# Knowledge, Empowerment and Religious Authority Among Pious Muslim Women in France and Germany

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In both France and Germany, as probably elsewhere in Europe throughout the 1980s and 90s, a sizable number of mosques and Muslim organizations opened their doors to women and started to provide prayers rooms, religious instruction,[1] and other services exclusively for female believers. In both countries the number of women benefiting from these services, in particular from religious instruction, has clearly reached that of male Muslims.[2] In addition, as on a global level, in European contexts the spread of media technologies has facilitated knowledge acquisition among lay Muslims, male and female alike.[3] One could conclude from there that a "democratization" of religious authority was about to emerge, as the pluralization of knowledge diffusion enables the believer to engage individually with the inherited religious tradition and to thereby increase her own interpretative authority. One could further argue that this process would sooner or later contribute to shifts in the very structures of authority, opening the path for women to become authorized interpreters of religious sources.

Looking at the current academic investigations of Muslim women, especially in European contexts, we can indeed observe a tendency to draw a linear linkage between knowledge appropriation and transformations of religious authority. While public opinion, supported by populist academic studies,[4] anticipates that the dissemination of religious knowledge would lead to a new subjection to authority (and thereby prevent women from following dominant Western gender conceptions), scholars working in the field have started to issue a sort of counter-discourse, tending to draw an immediate causality between knowledge acquisition and shifts in religious authority in favor of women's participation in the production and circulation of religious discourse.[5]

However, we should add that the relationship between knowledge acquisition and religious authority or modes of religious authority in more general terms has so far only rarely been systematically addressed in studies on Muslims in Europe[6]; the main focus of investigation has remained on processes of identity formation and reconfiguration of Muslims (both male and female) in non-Muslim European contexts.[7] Moreover, in most studies religious authority has mainly been used as a synonym for "leadership," while authority has either been interpreted as something imposed on the subject or something against which one attempts to resist. In order to go one step further, and to address the relationship between knowledge appropriation and religious authority aptly, it seems necessary to (re)turn to some basic questions, such as how authority is constituted through knowledge, how it is mediated, how it is challenged, reconfigured, but also how it is reconfirmed.

Rather than tackling these questions on a purely theoretical level, we focus on young Muslim women in two national settings: France and Germany. This is based on separate investigations conducted between 2000 and 2001 (Schirin Amir-Moazami) and between 2003 and 2005 (Jeanette S. Jouili) in various Sunni-Muslim organizations in France and Germany.[8] While a certain bias lies in the fact that we focused on Islamic organizations that all have Sunni backgrounds and that have mostly put major effort into the transmission of Islamic knowledge, we were unable to denote any major differences in the ways in which the women involved in these organizations relate to "authority" or to the appropriation and circulation of knowledge. However, we also have to admit that the main goal of our fieldwork and interviews did not consist in a comparison of different Islamic organizations, or, consequently, the role and place of women therein.[9] The main purpose for selecting interviewees from these Islamic organizations was to gather a sample of "practicing" and mostly publicly committed Muslims who are engaged with Islam on a collective, institutionalized level.

What is interesting, however, is that although we did our fieldwork in different settings and completely independently from each other, we gathered

quite similar data, and arrived at similar conclusions. We assume that this is not only the result of various discussions and common viewpoints we share about the topic, but also stems from the data itself. This does not mean that there is just one "type" of Muslimness or only one single relationship of female Muslims to knowledge and authority, but there is definitely — despite internal variations — a certain trend among institutionally organized committed Muslim women.

Since Max Weber's well-known work, religious authority has typically been studied from the perspective of organizational stratification and many scholars have tried to get closer to some kind of "definition." While our terminology is clearly informed by these works, we contend that it is necessary to depart from the mere equation of "authority" with "leadership." Beyond the question of the formation or reformation of authority, what interests us is the relationship between the subject and authority. In this inquiry we will use authority both as "leadership" and as "authoritative" discourse, which is related to power, while focusing on the ways in which a particular type of Muslim — women with a commitment to piety — incorporate, give credit to and thereby also mold religious authority. It is thus not only about the internal logics of authority but mostly about the relationship between the subject and authority.

We analyze through the lens of these women the relationship between knowledge accumulation and religious authority, concentrating, on the one hand, on the way in which these women engage with religious authorities — meant as both personified and discursive authority — and, on the other hand, on their discourses situated within the religious fields in which they are involved. In order to account for their subjective motivations and desires, we attempt to go beyond the common binary drawn between subjection *or* resistance to authority. Instead, we show that for these women both a reflexive *and* also an affirmative engagement with religious authorities constitutes a necessary condition for the acquisition and circulation of religious knowledge and for processes of incorporating piety, which the women deem central for their self-understanding as Muslims.

We begin with an inquiry into the ways in which these women position themselves as knowledgeable Muslim women within the wider Muslim community. Here, we show first that the women's engagement in the process of acquiring Islamic knowledge is largely coupled with their aim to cultivate a "pious self." Although we are firmly aware of various other implications, we use the term "piety" here mainly as conceptualized by Saba Mahmood, that is to say in terms of a cultivation of religious virtues that are embedded in a specific Islamic tradition.[10] Beyond this individual dimension, we illustrate that the women's aim to acquire and circulate knowledge is simultaneously coupled with a sense of responsibility towards the construction of a virtuous community, which they try to put into practice in a twofold way. First, they

relate it to a reaffirmation of motherhood, and to the aim to educate the next generation. Second, they articulate the goal to transmit knowledge and Islamic virtues to the wider Muslim community and also, to a lesser extent, to non-Muslim public spheres.

In the second part we address the question of whether, through the women's perspective, we can speak about a feminization of religious knowledge giving rise to a feminization of religious authority. Here we show, on the one hand, that the women's discourses, based on their appropriation of religious knowledge, put strict gender divisions effectively under pressure and potentially lead to shifts in parental and paternal forms of authority structures. Their involvement in transmitting Islam both on an informal but also on an institutional level implies a certain shift in traditional male dominated authority structures. On the other hand, we illustrate that for such shifts the recourse to a "pure Islam," which is coupled with reflexive engagement *and* a confirmation of religious authorities, as well as authorized discourse, constitutes the necessary starting point. This will lead us to the third and last point, in which we show that for the women we worked with, an increased awareness of the importance of religious authorities, both for their daily life conducted within the family milieu and within the Muslim community, is crucial for processes of incorporating piety. What counts in light of the women's priority given to the constitution of a pious self is not so much a struggle for transformations in authority structures, but an essential need for religious authorities in order to reach the desired effect of self-reform and piety.

## Women's Participation in the Acquisition and Diffusion of Islamic Knowledge

### Acquiring knowledge and religious sensibilities

Most of the women we interviewed got involved in processes of "Islamization" in their adolescence. This process was always accompanied by a search for a better understanding of their religion. While often initially motivated by their experiences of 'otherness' and a desire to be able to better defend their religious heritage, as literature has sometimes stressed,[11] there is another crucial aspect that the women emphasized in a more advanced stage. They came to consider the acquisition of religious knowledge as the *sine qua non* for developing a sound faith that is strong enough to enable them to resist the "temptations" of a secular environment. Although the women claimed that it was their already existing faith that encouraged them to increase their interest and commitment to Islam, they also considered a "basic" faith unsatisfactory. Thereby they repeated a well-known dictum articulated by both classical and contemporary Muslim scholars that there was "no true faith

without understanding."[12] They considered committing themselves to the study of their religion a basic means of cultivating their faith in order to effectively transform their lives. Islamic knowledge should immerse the believer in a permanent atmosphere filled with divine presence, which the women experience as mostly nonexistent in secularized societies.

The women's appeal to a particular relationship between knowledge and faith refers to how Islamic thought had assessed religious knowledge (*ʿilm*) and its dissemination. The virtues of knowledge are repeatedly emphasized in the founding texts, where knowledge is understood to be in a causal relationship with faith (*iman*): Faith emerges and can grow through knowledge. This is why classical scholarship has turned *ʿilm* into a central Islamic "metaphor."[13]

When the women underlined the importance of knowledge for the cultivation of their faith, they generally stressed two different effects that knowledge has for the believer. First, it is the concrete knowledge of Islamic dogma, the "facts," as the women sometimes put it, which is considered essential to understanding one's religion, and to be convinced and therefore to believe more profoundly. Faith, instead of being a hindrance to the accumulation of knowledge in the women's perspective, constitutes its necessary starting point and vice versa. Such assumptions challenge dominant conceptions of religion rooted in a post-Enlightenment tradition, which frames religion as a sub-category lying in semantic opposition to transcendental ideas of reason and individual autonomy.[14] Moreover, as we will show more appropriately later on, the women's desire to approach Islam cognitively in order to better "understand" it is often paralleled by their critiques of their parents' generation, in particular, their supposed "traditional," "non-reflexive" emulation of religious practices.

Alternatively, *ʿilm* is related to a more spiritual approach of the transmission of Islamic contents. Here, the goal is especially the cultivation of certain emotional inner dispositions, which are the very basis on which faith is to be constructed and fortified. A social worker teaching a *tafsir* class in an Islamic women's organization in Cologne[15] explained this relationship between faith and knowledge in the following way:

> It is like in any other relationship. To lead a good relationship, whether as a spouse, or as a friend or in parent-children relationships, all relationships require hard work. For the God — human relationship, it is the same thing. This is work on the God — human relationship: through the acquisition of knowledge, you get closer to God. This is the interaction of the cognitive and the spiritual aspect of faith. On the one hand, it is the cognitive acquisition of simple knowledge, facts, hadiths, verses of the Qurʾān and the meaning of their contents. On the other

hand, it has an effect on the relationship with God. The more I have knowledge, of course, provided that I am convinced of these things, the more I am fulfilled by faith, the more proud I am of my faith, and the deeper are those roots. The more my faith becomes unshakeable. This spiritual growth is absolutely linked to this cognitive growth, which one achieves through access to the sources.

While this perception of the importance of acquiring Islamic knowledge is very much focused on the believer as she aspires to be a "pious subject,"[16] there is yet another important dimension with a much more collective orientation involved, which we will illustrate in the next sections.

### Motherhood and knowledge diffusion to the next generation

It is important to note that the women often justified their search for knowledge in a gendered way. Thus, they tended to combine notions of the "good (educated) Muslim" with that of the "good (educated) mother." Here, their search for knowledge often goes hand-in-hand with an enhancement of the role and importance of motherhood. Rearing children in their perspective gains particular importance because the woman thereby fulfils the requirement of transmitting Islamic values and norms to the next generation.

The interviewees thus by no means conceived of the "naturally given" role of the woman as mother and "lady of the house" as a limitation; rather they saw this as a privilege, most notably because by bringing up her children the woman is esteemed as the most important person in charge of educating the next generation. She, therefore, holds a great social and political responsibility. As the "first teachers of the children" (a common reference to the sayings of the Prophet, which the women often used during the interviews), women are supposed to be in charge of the construction or maintenance of the Muslim community and of society in a broader sense. It is therefore important to underline that the high value attributed to knowledge accumulation not only contains an individual component, as described above, but also has a strong collective implication: the educated mother is in charge of serving the community through religious know-how and also through scientific and pedagogical means.

This simultaneously points to a particular understanding of private and public domains, and of the borderlines between these two spheres. Through the construction of a "private" domain that simultaneously represents and reproduces public concerns, domesticity gains a public relevance. The high status and responsibility that the women attribute to the role of the mother comes close to the concept of "political motherhood" elaborated by Pnina Werbner.[17] In this concept, the domestic sphere constitutes both a separate entity and a sphere, which gains public or political importance. Hence, the

domestic sphere, as the women conceptualized it, cannot be limited to a domain that is constitutive for processes of individualization, but instead turns out to be a space that is largely societal and political. From this point of view we can argue that the women's discourse brings to the fore an enhancement of what is usually considered the hidden "private domain" in that their premise of the "educated mother" gains societal importance.

The importance the women attributed to the religiously instructed and well educated mother sounds like a *déjà vu* of the reformist discourse that emerged especially in the second half of the 19th century in most important centers of the Ottoman Empire,[18] and which initiated a shift from the father as the legitimate educator of the next generation to the mother, who was then considered the primary instance for the transmission of moral values and religious education. As Lila Abu-Lughod's *Remaking Women*[19] suggests, the emphasis was placed on the scientific dimension of childrearing, and thereby on the importance of a new type of motherhood. The ideal of the "new" "educated" mother was related to a redefinition of domesticity as a separate sphere, which was gaining a central position in the formation of society. Similar to the women's contemporary discourses, the emphasis by Muslim reformers on the importance of educated mothers was anchored in the resurrection of core texts and their contextualization in the new settings, hence, the re-creation and renewal of Islamic thought. This enterprise was condensed into the key notions of *islah* (reform) and *tajdid* (renewal). Moreover, Muslim reformers envisaged the domestic sphere as a space that should be the basis for the creation of a collective subject, based on Islamic virtues, envisaged for the wider Islamic (transnational) *umma* through religious instruction and the rediscovery of "true Islam" through appropriate knowledge and guidance. This focus is taken up today by young Muslim women residing in European societies.

With their emphasis on "scientific motherhood,"[20] the women confirm traditional gender roles, as also prescribed in orthodox discourses, while simultaneously putting into question the idea of women's confinement to a purely domestic role. Moreover, while enhancing the ideal of the educated mother, they also attributed a high relevance to their public roles beyond the idea of educating the next generation, yet referring to Islamic discourses as the main authoritative source. This introduces another dimension involved in the women's importance attributed to knowledge acquirement and education.

### Knowledge diffusion in da'wa activities

One of the effects of religious knowledge acquisition is that it enables women to participate in the growing institutionalized dissemination of this knowledge in the European Islamic landscape. Apart from numerous informal

and semi-private initiatives that the women set up themselves, more and more female teachers are employed in the different established Islamic female and gender-mixed organizations. In both countries, several independent women-run centers have emerged during the last ten years that provide Islamic education, besides professional counseling work and secular education programs, necessary for a successful interaction with the majority society. This work of knowledge dissemination can best be analyzed in terms of *da'wa* work (literally: "call" or "invitation"). From the early days of Islam, *da'wa* has been viewed as a duty incumbent on the believers in order to encourage fellow Muslims in their struggle to lead more devout and pious lives. Today, it has become the most substantial constant factor of contemporary Islamic activism, whether in Muslim majority societies or within the migrant communities in the West. It can be considered, as Charles Hirschkind puts it, the "conceptual resources grounded in a long tradition of Islamic practice and scholarly inquiry,"[21] which are now being given a new shape within the contemporary minority situation of Muslims in Europe with specific needs.[22]

In order to better understand the contemporary dynamics of *da'wa*, one has to look back at how the Reformist Salafi thinkers of the early 20th century significantly shifted the sense of the concept. While *da'wa* was traditionally understood as an activity to be conducted under the aegis of the clerics, Reformist thinkers claimed it to be the duty of every Muslim, thereby opening the path for lay persons to be involved in it.[23] This "democratization" of *da'wa* turned out to be particularly beneficial for women since they were now included in the *da'wa* duty and activities.[24]

The modern shift in the understanding of *da'wa* has also been translated into the work of the Islamic teaching centers in Europe that we investigated. These centers do not limit themselves to re-Islamization through knowledge dissemination, but also encourage their students to participate in *da'wa* activities.[25] As part of their commitment to Islam, several women who were engaged in this kind of *da'wa* work attempted to encourage their fellow Muslims to find their way to the benefits that they themselves experienced in their own religious trajectory. They described how and to what extent they felt that their knowledge encouraged them to disseminate it in their day-to-day environment. This duty is considered an Islamic obligation, as described by the social worker from Cologne, quoted above:

> From an Islamic point of view, it is '*khayrukum man ta'allama al-qur'ān wa 'allamahu*' which means 'the best among you are those who learn the Qur'ān and teach it.' This is of course for me a theological motivation. Furthermore, it is a responsibility for which one will not only be rewarded but will be held accountable if you don't hand down this knowledge. In this respect, I see it as my duty.

It is obvious that the *da'wa* work is also encouraged by the minority situation in which Muslims live in Europe. Given this minority status, it is no longer a matter of course for Muslims to receive religious instruction. The effort must be made by the believers themselves, sometimes under quite preliminary and provisional conditions. Thus, pious Muslims feel an urgent need to transmit their Islamic knowledge to Muslims of future generations in order to encourage them to lead pious lives in an environment that they qualify as being predominantly non-religious. They see this as the condition for the survival of the Islamic minority community, for the consolidation of its identity, and as a means of maintaining the boundaries that enable it to resist the "secular Western" way of life (considered to be filled with numerous temptations) and to resist its pressures to assimilate.

Most of the women simultaneously added another aspect to these implications of the notion of *da'wa* related to the non-Muslim environment. In this respect, *da'wa* is less undertaken in a "missionary" spirit with the goal to convert, as often anticipated by public opinion, but rather with the idea of a rectification of negative representations of Islam within European public spheres. This is also why representatives of Islamic organizations, conference speakers and theologians often ask Muslims to display exemplary behavior, especially concerning those who are publicly visible through Islamic dress codes. *Da'wa*, in this sense, requires the acquisition of a deeper knowledge that enables one to refute the negative ideas stemming from the non-Muslim environment. For women, this means in particular to do instructional work in the sense of attempting to work against the widespread assumption that Islam inherently produces gender inequality.

In this regard, the women's emphasis on knowledge and education and on the necessity to transmit it should additionally be understood as an attempt to enhance the status of Islam by detaching it from its common connotation with illiteracy. Apart from a mere 'internal' logic directed at the Islamic community, this argument should thus be read in its relationship to the wider public spheres of French/German society in which the women interact. Here the emphasis on the necessity of female education, prescribed by Islam, entails a counter-discursive strategy *vis-à-vis* public opinion, which commonly associates Islam with irrationality or backwardness, and which, especially in the French case, almost categorically refuses to acknowledge that publicly committed, pious and organized Muslim women are educated and rational actors.[26] Thus, the women attempt to replace the stereotype of their mere passivity through the counter-image of an educated *and* Islamically committed woman. *Da'wa* is thus not only experienced as an obligation imposed on oneself, but also as a very personal "desire to disseminate a word one deems useful to the individual and to society."[27] In this sense, *da'wa* becomes a "vocation."[28]

So far, we have mostly focused on the ways in which the women we interviewed justified the necessity of acquiring knowledge and becoming educated believers through an enhanced consciousness of the value of their own capacities to disseminate Islamic knowledge and to actively participate, therefore, in the strengthening of the Muslim communities in France and in Germany. Although this capacity already indicates a certain degree of authority appropriation, in the next sections we will try to more systematically address the relationship between knowledge/education and authority.

## Knowledge Acquisition and "Pure Islam"

Most of our interviewees stressed how much acquiring Islamic knowledge helped them to better appreciate their religion, which they had sometimes experienced as "oppressive" because, as they put it, patriarchal traditions were often legitimated in the family milieu with reference to Islam. Therefore, it is through their capacity to distinguish between "tradition" and "religion" that the women claimed Islam as a source for reinterpreting certain elements within the family traditions, which they perceived and experienced as being too strict. The defense of Islam is then situated in a critique of custom, or as the women put it, of tradition. In this context, the women frequently spoke about interference by local "Turkish" or "Arab" traditions with Islam. They stressed that it was because of their parents' affiliations with these "migrated traditions" and with local customs that they suffered from strict gender norms, including an unequal sexual morality and restrictions for women regarding study.

The arguments used by these women recall the dominant contemporary Islamic discourse, which again emerged from the Islamic reform movement at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries and was successively diffused by Islamic movements. *'Ilm* and the corollary notion of *tarbiya* (education) became key terms for the goal of individual social and moral reconstruction as well as for the Muslim community, deemed in decline.[29] The bad state of the *umma*, denounced by reformists, was a result of the "*ignorance*" of the Muslim populations, a condition captured by the Islamically connoted term *jahiliyya*. In this perspective, the dissemination of a "pure" Islam, detached from all traditional deviations, can re-establish the glorious state of past Muslim civilizations.[30] It is within this logic that these women identified various problems of the Muslim community, especially the unsatisfactory condition of Muslim women not only in Muslim majority countries but in particular in the context of migration as a consequence of "ignorance" attributed to and personified in their parents' generation. Accordingly, the women often accused non-educated Muslims (especially of their parent's generation) of blindly adapting customs, in particular prohibitions, without having seriously studied the Islamic texts.

The entrance point through which this struggle is channeled is on the one hand the accumulation of knowledge and on the other hand the emphasis on the necessity to circulate and transmit it. For the women we interviewed, proper knowledge of Islam was regarded as a precondition to contribute to the welfare of the Islamic *umma.* "Ignorance" of the "genuine" Islam, terms often used, is considered the reason for the crisis Muslims are experiencing on a global, as well as on a local, scale, which means in this context, in their daily reality in France and Germany.

Through the politics of authenticity, gender arrangements are not necessarily directly attacked in favor of a completely reversed understanding of gender roles — for example the "Western" idea of gender equality (which is, of course, itself multiple). They are challenged from "within" and also with the internal tools of argument and confutation that are part of the tradition. This emerges most clearly through the propagated balance between the equality (towards God) and the simultaneous maintenance of certain differences between men's and women's social roles.

More importantly, the women's acquisition of religious knowledge and their emphasis on the multiple implications of education potentially become a means to shift the locus of the legitimate interpreter of Islam and to question misogynistic interpretations of religion, most notably when the very life strategies of the women are on the agenda. However, in order to address the question as to whether this process simultaneously constitutes a transformation in authority, or whether the women are at all longing for such transformation, it is necessary to look more carefully at various levels of authority within the different social fields in which these women interact.

### *Shifting parental and paternal authority*

The accumulation of religious knowledge potentially enhances the women's status within their families to the extent that the legitimate interpreter of the Islamic sources in this domain becomes elusive, or at least diversified. Thinking about the content, interpretation and transformation of (religious) authority, one clearly should bear in mind the impact of women in such domains as the extended family, the life of the married couple, or other settings like secular institutions (schools, university or workplaces), which are obviously also spaces that are intermingled with community structures. These domains, while not being *stricto senso* religious in any organized manner, are probably not less political, and have an impact on the shaping and circulation of discourses and warrant special emphasis, especially if we do not want to reproduce the dichotomy between "private" and "public" spaces that do not affect each other.

Here we could argue that the women's comparatively high social and cultural capital (understood in the Bourdieuan sense) — in particular, educational skills — as compared to the former generation thus constitutes a challenge to parental forms of authority, justified mostly in terms of generational and gender hierarchies, as they have often also become more knowledgeable in religious domains than their parents. The very fact that these women have increased their cultural capital, including religious know-how, not only allows them to fulfil their self-declared role as knowledgeable educators of the next generation and of the wider community, but also enables them to put forward suggestions for interpretations of the texts in favor of a more participatory notion of gender relations, even though they mostly attempt to back these up with authorized discourses.

In particular, the distinction between "pure Islam" and "custom" or "tradition" alludes to an intergenerational struggle over "right" or "wrong" versions of Islam and, within this, to an effort to enhance the status of Muslim women in the Islamic community. Hence, their comparatively higher educational skills potentially increase the women's abilities to develop certain kinds of leadership within the particular social field of the (extended) family. Here, knowledge or being knowledgeable as cultural capital implies an empowerment towards parental or, more broadly, domestic forms of authority. Although this kind of empowerment does not immediately affect or upgrade the women's positions within the religious establishment, it probably also contributes to the production and circulation of religious knowledge, even if this might be rather implicit and difficult to measure empirically. In order to make these assumptions more explicit, we could look, for example, at the women's strategies to contest limitations imposed by their family milieu on their right to pursue their educational or professional careers, or at their efforts to contest forced marriages.

We can see in the previous pages how much the women we interviewed insist on the necessity of acquiring Islamic knowledge as a religious duty. The same holds true when it comes to secular knowledge and education. To search knowledge, "even if it is in China" (a reference to the sayings of the Prophet, often taken up by the interviewees) proves to be one of the central elements in their life politics and is also the focal point around which transmitted forms of authority are potentially challenged or reestablished. This becomes clear, for example, through their strong emphasis on the necessity to be or become educated mothers, through which they simultaneously articulate a critique on restrictions against women acquiring knowledge, whether imposed by the family or by the community at large. The statement of a university student and mother of three children in Marseilles articulates this well:

> ( . . . ) if she [the mother] hasn't acquired the necessary knowledge, how will she accomplish her role appropriately? This is why in Islam it is an obligation to study. There is a hadith that says that searching for knowledge is an obligation for men and women, thus, for men *and* for women [emphasis put in by the woman], and a woman with enough knowledge can educate her children suitably, and can contribute to the positive evolution of society.[31]

As this quotation shows, with their emphasis on women's role as the "first teacher of the child," our interviewees strongly criticized the limitations imposed on women to pursue education both in Muslim majority contexts and within Muslim communities in Europe. In this regard, the enhancement of the role of the educated mother reveals an important step towards an internal redefinition of the traditions, within which these women have been often raised. But their acquired knowledge also becomes a justification for their aspirations for participating in professional activities. Having studied or received a professional formation is considered a resource that has to be put to the service of the community, once again, justified with Islamic references, notably the practice of the female companions of the Prophet, who are portrayed as having participated actively in all domains of social life in the community. The demand to work or to study (including *da'wa* activities) thus simultaneously reveals an outspoken or hidden critique on the limitations against women's participation in public matters, imposed both in Islamic societies and among Muslim communities in France or Germany.

As indicated above, another important example of the women's struggle against family restrictions is their rejection of forced marriages. Having themselves sometimes been confronted with this custom, they frequently questioned and criticized the practice of forced marriages, insisting that "Islam prohibits marriages against the will of the woman."[32] While contrasting their own "better knowledge" of Islam with the mute adoption of "migrated traditions" of their parents, the women often claimed that Islam provided them with rights like divorcing or choosing husbands on the basis of the principle of mutual respect — rights that although taken for granted in French and German societies, are not necessarily always accomplished within Muslim families.

The idea of marriages based on choice and mutual respect, which the women justified with Islam, is taken further when it comes to the concrete management of their lives as married couples. Those women who were already married at the time of the interview commonly claimed, for example, that they had negotiated with their future husbands before and after the wedding on the basis of sacred rules about daily life matters, particularly about their own rights as spouses — for example, the right to continue their studies

or to have a professional career. Some women argued that this unwritten contract encouraged their husbands to respect them and share certain tasks around the house, after they had evoked that "the Prophet Mohammed too helped his wives in the house and used to play with his children," as a woman in Marseilles put it.[33]

The interviewees narrated several examples of this kind, where the claim reaffirms Islamic principles, but in doing so requests more space for participation in the process of shaping Islamic norms. Moreover, it seems that at least in some life trajectories, the women were quite successful with their Islamically justified struggle in the family milieu. Both as far as the intergenerational struggle is concerned and with regard to the organization of the life of the married couple, authority is thus if not transformed then negotiated through shifts in the accumulation and transmission of Islamic knowledge.

Such observations are by no means completely new, and are confirmed in other studies conducted on Muslim women in both France and Germany.[34] However, what most of them have failed to systematize is how the women's recourse to a "pure Islam" is related to religious authority. In other words, in most works the recourse to an authentic Islam appears as a free floating set of references from which the believer is able to choose freely and in a utilitarian way what she "needs" for her daily life conduct. The reference to "true Islam" becomes, indeed, the major source of authority, appropriated through knowledge acquisition, and points to a certain degree of empowerment. However, it does not point to a detachment from religious authority, meant as "authorized discourse," as a source of liberation, but, quite on the contrary, confirms the attachment to it. As we will show in the next sections, the women's references to an "authentic Islam" is not based on a purely selective and pragmatic activity. To the contrary, it is inscribed in the reformist logic of revising Islam and making it fit again the requirements of their personal life contexts, instead of gradually discarding the theological and conceptual apparatus of Muslim traditions.

## The Women's Self-Positionings *vis-à-vis* Religious Authorities

In principle, it is obvious that acquiring profound religious knowledge, especially of the classical Islamic sciences, might enable women to produce and disseminate specifically feminized Islamic thought. We witness today that in different countries around the globe, in Muslim-majority countries (Iran, Malaysia) as much as in the Muslim Diaspora, where women's participation in Islamic networks, their combined efforts in studying Islamic sciences and conducting grass-roots work with other women, has engendered a trend that

has been called "Islamic feminism": women engage critically with the sacred texts as well as with the larger corpus of scripture and claim the right to re-interpret these sources. In their approaches, these women often break (either in a more radical or in a more modest way) with past restrictions against Islamic scholarship in order to rearrange the Islamic definition of gender relations to their advantage. In this sense, "Islamic feminism" challenges traditional religious authorities in the sense of questioning their interpretations, as well in the sense of claiming authority, justified through knowledge. Moreover, while their discourse had a certain impact in the different national contexts where these women's groups emerged, they are still rather marginalized and contested by the larger Islamic community.

Now, if we turn back to Europe, it seems that women's participation in Islamic organizations and in the processes of knowledge dissemination so far did not have the same impact, since there are only a few individuals whose work can be compared to those of the Islamic feminists cited above. The few exceptions are rather marginal phenomena, and their work is hardly known outside their own limited circles. In Cologne, for example, we encountered the Centre for Islamic Women's Studies and Women's Promotion ZIF (*Zentrum für Islamische Frauenforschung und -förderung*), whose members engage in this type of "feminist" method with the sacred texts and take a highly critical stance towards the male-dominated orthodoxy.[35] Because their exegetical work is conducted in an autonomous way, which often lies in open opposition to the methods established by the classical Islamic sciences of *tafsir* and *fiqh*, they suffer from marginalization by the larger Islamic public. Moreover, their ways of contesting established forms of religious authority has brought them into conflict with other Islamic organizations in Germany. Their main audience today is thus interfaith meetings, especially with other religious feminists. In other words, the request for participation and the women's ambitions to autonomously interpret the sacred texts might not necessarily be authorized on a broader structural scale both within the Islamic community and also within the wider European public spheres. Although the possibilities for the participation of women in the processes of knowledge transmission has, indeed, increased throughout the last decades, this does not necessarily imply an increase in the processes of knowledge production, which becomes part of the religious canon.

Furthermore, while one could at first glance imagine that the refusal and marginalization of such kinds of Islamic feminist movements is due to male dominance within Islamic organizations in Germany, it is interesting to observe that their work also did not seem to attract the majority of the pious Muslim women we talked to, who were engaged in these organizations. These women were either ignorant of the ZIF's work, although the two leading figures,

Amina Erbakan and Sabiha El-Zayat, personally connected with *Milli Görüs*'
Erbakan family, were familiar to them. Or they outspokenly disapproved of
their activities as being "too radical" in the sense of stretching the limits of the
established Islamic orthodoxy too far. Many women also described the ZIF as
being "too feminist." This latter critique can be better understood if one takes
into account the rejecting attitude with which the women generally dealt with
this notion. This mirrors a more general trend in contemporary Islam that tends
to associate feminism with "Westernness" and with a hostile attitude towards
men, and therefore as being potentially anti-Islamic.[36]

    Moreover, most of the pious women we interviewed, while being sensitive
to their own empowerment, do not necessarily want to "renew" Islam but
rather prefer to stay inside the "consensus" of established orthodoxy. One
woman, for example, described the Muslim women's organization in which
she works, comparing it to the ZIF in the following way: "This [her] group,
these are women who want to bring further their stuff, too. But . . . , they don't
fall outside the frame of the Koran or of Islam." It is with this attitude that the
majority of individual Muslim women or women's associations opt for a much
more accommodative stand towards mainstream Islam and its established
authorities. While their effort to instruct more and more Muslim women in
Islamic knowledge is also obviously a struggle for female empowerment,
within these organizations, the women quite consistently insist on the
necessity of leaving the right of interpreting the texts to the *ulama*. A female
conference speaker in Cologne, for example, warned her audience in this logic
"not to engage in a personal *ijtihad*," while at the same time rejecting what
she called "blind *taqlid*." She stressed the necessity of acquiring knowledge of
the sacred texts, but simultaneously underlined that this knowledge would not
enable the individual believer to draw her own conclusions. According to this
view, *ijtihad* is considered the prerogative of Islamic scholars. When advice is
needed, one should consult these scholars. This clearly puts into question the
commonly drawn causality between knowledge appropriation and
incorporation of (established) religious authority. Hence, in the women's
approaches, there is a great tension between the imperative for the
individual believer to acquire knowledge and to understand it by using
his own reason and the practice of relying on religious scholars for
authoritative interpretation. This seems to be a phenomenon typical of
contemporary Islamic movements.[37]

    Interestingly, it even seems to be their more profound knowledge of the
traditional Islamic sciences acquainting them with the *usul al-fiqh* (the Islamic
law, etc.) that has encouraged these women to emphasize the importance
of the *ulama*, and of remaining inside the Islamic consensus as part of the
religious dogma (*aqida*). It is also their familiarity with the authoritative

religious discourse that deepens their mistrust towards everything likely to be *bid'a* (unlawful innovation). Accordingly, those women who were most notably well instructed in Islamic theology regularly referred to Islamic authorities. They were cautious to assert that the opinions they circulated were "authorized" opinions, regularly invoking sentences like "there exists a consensus that . . ." Similarly, when asked about specific cases in Islamic law about which they felt insecure, they were reluctant to give their own opinion and advised us to consult a scholar.[38] Contrary to the widespread interpretation of an increasing individualization of knowledge appropriation, we can therefore argue that the acquisition of religious knowledge, facilitated through modern communicative means, might also have an objectifying effect: the more familiar the women we interviewed got with orthodox Islamic discourse, the more they seemed to reaffirm it.

Yet, we should also not be tempted to conclude that this leads to a simple conformism or to homogenization. The women especially criticized the "traditional emulation" of their parents' generation, and rejected conforming to the Islamic contemporary discourse inspired by reformism, or "blind *taqlid*." Therefore, they claimed their Islamic right and duty to consult the primary texts in order to give credit to the opinions they heard. They also tended to consult several partly divergent opinions and compare them to each other. In addition, it is, of course, important to remember that the scholars to whom the women refer do not represent stagnant opinions but adapt themselves more and more to minority conditions and the different needs of the individual Muslim believer in the diaspora context. Given the multitude of different and changing opinions within orthodox scholarship, the women who are well acquainted with the Islamic sciences use these differences in order to search for opinions that might give them a larger scope of free action in their concrete day-to-day lives. An example of how scholars who modify legal advice become a support for women is illustrated by the example of a young student hoping to become a singer. She had been discouraged by her entourage because of the common opinion that women are not allowed to sing in front of a mixed public (according to the *hadith* "The woman's voice is *'awra*" (*sawt al mar'a 'awra*).[39] Being herself very well instructed in Islamic sciences, this woman started to search for the different scholarly opinions on this issue. She had already found out that it was a "weak *hadith*" but one that had obviously been accepted by consensus. Only when Yusuf al-Qardawi — who himself changed his opinions concerning women significantly[40] — issued a sort of fatwa on this question, confirming that this rule was indeed based on a "weak *hadith*" and was therefore null and void was she able to justify her singing ambitions to her family and in her Muslim environment.

It is interesting to note that these women sometimes take apologetic positions when repeating (with more or less conviction) the traditional rationale behind aspects of Islamic law that disadvantage women. It is the wide scope of different, modifying and adjusting juridical scholarly opinions inside mainstream orthodoxy that at certain points turns out to be beneficial to them in their day-to-day lives. However, in order to more appropriately measure why pious women attribute such weight to religious authorities and also demonstrate a certain submission to them (which can be at times liberating but at times also restricting), we have to go beyond the idea of *empowerment* through the incorporation of authority. This necessitates, more specifically, returning to a key aspect we touched upon at the beginning of this article: the project of self-reform. This, as we shall show in the last section, cannot be detached from an intimate relationship with religious authority.

## The Importance of Religious Authority for the Formation of a "Pious Self"

While trying to be sensitive to the complex relationships women enter into with regard to personified or discursive religious authority, a particular emphasis has so far clearly been on female empowerment. This focus can be considered fundamental in understanding the importance of the women's Islamization as a locus for the negotiation of gender issues. It would, however, be too limited to leave it there, especially if one attempts to be sensitive to processes of becoming pious, which is crucial for the self-understanding of the women we interviewed. Put differently, it is necessary to move beyond the normative paradigms that conceive of shifting authority relationships towards gender equality as the only legitimate way to explain the women's Islamization processes. Such an approach prevents us from giving credit to the different virtues that are enacted in the special relationship to the authoritative discourse (meant as God's word) and religious authorities, which are considered to speak in "God's name." Inspired by Saba Mahmood's work,[41] we show in the following sections that "submission" and "obedience" can manifest Islamic virtues, which are considered central to the formation of a pious subject.

We should remind ourselves that for most of our interviewees, knowledge acquisition should not be carried out only as an individual initiative, but under the aegis of authorized representatives of the community, because it is in this frame that an "authentic" Islam can be transmitted and faith can be most effectively cultivated and fortified. It is in this context that numerous women underlined the importance of listening to knowledgeable teachers, *shuyukh* or rhetorically talented preachers, either at conferences, in mosques, Islamic classes or through media technologies. Not only do these sources provide knowledge, but they are most able to engender the feelings that constitute

piety, love, fear, humility, or hope. The following statement by a nurse and leader of an informal Qur'ān study group for women elucidates this:

> What really helped me are the conferences by Amr Khaled, you probably know him. I got to know him at Le Bourget three years ago and it was like a revelation. [ . . . ] The topic of the conference was, I still remember, about the question why Muslims back then had this strength, masha'allah, this strength and that iman, which we don't have anymore. And he told us these stories, and it was like I was there, masha'allah. He has a way of speaking. There are a lot of Arabs like this who have a particular eloquence, and you feel that he takes you and he brings you back to the past. [ . . . ] He has a way to talk to your heart, you know. There are people like this who are talented, this is from God, al-hamdulilah, it's a gift. That day, my mother bought tapes from Amr Khaled, on the topic of adoration. I listened to it and it helped me so much to strenghten this love for God. And all the lessons of Amr Khaled talking about God's love for us, it helped me a lot, the conferences by Amr Khaled really helped me to develop this feeling of love."[42]

In this sense, qualified knowledge transmission can become "an emotional experience of a body permeated by Islamic faith," as Charles Hirschkind describes it so aptly.[43] Many of the women we interviewed stressed how that aspect became particularly important in the context of a non-Muslim society.

If knowledge acquisition is a tool with which to become pious, the main goal consists in effecting a reform of the self. Therefore, these pious dispositions that are to be cultivated are not only ends in themselves, but are necessary to enable the individual subject to change her conduct and act properly as a Muslim, according to orthodox norms of Islamic piety. In this sense, acquiring religious knowledge becomes a "disciplinary practice,"[44] a technology for ethical self-improvement. It is this emphasis on self-reform that reveals an apprehension of obedience that largely differs from the liberal understanding of the term, mostly associated negatively. In other words, the aspired refashioning of the self can only be realized through obedience and acceptance of fulfilling one's duties, conceived of as a specific virtue of piety. A woman who teaches "Islamic Morals" in an Islamic Institute in the suburbs of Paris expressed this idea in a particularly strong way. While she very much supported the struggle of Muslim women to demand their "Islamic rights" against practices considered misogynistic, she also warned that if such an approach was at the center of one's Islamic consciousness, one might forget the core elements of what piety was all about:

> The conscious and rigorous Muslim who loves Allah and who wants to satisfy him is more in the domain of duty, no matter what domain, than in the domain of rights. [ . . . ] The woman is not there to say: 'I have my

rights,' no, I have duties, and the same is valid for the man. [ . . . ] It is much more complex, and exactly as far as the self-reform is concerned, it has to begin with myself, it is not about claiming something from someone else, I start with myself. This is why the big jihad, this effort of oneself, is about starting with me. I do what I have to do.[45]

It is this positive interpretation of obedience and the sense of a necessary "duty," forming an elementary part of one's faith, that makes it more difficult to simply link the women's narratives to strategies of authority appropriation or contestation. In their desire to fulfil their Islamic duties, which means to adapt their lives to Islamic norms, the women accord immense importance to religious authorities, from whom they demand practical know-how, which supplies them with concrete rules to guide their behavior in day-to-day life. Countless conferences and religious classes are given with this objective. Moreover, there is a large population of Muftis among European Muslims who are consulted and asked for opinions on the most diverse subjects via the internet and during religious programs on satellite.[46] In the courses given by Islamic organizations or inside peer groups, participants often openly discuss ways to bring seemingly insignificant aspects of their lives in compliance with norms of Islamic piety. We witnessed several times how the lessons shifted from their original topic to a discussion of practical issues. The young women brought these up themselves, mostly regarding the difficulties of conforming oneself to Islamic norms in everyday life, particularly in the context of contact with the non-Muslim 'other,' asking their teachers for concrete advice. It is especially the adaptation of a virtuous Islamic life to a Western context that the women perceive as difficult.

The statements of our interviewees suggest that especially at the beginning of their Islamization process, they needed authoritative opinions that would enable them to practice their religion "correctly." But they indicated that they need these opinions at other moments in their lives as well, when they face particularly complicated situations that require them to make difficult choices; they need religious authorities to help them engage in "Islamically correct" behavior. Contrary to the idea of an increasing individualization of knowledge acquisition and a gradual detachment from religious authorities, these observations suggest that engagement with religious authority is crucially important to the processes of Islamization for these women. For them, it becomes an elementary means of developing their own spiritual potentialities through which the ideal of a pious self is realized.

## Conclusion

In the course of this article, we tried to bring into focus a quite diverse scope of aspects surrounding the complex relationship of Muslim women with

concepts of piety, knowledge acquisition and religious authority. We began analyzing this relationship by first being attentive to the women's emphasis on knowledge acquisition as a means of becoming pious and, second, by analyzing the different levels involved in the women's aims to participate in the processes of knowledge diffusion. These different dimensions involved in the search for becoming knowledgeable and educated believers and the simultaneous aim of transmitting one's knowledge might best be described in terms of a twofold meaning of "education," as implied in the German differentiation between *Bildung*, meant as the acquisition of knowledge, and *Erziehung*, meant as education of the self and of others. As we showed, these two dimensions cannot be grasped without paying attention to the gendered dimension of knowledge acquisition and dissemination and the effects that it has on rearranging and reaffirming gender relations. The women's emphasis on their responsibility as the main educators of the next generation as much as their ambition to transmit Islamic knowledge to the wider community through *da'wa* reveals both a reaffirmation of gender norms and a challenge to such norms, articulated from within the Islamic sources. Although a more careful analysis examining the interaction between the various social fields[47] in which the women are involved is warranted, we tried to show that the women's augmentation of their roles as educated and religiously instructed believers provides them with a new role inside the Islamic community, and thereby with a particular type of agency. They contest prohibitions that are often Islamically legitimized, such as secluding women from society, restricting their knowledge, etc. Here, the "politics of authenticity" can be interpreted as a step towards their empowerment. We can thus claim that these women's discourses largely remain within the patterns of internal change and reform of Muslim traditions, instead of simply manifesting a gradual adaptation of dominant gender notions as a result of their interaction with "liberal" European societies.[48]

What arises from the women's discourses is that if we understand religious authority in the sense of having the capacity and the right to transmit knowledge and educate members of the community, including males, we can speak about a shift in the authority structures within Muslim communities in Europe. It seems that this does not necessarily encourage (in the short term) shifts in the higher hierarchical structures of religious authority in the sense of legitimizing female Muslims to produce legitimized knowledge, but it might contribute to a reaffirmation of the traditional prerogatives and privileges of religious authority. Moreover, as we have suggested, the women also do not necessarily attempt to remodel established forms of religious authority in order to become autonomous interpreters of Islamic sources.

At first glance, the women's engagement with and their reaffirmation of established forms of religious authority can be read as a contradiction to their

struggle for empowerment. It can even be read as a new form of submission or domination, yet, in the second regard, a more complex picture has been revealed. The inquiry into their strategies within an Islamic orthodox field and the conceptualization of their agency beyond the common paradigms of submission versus resistance might enable us to conceptualize the notion of religious authority in a more multileveled way. It could help us to understand (religious) authority as a dynamic relationship among social actors. This becomes particularly clear when we take into account that the women's engagement with established forms of authority turned out to be a necessary condition for both becoming pious selves and for justifications of social change within the Muslim community.

In looking at the process of becoming pious, an exclusive and normatively biased focus on female empowerment reveals its limit when it comes to the personal desires of these women. The women's aspiration to piety manifests in their desire to gradually get closer to and literally "please" God — this makes a certain degree of submission unavoidable. In turn, as shown for these women, submission to God's authority is not only coupled with an individual enterprise of instructing oneself and others, but is also strongly linked to obedience to personified authorities whose discourses as legitimized interpreters are considered authorized. The importance the women attributed to legitimacy and authority clearly goes beyond a mere personal relationship between the subject and God. It also reveals the goal to constantly relate oneself to a religious community or a "discursive tradition," to use Asad's words, without however implying an unreflected adaptation to patriarchal power structures.

## Endnotes

1.      Under the umbrella term of religious instructions, different offers are subsumable, ranging from simple Qurʾānic lessons to a profound study of and hermeneutic approach to the sacred texts.

2.      According to a study by Gerdien Jonker (2004) in mosques in Berlin, for example, two-thirds of the young generation of Muslims, benefiting from religious instructions, are female.

3.      Mandaville, Peter, *Transnational Muslim Politics: Reimagining the Umma* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002) or Allievi, Stefano, "Islam in the Public Space: Social Networks, Media and Neo-Communities", in *Muslim Networks and Transnational*

*Communities in and Across Europe*, eds. S. Allievi and J. Nielsen (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 1–27.

4. See, for example Spuler-Stegemann, Ursula *Muslime in Deutschland, Informationen und Klärungen* (Herder: Spektrum, 2002) or Altschull, Elisabeth, *Le foulard contre l'école* (Paris: Seuil, 1995).

5. See Amiraux, Valérie, *Acteurs de l'islam entre Allemagne et Turquie. Parcours militants et expériences religieuses* (Paris, L'Harmattan, 2001); Bouzar, Dounia, *Monsieur, l'islam n'existe pas — Pour une désislamisation des débats* (Paris: Hachette Litterature, 2004); Jonker 2004 Jonker, Gerdien, "Vor den Toren: Bildung, Macht und Glauben aus der Sicht religiöser muslimischer Frauen", http://www.gerdien-jonker.de/pub8.pdf (2004); Venel Venel, Nancy, *Musulmanes françaises. De pratiquantes voilée à l'université* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1999).

On a global scale this is reminiscent of what Charles Hirschkind (Hirschkind Charles, "Civic Virtue and Religious Reason: An Islamic Counterpublic", *Cultural Anthropology* 16/1 (2001a): 3–34, 3) has labelled the "deliberative" and the "disciplinary" interpretation. In the first approach the role of print and other media technologies is regarded as a means to enable the lay believer to critically engage with religious authorities, becoming herself a legitimate interpreter of the discursive tradition. Meanwhile, in the "disciplinary" approach the dissemination of knowledge is regarded as a new means to objectify the religious discourse and thereby to reaffirm hierarchical authority structures.

6. For exceptions see Roy, Olivier *Vers un islam européen* (Editions Esprit: Paris, 1999); Peter, Frank, "Islamic Sermons, Religious Authority and the Individualisation of Islam in France", in *Religiosität in der säkularisierten Welt. Theoretische und empirische Beiträge zur Säkularisierungsdebatte in der Religionssoziologie* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag, 2006), 303–320.

7. On this point see Peter, Frank, "Individualization and Religious Authority in Western European Islam", *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 17/1 (2006): 105–118.

8. S. Amir-Moazami's fieldwork is based on semi-structured interviews with practicing, and publicly committed, Muslim women, engaged in the *Islamische Gemeinschaft Milli Görüs* (IGMG), the *Verein der Islamischen Kulturzentren* (VIKZ) and *Anstalt für Religion e.V./Diyanet Isleri Türk Islam Birligi* (DITIB) in Germany. In France they were part of a small centre for Islamic instructions, located in Marseille or of informal women's groups, or engaged in the *Jeunes Musulmans de France* (JMF). All together S. Amir-Moazami conducted 40 interviews, 20 for each country.

Jeanette S. Jouili conducted her fieldwork between 2002 and 2003 in Paris and in the region of Cologne/Bonn, as well as in 2005 with women who participated in diverse Islamic organizations with the objective of Islamic knowledge acquisition or dissemination. J. S. Jouili conducted 40 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with both covered and non-covered women, 20 in each country. In Cologne the women, of Turkish and Arabic background, were part of the female organization *Begegnungs- und Fortbildungsstätte Muslimischer Frauen e.V.* (BFMF), the *Institute of Islamology*, and the *Islamische Hochschulvereinigung* (IHV). In Paris, mostly of Maghribi background, they belonged to the *Centre de Recherche sur l'Islam* (CERSI) and the *l'Institut Européen des Sciences Humaines* (IESH). All except the BFMF are mixed-gendered centres of Islamic learning and they all can be set into the wider trend towards establishing Islamic organizations which transcend ethnic, linguistic, and, at least for the German case, confessional divisions.

Independently from the in-depth interviews, we have both conducted long term fieldwork that consisted of a large scope of participant observation and conversations with various people at the mosques — directors, imams and in particular women, who were in charge of the women's sections. We also attended various meetings, lectures and teaching courses at the organisations we investigated.

9.   On this see, for example, Amiraux 2001, op. cit; Bouzar 2004, op. cit. and Jonker, Gerdien, "Islamic Knowledge through a Women's Lens: Education, Power and Belief", *Social Compass* 50/1 (2003): 35–46.

10.   Mahmood has developed a fine notion of piety, which she uses also to engage critically with feminist thinking and, more substantially, with some of the founding principles of normative modernity, in particular individual autonomy. Her notion of piety thus clearly, and maybe even foremost, reveals a counter-conceptual idea, which she frames with politics of "social conventions" (2005: 148), to which self-declared, practising and publicly engaged Muslims have committed themselves. It embodies the self-willed obedience of pious Muslims to religiously prescribed conventions, which Mahmood juxtaposes with concepts of autonomy, deriving from liberal approaches, even those, which admit the social embeddedness of the self, but which are ultimately inscribed in the goal to liberate it from social conventions.

11.   See Klinkhammer, Gritt, *Moderne Formen islamischer Lebensführung. Eine qualitativ-empirische Untersuchung zur Religiosität sunnitisch geprägter Türkinnen der zweiten Generation in Deutschland* (Marburg: Diagonal-Verlag, 2000); Nökel, Sigrid, *Die Töchter der Gastarbeiter und der Islam* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2002).

12.   Ramadan, Tariq, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 84.

13.   Lapidus, Ira M, "Knowledge, Virtue, and Action: The Classical Muslim Conception of Adab and the Nature of Religious Fulfilment in Islam", in *Moral Conduct and Authority. The Place of Adab in South Asian Islam*, ed. B. D. Metcalf (Berkely and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), 38–61.

14.   On this point see Asad, Talal, *Genealgies of Religion. Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam.* John Hopkins (University Press: Baltimore, London, 1993) and Asad, Talal, "Religion, Nation-State, Secularism", in *Nation and Religion. Perspectives on Europe and Asia*, eds. P. van der Veer and H. Lehmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 178–192; Casanova, José, *Public religions in the modern world* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1994).

15.   In order to keep the anonymity of our interviewees, we only mention the first letter of their names. N., 35 years, social worker, interviewed by Jeanette S. Jouili in Cologne, 13/05/03.

16.   Mahmood, op. cit.

17.   Werbner, Pnina, "Political motherhood and the feminization of citizenship" in *Women, Citizenship and Difference*, eds. N. Yuval-Davis and P. Werbner (London: Zed Books, 1999).

18.   Mitchell, Timothy, *Colonial Egypt* (New York, New Rochelle, Melbourne Sidney: Cambridge, 1988); Shakry, Omnia, "Schooled Mothers and Structured Play: Child Rearing in the Turn of-the Century Egypt", in *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, ed. L. Abu-Lughod (New Jersey, Princeton University Press 1998), 127–169; Amir-Moazami, Schirin and Salvatore, Armando, "Gender, generation, and the reform of tradition: from Muslim majority societies to Western Europe", in *Muslim Networks, Transnational Communities and in and Across Europe* eds. J. Nielsen and S. Allievi, (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 32–77.

19.   Abu-Lughod, Lila, *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*, L. Abu-Lughod (New Jersey, Princeton University Press 1998.

20.   Shakry, op. cit.

21.   Hirschkind 2001a: 11.

22.   Ramadan 2004: 73f.

23.  Roest Crollius, Ary R., "Mission and Morality. Al-amr bi-l-ma'ruf as Expression of the Communitarian and Missionary Dimensions of Qur'ānic Ethics", *Studia Missionalia* 27 (1978): 257–284 and Mahmood, op. cit.

24.  See, for example, Mahmood, op. cit.

25.  One of the primary goals of the *Institute of Islamology* in Cologne, for example, where some of the interviewees were enrolled, is the training of qualified *da'wa* workers. In France, the "*L'Institut Européen des Sciences de l'Homme*" or the CERSI *(Centre d'Etudes et de Recherche sur l'Islam)*, for example, even offers special classes in *Fiqh ad-da'wa*.

26.  Cf. Amir-Moazami, Schirin, *Politisierte Religion. Der Kopftuchstreit in Deutschland und Frankreich* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2006, forthcoming).

27.  Babès, Leila, *L'islam positif. La religion des jeunes musulmans de France* (Paris: Les Editions de l'Atélier, 1997), 138.

28.  Mahmood, 2005: 64.

29.  See Shakry, op. cit.

30.  Leading figures of this discourse were scholars like Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani (1838–97) und Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905). Especially Abduh is of particular importance for us, since he combined the propagated reforms in the educational domains with the idea of a renewal of Islamic thought and practice. Their distinction between custom and scripture can be regarded as exemplary, as it has become a model for the discourse on authenticity, kept alive and extended until today.

31.  N., 30 years, director of a woman's group in Marseille. Interviewed by S. Amir-Moazami in Marseille, 14/5/01.

32.  M., 32 years, housewife and mother of two children. Interviewed by S. Amir-Moazami, the 23/11/2000 in Berlin.

33.  U.L., 30 years, initiator of an informal group for Muslim women in Marseilles. Interviewed by S. Amir-Moazami the 20/4/01.

34.  Venel, op. cit.; Klinkhammer, op. cit.; Amiraux, 2001, op. cit.; Nökel, op. cit.; Bouzar, op. cit.

35.  See Zentrum für Islamische Frauenforschung und Frauenförderung, *Ein einziges Wort und seine große Wirkung. Eine hermeneutische Betrachtungsweise zum Qur'ān, Sure 4 Vers 34, mit Blick auf das Geschlechterverhältnis im Islam* (Cologne: ZIF, 2006).

36.  Karam, Azza, M., *Women, Islamism and the State. Contemporary Feminisms in Egypt* (London: Macmillan Press LTD, 1998).

37.  See Deeb, Lara, *An enchanted modern. Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 23.

38.  The women's reference to religious authorities may concern the 'founding fathers' of Islamic orthodoxy of the classical age, but also the personalities rendered popular in contemporary mainstream Islam through modern media technology; either those belonging to the class of *ulama* in the classical sense (e.g. Yusuf al-Qaradawi), but also the more modern preacher types, such as Tariq Ramadan who is better known in France than in Germany, or the by Arabic-speaking Muslims world wide venerated Amr Khaled. In Germany unlike in France, local Islamic celebrities are rather absent, as actually regretted some of our interviewees.

39.  The most common English translation of the term is "blemish." When refering to a woman's body, the interpretation is that parts of the body are a blemish which have to be concealed. For an interesting discussion of the different meanings of *awra'*, see El-Guindi El-Guindi, Fadwa, *Veil. Modesty, Privacy and Resistance.* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 1999), 140–143.

40.   Roald, Anne Sofie, *Women in Islam. The Western Experience* (London, New York: Routledge, 2001).

41.   Mahmood, op. cit.

42.   N., 30 years, nurse. Interviewed by Jeanette S. Jouili in Paris, 11/03/05.

43.   Hirschkind, Charles, "The Ethics of Listening: Cassette-Sermon Audition in Contemporary Egypt", *American Ethnologist* 28/3 (2001b): 623–649, 628.

44.   Asad 1993: 125.

45.   S., 33 years, housewife and mother of three children. Interviewed by Jeanette S. Jouili, 17/12/05.

46.   Caeiro, Alexandre, "Transnational 'Ulama, European Fatwas, and Islamic Authority: A Case Study of the European Council for Fatwa and Research", in *Producing Islamic Knowledge: Transmission and Dissemination in Western Europe*, eds. M. van Bruinessen; S. Allievi (London: Routledge, 2006 forthcoming).

47.   A proper analysis should, of course, also take more systematically into account the discursive and institutional settings of the (French and German) majority societies. For example, given different traditions of church-state relationships, different experiences with immigration, and also differing discourses on gender in both countries (as, for example, in Fetzer, Joel S., Soper, J. Christopher, *Muslims and the State in Britain, France, and Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004 or Koenig, Matthias, "Politics and religion in European nation-states — institutional varieties and contemporary transformations" in *Religion and Politics. Cultural Perspectives*, eds. B. Giesen and D. Suber (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 291–315), it would be interesting to look in a comparative fashion, whether national discursive traditions matter for the way in which forms of authority are experienced, transformed or maintained among female leadership within the Muslim organisations. What impact has, for example, the French state's interventionist attitude, in the process of institutionalising Islam for women's movements in mosques or organisations? To what extent has, in contrast, Germany's model of church and state co-operation influenced the developments within women's sections in the mosques? To what extent does the institution of *laïcité* matter for the structures of authority amongst young Muslim women engaged in mosque movements, etc.?

48.   Yet, the whole question of women's rights in Islam and the frequent defensive position taken in Islamic discourses in response to Western accusations cannot be understood without accounting for the encounter with Western powers during colonial times. From that time on, the "West" has set the standards by which gender-justice is being measured. In this sense, the evolving dominant Islamic discourse on gender questions, whose ambiguity is also reflected in the narratives of our interviewees, should also be linked to the "Western" norms, even if the modes of reasoning conform to an Islamic "discursive tradition" (Asad) and its specificity and difference is always reaffirmed.