by the new technologies of global communication. Beyond the national boundaries, the personal and transversal connections between Muslims are accelerated by means of global technologies of communication. Furthermore, the new media facilitate and encourage the velocity of the visual, the pictorial and sensorial aspects of religion rather than the textual ones. While religious texts require time for reading, interpreting and translating, the images are reproduced easily and circulated globally, privileging the register of the emotional and visceral.

In this article I engage an analysis of the ways Islam becomes a challenge, a contesting force in Europe. I focus on the manifestations of religious faith in bodily rituals and in public spaces, thereby trying to depict the spatial, visual and corporeal dimensions of religious faith. These three dimensions join the three foci that are proposed in this book, namely diasporas and territories, images and texts, and bodies and rituals.

Let me start with unpacking the concept of 'religious identities' in order to liberate the visual and spatial aspects of faith and agency. Instead of taking the notion of religious identity as a given, it will be heuristically fertile if we highlight the potential tensions between religious faith and collective identity, and understand religious identity as a category that is not fixed and

stable but as a construct and a process in movement. Faith and identity are not one and the same; they can be distinguished and considered at least in tension, if not in opposition. Equating religious identity with religious faith dismisses the complexity of the relations between the two. The contemporary Islamic movements have reinvigorated the relation between faith and identity, translating the former into the latter, turning faith into agency and political action. Political scientists have explained this transformation from religious obedience to political contestation, and have put the emphasis on the instrumentalization of religion by political Islam. On the other hand anthropologists have studied belief and faith practices independent of sociological dynamics of identity formation. We need to understand the ways in which religious faith, collective identity and political agency are interrelated, transforming each other, without reducing one to another.

In social sciences, the notion of identity gained currency in relation to the emergence of 'new social movements'. The sociological literature produced on the new social movements was in direct lineage with the heritage of the counter cultural values of the 1960s and more general in affinity with secular leftist traditions. The study of religious movements was for a long time exempt from the list of 'new social movements'. These movements have addressed issues of identity and difference, criticized essentialism and privileged alternative constructions of identity by means of consciousness-raising processes and enhanced politics of recognition. Consequently, the mottos such as 'black is beautiful', 'private is political', 'coming out', carried by black, feminist and gay movements have changed the prevalent cultural, racial and gendered norms of Western societies. They were 'identity-movements' to the extent that those actors, women, African-Americans, gays, queers, all claimed their negated identities in the public sphere and brought forth such categories as race, gender and sexuality, under political contestation. These movements were interpreted as 'the return of the repressed'; they were 'contesting identities' to the extent that they were critical of the prevalent cultural norms that stood for discrimination, exclusion and stigmatization of groups because of their skin color, sexual preferences and gender.

In some respects contemporary Islamic movements follow a similar dynamic of building upon their difference instead of adopting strategies of assimilation with the prevalent secular norms of equality and sexuality. By means of their bodily practices, such as covering and praying, and following dietary restrictions, they manifest their religious faith and make Islam, the repressed of the modern, publicly visible. They are contesting secular cultural norms but also reinventing the Islamic traditions in secular contexts. The new actors of Islam are not following therefore the footsteps of their coreligionists

in majority-Muslim countries, traditional, orthodox ways of living and interpreting faith. Especially in European contexts of immigration Muslim youth are distancing themselves from the religious authorities of the national backgrounds of the previous generations. The way they embrace Islam in Europe is closely related with dynamics of de-territorialization of religious faith and the loosening of the ties between national and religious identities. Instead we are witnessing the ways Islam becomes part of European territories and built-in to the histories of European nations. The passage of Islam from Eastern lands to the Western world does not follow a peaceful and linear process of integration but engenders a series of religious controversies and public debates that in turn becomes a concern not solely for Muslim citizens but for all. Contesting Islam bears this signification that the very secular premises of the European public life are challenged by religious and cultural difference.

Praying and Contesting

Claiming for places of worship, for mosques or places of burial (a place in the cemeteries, *'un carré musulman'*) illustrates the sociological fact that Muslims as a minority group are in the process of sedenterization in Europe. However these claims provoke social anxiety and engender politics of fear, rather than being taken as a sign of integration and belonging to European territories. We observe that the liberal discourse of rights, cultural pluralism or freedom for religious observance fall short in providing a legitimate frame for debating such claims. Multiculturalism, minority rights, religious freedom, all these well-established and widely-accepted principles of European democracies are critiqued even by those who have cherished them. The visibility of Islam in European contexts triggers a source of discord and contestation that puts to test the power of the secular liberal discourse for rational decision-making and enhancing pluralism. Islamic covering and praying, as new forms of Islamic visibility in Europe provoke a series of reactions and debates on secular norms and European values, calling in some cases for prohibitive legislations against such visibilities across Europe. The French laws against the ostentatious religious signs in public schools, known as the law against the Islamic headscarf and against the total veiling in the streets (the burka law) as well as the Swiss referendum that banned the minaret construction are such examples.¹

1 In March 2004, the Stasi Commission banned the wearing of headscarf at public schools. In October 2010, the French Constitutional Council banned burqa, full veiling, in the streets.

Instead of engaging a discussion at the abstract level of principles, laws and legislations, we need to take a step back, adopt a closer angle and depict empirically the particularities of religious faith and subjectivities in diasporas in order to be able to understand the contesting dynamics and the public controversies they trigger in European contexts. The presence of Muslim religion in Europe, contrary to what public authorities seek for, cannot be totally represented and controlled by religious institutions. In the French case, the creation of CFCM, (*Conseil Français du Culte Musulman*) aimed to have an interlocutor representative of different Muslim communities with whom the State authority looked forward to negotiating and solving the religious claims of Muslims. However, it soon became evident that such authorities do not have a say on the religious practices of Muslims. They could not dissuade for instance Muslim young girls from wearing their headscarves in public schools. Personal forms of piety do not always follow the religious institutions and authorities. Islamic religion makes part of the lived experience of Muslims and of “expressive individualism”² open to relearning and interpretation at the personal level. Islam in a migrant, secular European context calls for awareness in the way Muslims practice their faith but also in their self-presentation in public. European Muslims have to struggle and search for ways of living correctly their faith, being a ‘good Muslim’ in a multi-religious secular European context. The context of immigration requires an effort for Muslims to re-learn and practice their religion.

Once again we can repeat that religious faith is not a pre-established, solid category but un-settled by the lived experiences of Muslims and subject to reinterpretation in the European context. Chains of transmission of religious knowledge are broken; religious authority loses its grip; family and community-based religious education becomes limited because of linguistic and environmental differences to provide guidance for young generations. In a secular and multi-religious environment, faith is constantly subject to learning and supervision, leading to a more rigorous search for piety and higher awareness of one’s faith. The fact that faith is becoming a personal matter, under close inspection of the person, does not imply that it is not collective. The good intentioned researchers of Islam are eager to put the emphasis on the

In a referendum held on November 29, nearly 58 per cent of voting Swiss citizens chose to ban the construction of minarets on mosques.

2 As Taylor argues, in the modern age, religious experience becomes important to find one’s way as opposed to following a model imposed from outside, society, previous generation, or religious authority. Cf. Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion Today* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 83.

‘individualization’ of Islam against those who deny any possibility for individuality and reflexivity in Islamic traditions. However, the personal dimensions in Islamic faith do not imply that it follows the logic of modern liberal individualism. There are many alternative ways of articulating the personal with the collective, faith with society, individual with community. As in the case of the actors of new social movements, Islamic actors are not born into these faith or identity-based communities, but they choose and shape them. They reflect upon their personal faith and rehearse their piousness, fashioning their self-presentations in alternative spaces and communities.³

One reinforces one’s faith by following the Islamic prescriptions and sharing the rituals together with the community of the faithful. Praying is such a major religious ritual, one of the five pillars of Islam, conducted both individually and collectively. If women’s covering is not among the five pillars of Islam and not adopted by all Muslim women, praying is an obligation for every pious person, a shared expression of faith by the community of Muslims.

The performance of ritual prayer five times a day is central for the formation of a pious Muslim. As Saba Mahmood has shown in her well-known work on mosque movements in Cairo, the act of praying follows a set of disciplinary techniques through which faith gets strengthened.⁴ Praying is not therefore an automatism; an outside-oriented ritual, but has to be embodied by the pious person both in her intentions and performances. Praying is also, as Jeanette Jouili’s work has shown a collective act through which Muslims reinforce their faith in company with other Muslims in alternative spaces, such as in praying halls, cultural institutions, or youth associations.⁵ By means of learning and sharing these rituals, the young Muslims not only reinforce their faith but also come to value their religious difference and develop confidence collectively to carry it to the public arena and make it visible. Therefore there is a strong correlation between the reinforcement of faith and the construction of identity, the processes without which one cannot explain how the religious

3 As Stephan Greenblatt argues, a person’s identity, while determined by external circumstances, is subject to improvisations and hence remains partly fashionable. Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance self-fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980).

4 Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: the Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005), pp. 123–128.

5 Jouili inquired how Muslim women in France and Germany learn to be pious, in acquiring religious knowledge, cultivating bodily disciplinary techniques, and surveying their minds and bodies individually and by getting together in mosques or cultural centers. Jeanette Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints: Women in the Islamic Revival in Europe* (Stanford University Press, 2015).

rituals are translated into political claims, how personal faith is rendered publically visible.

I select three different practices of Islamic praying to illustrate the ways in which religious ritual provoked public controversies in different European countries, namely Italy, Germany and Spain. The praying took place in different spaces, in the streets of Milan, in a public school of Berlin, in front of a mosque-cathedral in Cordoba. The praying was conducted by Muslims of different profiles representing different generations and faith trajectories; a young school boy of the second generation of German Muslims, a convert in Spain, and the immigrant Muslims coming from different national origins in Italy. These concrete cases provide us with some clues to depict the ways religious faith is embraced by those with different personal trajectories and temporalities; namely Islamic past in medieval Europe, migrant workers and Europe-born Muslims. Each act of praying brings under attention the visibility of the bodily ritual and the 'space' in question; schools, streets and cathedrals. The space is invested as a site of contestation, the visibility of the religious bodily ritual designates the presence of Muslim actors in spaces in which they are not necessarily welcomed. The space, both in the concrete sense of a public square and in the abstract sense of a 'public sphere' becomes a site of confrontation between those who are allowed to enter and those who are banned. The entry of Muslims to such spaces reveals the prevalent tacit national norms, whether they are secular or Christian. Let's go back to the three distinct controversy provoking praying events.

The first event that provoked a nation-wide controversy in Germany took place in a high-school, in Berlin's Wedding district, when a 16-year-old student, Yunus Mitschele, started conducting his prayers at school. He comes from a mixed family, with a Turkish mother and a German father who converted to Islam. In a school environment regulated with secular norms, religious obligation to pray five times a day at set times required both temporal and spatial rearrangements. He tried at a personal level to accommodate the prescriptions of his faith with the secular norms of the school. He had been praying during class breaks, by kneeling on his jacket, laid out in a school hallway. The jacket instead of a prayer rug, the hallway instead of a mosque, details that point to the particularities of living Islam in a European context. The school principle, disturbed by the scene of praying, warned him and asked him to respect the rules. Yunus carried his case to the court asking for a praying room in the school. The court first argued in favor of religious freedom and said to ban the student from praying at school would violate his right and agreed for a requirement to have a prayer room in the school. But others, including school authorities and some teachers disagreed with the decision and defended the idea that the

school should remain a neutral space as the only way to respect the plurality of religions represented in the school. Some others have put under suspicion Yunus's religious convictions and interpreted the praying ritual not emanating from his religious faith but as a political and provocative act. After a two-year battle, the Berlin federal court, following the arguments of the school's board, ruled that praying at this school could cause conflict and disturb peace in the school and therefore should not be allowed.

The second praying event that I want to evoke took place in Milan during a political manifestation against Israeli occupation of Gaza in January 2009, organized by Italian leftist and pacifist associations. At the end of the manifestation, Muslim participants, following their daily obligation for praying five times a day, turned towards the direction of Qibla and started to perform the evening prayer (*maghrib*), the one that begins immediately after sunset. The scenery of a Muslim crowd praying collectively in the public square of Milan, a space invested for political manifestations and in front of the Dome cathedral, the powerful sign of Catholic Italy, was not a conventional scene, to say the least. The public debate that followed revolved around several arguments: for some, public praying meant a provocative political act and the instrumentalization of religious faith by militants. The fact that the praying was performed for a political cause in solidarity with Palestinians raised as well the question of loyalty of Muslim citizens to Italy. Muslims praying in front of the Cathedral meant in the eyes of some Catholics an offensive act that incites the fear of being invaded by a foreign religion. In the eyes of more pragmatic politicians, the street praying designated the need for the construction of mosques.

The Milanese case of praying controversy captures, in a snapshot,⁶ many features of conflicting and contesting meanings of Islamic faith and public agency. The praying controversy brings forth the issue of religious difference in public life; the importance of embodied forms of faith, bodily rituals and public visibility; the transnational connections and the multiple loyalties of Muslim citizens.

The third case of a praying event that provoked a public controversy took place in Cordoba, in the Andalusian city of Spain. Since the early 2000s Spanish Muslims have campaigned for the right to pray in the Cathedral, the former Great Mosque of Cordoba, known by the inhabitants as the *Mezquita-Cathedral*. The claim was rejected both by Spanish Catholic authorities and the Vatican. In 2007, the President of the Islamic Council, Mansur Escudero,

6 For using the snapshot as a microsociological methodology, cf. Nilüfer Göle, 'Snapshots of Islamic modernities', in: *Daedalus* 129 (2000), pp. 91–117. This is a special issue on Multiple Modernities.

laid his rug in front of the site and made his prayer in the street in front of the television-cameras. He said he hoped to “soften the heart of the bishop” to allow Muslims to pray alongside with the Christians in this historically charged religious edifice. By means of his praying performance he made his religious claim to transform the cathedral into a multi faith place, public. Mansur Escudero, who passed away in 2010, was a Muslim convert. Or, more precisely, a ‘revert’, in the sense of going back to the Muslim origins of Spain, reverting back to Islam. He wished that the Cathedral also should revert to its Muslim origins, as he did himself. The Mezquita is regarded as one of the most accomplished monuments of Islamic Moorish architecture which today has become a part of a World Heritage Site. The Great Mosque of Cordoba was seen as the heart of the Islamic community of Andalusia for three centuries. In modern times, philosopher of Islam and poet of Pakistan, Muhammed Iqbal, visited the mosque in 1931 and treasured the place in his poem *The Mosque of Cordoba* as a cultural landmark of Islam. He requested the authorities to permit ‘azan’ in the Mezquita.

The history of the Mezquita-Cathedral is a multi-layered history of conversions and conquests, witnessing architecturally the cohabitations as well as wars among peoples of different religions. The site was originally a pagan temple, then a Visigothic Christian church before the Umayyad Moors converted the building into a mosque. After the Spanish Reconquista, it became a Roman Catholic Church. Nowadays the site continues to be a battleground as a marker of a religious majority, a past heritage and memory. Spanish Muslims, among them converts, are more sensitive than the immigrant Muslims, in formulating their claims for transforming the Cathedral into a multi-faith place. To finish with the ‘ambiguity’, the hybrid nature of the Mosque-Cathedral, the public authorities have attempted a politics of ‘forgetting’ by erasing the Muslim past in changing the vocabulary, removing the word Mezquita from the tourist guides and brochures.⁷

All uncanny examples of Muslim public praying of immigrants, students, and reverts in Europe where religious rituals, bodily performances contest majority norms and memories, sites and spaces. Praying, common to all monotheistic religions, becomes divisive and controversial; it becomes a site of public debate whether it is an expression of faith, cultural identity, or political instrumentalization. The rights of Muslim minorities for citizenship are

7 For an analysis of Islamic revival and the rise of converts to Islam in Andalusia as a sign of growing sensibility “... against the ideological erasure of the nation's non-Catholic self”, cf. Charles Hirschkind, ‘The Contemporary Afterlife of Moorish Spain,’ in: *Religious and Political Identities in the Mediterranean Basin Since 1492*, Symposium Papers, 2010.

debated also in relation to questions of national loyalty, whether they have different loyalties such as to their countries of origin, to Palestinian cause, to global Islamic networks that funds mosques and train imams.

These three distinct examples illustrate well the different faces of European Islam, the way Islamic religion is interpreted and manifested by European citizens of different origins. The Muslim past of Cordoba, and the issue of conversion (reversion) to Islam, Muslim immigration and transnational loyalties (Palestine cause), a young schoolboy in Berlin and integration—all these cases witness the different façades of European Islam. Each case brings forth different forms of praying, and the changing frontiers between private religion and public visibility, personal piousness and public perceptions, between faith and politics; collective street praying and political manifestation, student praying in a public school, and convert praying in front of a converted mosque. Each of these performances bring forth the question of space and its neutrality, whether secularism is a condition for pluralism or a hindrance of the multi-religious, the multi-cultural society was constantly tested in all these cases. A public school in Berlin, a public Square in front of the Cathedral in Milan, and the Mezquita in Cordoba are all in different ways revelations of the tensions between the secular and the religious, as well as between different religions.

The issue of space, citizenship and State authority are closely related with each other. These cases reveal the ways in which religious identities change and contest politics of secularity and neutrality. Politics of praying reveal the question of ownership and exclusion in space, the norms that organize a space and the imprint of State authority that defines and controls the frontiers between private and public distinctions, religious and sacred norms, established citizens and 'strangers'.

Religious Visibility as Public Agency

The public space has a reciprocal relationship with democracy in that it allows for the appearance of new debates and new actors. Through their capacity to interrupt the established order of power-relations, newcomers question—as critical movements—the consensual norms of societies. In this way, the public space offers a stage of visibility for actors, including those who do not share the values of the majority and those who do not enjoy the same rights of citizenship. Like in a theatre, the public space is where different actors appear on stage and learn to perform a piece together; they can be found in both consensus and confrontation and communicate in both verbal and non-verbal ways. One can also think of the public space as a social text—a script that

actors take ownership of, improvise with, and reinvent as they seek to make it come off successfully. The public sphere, like a theatre, is not a purely discursive and rational place where opinions and words are exchanged solely in order to reach a consensus. It is a venue where an unpredictable social drama takes place that portrays the singularities of individuals and the pluralism of worldviews.⁸

It is in representing the visual aspects of cultural and religious difference that Islamic actors stand out and break from the consensual secular order. There is a performative and repetitive action, rehearsal of the staging of actors and their manifestation in public life. Meanwhile, public action is not always fueled by ideological convictions, nor is it always the product of a collective organization, as is perhaps the case with political movements. The wearing of the Islamic headscarf (the veil or *hijab*) by girls in public schools and the act of performing Islamic prayers in the streets of European capitals display a particular mode of religious agency: silent, repetitive and performative. Thus, the public manifestation of the Muslim actor can be accomplished mutely, sporadically, and intermittently, all the while participating in the elaboration of an alternative public imagination.

Cornelius Castoriadis has attracted our attention to the role of collective imagination in the making of history. To capture the process by which history and politics come into being, he gives a special place in his work to the imagination. For him, “history is (...) impossible and inconceivable outside of the productive and creative role of imagination (...) in its historical making.”⁹ Indeed, as Nicolas Poirier points out, in Castoriadis’ works from the 1960s onwards the language of praxis progressively gives way to that of the imagination as a guiding concept for the potential elucidation of society and history.¹⁰

Religious visibility as a mode of public agency participates in the production of collective imagination and is involved in the creation of history. Staging religious signs and habits in the public space constitutes the (re)appearance of an entire repertory of actions derived from the Islamic corpus of Quran and Sunnah. Rituals and practices of piety, in so far as they are manifested publicly, become visible to the eyes of others and are transmitted by the staging of performances as well as images. The visibility of public agency is a vector for communal imagination, creating horizontal bonds of recognition between individuals who do not necessarily share the same faith or ethnic identity.

8 Erving Goffman, *Les cadres de l'expérience*, trans. Isaac Joseph, Michel Dartevelle and Pascale Joseph, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, collection Sens commun, 1991).

9 Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris: Seuil, 2006), p. 220.

10 Nicolas Poirier, *L'ontologie politique de Cornelius Castoriadis: Création et Institution* (Paris: Payot, 2009), p. 244.

Thus, practices such as the wearing of the *hijab* in schools, public prayer, or the commerce of *halal* food not only publicly express the presence of Muslims in Europe, they also participate in the (re)production of a religious collective imagination in which Islamic actors can recognize themselves and connect to each other. It is public action then—including the pious practices of the Islamic habitus and its appearance on the secular public stage—that produces a new collective imagination. This development is the result of the modern condition of mobility, the disintegration of the links of belonging, the displacement of religion, and of immigration and the crossings from East to West. In the context of current European immigration, Islam, as a force for the creation of social ties between people confined to a locality, a particular faith, and a community, becomes the constituent reference point for the bond of collective imagination. Mobility and up-rooting are the modern conditions that allow for the disembeddedness and the creation of horizontal links of social imagination through which people simultaneously recognize themselves and gain awareness of the existence of others.¹¹

Unlike discursive modes of political action, public agency presents a performative mode of piety, comprising bodily gestures and rituals. Religious public agencies are carried by social imaginaries and images rather than by a well-defined corpus of ideologies and solid ideas developed in the hands of few. They make part of the ‘popular culture’ to the extent that new, mass and social media, television, film and internet contributes to the circulation of these images and performances. Unlike ideas, images more easily circulate and cross over national borders and linguistic barriers. Public agency, differing from political action that necessarily seeks rational and sustainable organization, can be carried on in an ad hoc, sporadic and intermittent manner, reminding a ‘happening’. And, finally, if political action attempts at transforming the social world by means of alternating power, public agency reveals the actor and manifests an alternative social imaginary that disrupts the social order and its established norms. The source of contestation and change is not situated in some time in the future but in the very present moment, in the moment when the actor appears and makes visible the contested religious difference.

The emergence of a pious public actor operates like a snapshot in our imagination and provokes a controversial event, for it has the effect of destabilizing established categories and boundaries.¹² Like in an artistic event or happening, the ‘Islamic performance’ is staged in a nearly instantaneous and spontaneous

11 Charles Taylor, *Varieties of Religion*, p. 83.

12 For an approach to public space and the role of events, cf. Michel Barthélémy and Louis Quéré, *La mesure des événements publics*, (research report for the CNRS; Paris: CEMS, 1991).

manner. A true repertory of religious acts has now produced a disruptive effect on the established order of public life. As Erving Goffman has argued, ruptures of social frameworks are introduced by those from below and are actions that seek to disturb and discredit the opponent.¹³ Their eruption ensues from a breach of the site of social contact that tests the limits of the secular neutrality and indifference of the public space.¹⁴

Contestations are not always produced by ideologies, by words and a written corpus, but can also be expressed in the corporeal manifestation of the Muslim actor and his religious difference in the public space—a site to which he is not welcomed. The public space, although it suggests an open space, accessible for all citizens, always knows frontiers of inclusion and exclusion; it is reserved for some and forbidden to others.¹⁵ And the entry of pious Muslim actors into the public space violates the consensual norms and reveals these unacknowledged rules. From this angle, visibility should be conceptualized as a form of public agency that plays an active role in the emergence of dissent, contest and the deployment of an area of conflict and confrontation. In its phenomenological dimension, public agency introduces another concept of politics, thus leading to a redefinition of politics itself.¹⁶

For Etienne Tassin, a rehabilitation of the phenomenality of politics relates to public agency and the appearance of actors. As he wrote, one can identify, in fact, “three virtues characteristic to political action: the *revelation* of an agent through action and speech; the linking together of actors; and the *institution* of a space of appearance or occurrence that unfolds via the consensual act.”¹⁷ The definition of the public space as a space of occurrence leads us to a new understanding of political struggle as the struggle for visibility. From this perspective, one acquires citizenship via public appearance and occurrence. The courage to appear, which, according to Hannah Arendt, consists in abandoning

13 Erving Goffman, *Les cadres de l'expérience*, p. 417.

14 For the first time in the history of the Turkish Republic, a female deputy with a headscarf, member of a pro-Islamic party (Fazilet Partisi) entered into the Turkish parliament in April 1999. The emergence of this veiled female political figure, Merve Kavakçı, has raised vague protest from leftist delegates and the press, with calls to maintain the principle of *laïcité* in Turkey. Ultimately, she was stripped of her citizenship. Cf. Nilüfer Göle, ‘Islam in Public: New Visibilities and New Imaginaries’, in: *Public Culture* 14 (2002), pp. 173–190.

15 Nancy Fraser, ‘Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to a Critique of Actually Existing Democracy’, in: *Social Text* 25/26 (1990), pp. 56–80.

16 Etienne Tassin (ed.), *Hannah Arendt: L'humaine condition politique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003).

17 Etienne Tassin, ‘La phénoménologie de l'action, une politique du monde’, in: Tassin, *Hannah Arendt*, pp. 47–61.

the shelter of the private sphere to expose oneself in the public space, is a way of proving one's citizenship. Through reintroducing Arendt's idea about the role of ordinary heroes in the phenomenology of politics, Tassin helps us to establish the relationship between public appearance and political action.

From this perspective, the public space is not only a place of regulation, where the Republic unfolds under State seal, where rational and legal procedures are laid bare: it is a place where social actors confront and reinvent the standards and forms of communal life. With this interpretation of the public sphere, we approach the idea that society is created by social movements. According to Alain Touraine, social movements lie at the heart of the wisdom of human societies that "have the ability not only to reproduce or even adapt their learning mechanisms and political decision-making in a changing environment but also, and above all, that are able to create guidelines and to change them—to *generate their objectives and their normativity*."¹⁸ Through this emphasis on social movements, the actor becomes actor in affirmation of his collective identity; in other words, he becomes actor through the naming of his adversary and the defining issues of his struggle.¹⁹ But, unlike the theory of social movements, the notion of the public sphere that is developed in this chapter through the prism of Islam offers a definition of actor and action that is not reducible to a dimension of collective identity.

According to the methodology of the public space, the actor does not pre-exist his action but is revealed through action and speech. It is the action–appearance that reveals the actor. In the words of Louis Quéré, "the public space (...) is first and foremost a phenomenal reality, a reality that happens, that manifests as a perceptible phenomenon through social practices."²⁰ In public action, the actor remains a person versus being dissolved in the anonymity of collective action. Her public protest can be made in a personal and singular way. The act is embodied, dwelling in a form and in a place. The corporeal and spatial aspects of personal performance are constitutive of social action. The conflict does not play out between two actors like in the case of social movement but is presented to all for public judgment, which is always plural.²¹ In public agency, dissent and contest, produced in this case by religious difference, does not act as an affirmation of a collective identity that preceded the action. This difference takes shape or becomes visible in so

18 Alain Touraine, *La Voix et le regard*, (Paris: Seuil, 1978), p. 80.

19 Alain Touraine, *La Voix et le regard*, p. 9.

20 Louis Quéré, 'L'espace public: De la théorie politique à la métathéorie sociologique', in: *Quaderni*, 18 (1992), p. 80.

21 Hannah Arendt, *Condition de l'homme moderne* (Paris: Pocket, 1983).

far as devotional practices are manifested in a personal, corporeal, and spatial manner. The negotiation between personal piety and public appearance constitutes a source of perpetual tension, reflexivity and readjustment for the actor; after all, religion is not a given category that can be acquired and fixed, but demands perpetual work, learning, discipline and surveillance. Particularly within a secular European context, Islamic piety demands a constant monitoring of faith and active self-presentation in public.²²

This personal dimension, embodied and elaborated through Islamic difference, does not signify a process of 'individuation' of Islam and points to the weakening of the collective. On the contrary, the appearance of Islam in public participates in collective imagination and creates a dynamic sense of belonging in an imagined community through which a distinctive religious habitus takes shape. The definition of agency, personal and public, as the fashioning of self and the production of a way of life, namely an Islamic habitus, is further reinforced by the religious corpus. In the Muslim tradition or *sunnah*, Islam valorizes mimetic mechanisms of learning and living their religion; Muslims are invited to emulate their Prophet in his words and his deeds. The *sunnah* provides a shared medium, a repertory for Muslims everywhere in the world, that enables a symbolic connection with the genesis of Islam and functions as the common reference point in their religious discourse, as in the formation of an imaginary community.²³

Social action is closely related with rational strategies of actors struggling for recognition and power. However the religious visibility as a form of public agency does not always imply 'intentional' strategies. The visibility does not always translate the will of the actor; on the contrary, the actor can make religious difference visible unwittingly, unintentionally. Practices like fasting, prayer, and dietary codes are among the Islamic prescriptions that Muslims consider as religious duties. They do not practice to make them visible, but to reinforce their faith. But once these rituals become the object of public attention, they acquire a form of new awareness, even in the eyes of Muslims. In this process, subjective meanings and public perceptions are mutually transformed. Meanwhile, apprehension regarding any manifestation of religion as an instrumentalization for political ends can easily lead to the denial of religion in the public.

22 Jeanette Jouili, *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints: Women in the Islamic Revival in Europe* (Stanford University Press, 2015).

23 John L. Esposito (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 305.

Public attention to Islam propels Muslims and Islamic symbols to the centre of the public space: clichés, images, and representations of Islam proliferate in the spotlight. They circulate on a European-scale in a process of trans-nationalization. Islamic actors intensify their differences and render themselves more visible as they use the spotlight to gain access to the public space. We can speak of an 'over-visibility' of religious faith both as a mode of self-fashioning and as public perception of difference. Islam becomes an issue of religious bodily rituals, figural representations, a question of cultural difference that is exasperated, over-visibility in the public sphere. The process of 'over-visibility' of Islam points to the non-recognition of religious norms and values as legitimate and designates the 'social disapproval' of Islam in European publics.²⁴

To sum up, religious identities are reshaped in a dialectical process in which individuals and groups define themselves and are defined by others. Identities are multi-faceted, expressed in cultural codes, embodied and carried in symbols, but are also relational, capable of shifting and changing in the process of encountering the others, in contesting the prevalent norms of self and society. The public sphere is the medium in which the religious differences are staged by means of bodily rituals and non-secular norms of intimacy and privacy. In contexts of migration, religion goes through changes because of territorial dislocations and discontinuities with traditions. Religious identities are reconstructed in turning faith into a novel awareness and agency that leads to new modes of Muslim self-fashioning but also to the contestations of the prevalent secular norms of the modern societies.

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24 For the relationship between over-visibility and social disapproval, cf. Oliver Voirol, 'Visibilité et invisibilité: Une introduction', in: *Réseaux* 129–130 (2005), p. 17.

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