

Religiosities in a Globalised Market

Migrant-Origin Muslim Europeans' Self-Positioning Beyond the Sending and Receiving States' Politics of Religion

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Introduction

Interviewer: Overall, when you think about your views on cultural, ethnic and religious diversity, or multiculturalism in general, do you think your worldview is different from that of your family and friends? If so, in what ways? And does that have any effect on you?

Zainab: I am much more open than my family about many things. [...] Even if Morocco itself is moving and changing, my parents have kept the mentality of Morocco from before [...] I am a Muslim woman attached to her religion and culture, but my field of possibilities is wider than that of my parents. I speak several foreign languages. I don't have an accent when I speak French. For example, I met a person of English origin in Venice, with whom I talked about veganism.

(PYI-FR, 2020a)

In this interview, Zainab described her efforts to “find [her] space” as a self-identified Muslim conservative in France and a self-identified Westerner in the Moroccan diaspora. She criticised both the French political landscape and the “hypocritical” approaches to Islam in Morocco. Towards the end of her nuanced arguments taking heart from a liminal position, she repeatedly came to the ethical conclusion that faith is a private matter but also should be a publicly visible one. According to her, the political order should guarantee that one can build one's trajectory. After making her knowledge claim, “homosexuality is a sin,” Zainab intended to open a space for others to decide their paths: “but I don't have the right to judge them.” Her relationship with religion led her to the ethics of non-interference, with which most jurisprudential readings of her faith would not fit well.

Zainab's position includes a tension between communitarianism, a philosophy that situates the individual into one's bounded community (i.e. in her case, a diaspora community), and cosmopolitanism, emphasising the possibility of a single community for all human beings. Zainab navigates through them while assessing her rights and duties based on her

understanding of Islam, French citizenship, and her Moroccan background. Her definition of the veil as “a religious duty” underlies her prediction that she may start wearing it one day. However, the veil ban in France, on the one hand, and her mother’s pressure to wear it, on the other, came together to hinder Zainab’s process of developing her religious ideology. She shields herself with a “Westernized vision” against the Moroccan communitarianism in France and her once-colonised Moroccan identity against French assimilationism. Her aim with these manoeuvres is to broaden further the “cosmopolitan” haven of her own, including “open-minded” friends who “decide for themselves” and random people with whom she likes to start a conversation and who do not approach her with judgmental eyes.

This article focuses on the space that Zainab and others urge to open by engaging with globally circulating cultural forms – i.e. “the field of possibilities” in Zainab’s words. The research analyses individuals who form their identities around a particular faith system and, as such, become a security concern for the governments occupying themselves with religiosities. In this context, I introduce the two imaginations of radicalisation – namely, radicalisation as religious-nationalist foreign infiltration and radicalisation as religious fundamentalism – associated with migrant-origin Muslims in Europe. This introductory section summarises the central debates and, in their light, the unstable politics of religion in Europe with snapshots from France, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium. The following section introduces several mechanics of globalisation that enable migrant-origin Muslims to access a repertoire beyond that of the diaspora communities without necessarily losing ties with such communities. Against this backdrop, I focus on 152 PRIME Youth¹ interviews with young adults of Turkish and Moroccan origin (aged between 18 and 30), most of whom keep such communal religious ties.

The first empirical section questions migrant-origin individuals’ non-religious reasons for keeping their links in mosques or religious communities funded by their countries of origin. I scrutinise the role of internalising problems, such as anxiety led by the feelings of discrimination, in maintaining organisational ties with such religious communities. By the same token, this section also includes an analysis of our interlocutors’ interest in European politics vis-à-vis their countries of origin. I argue that the Erdoğan figure among migrant-origin Muslims, regardless of the Turkish government’s aims, is far from embodying a religious-nationalist foreign infiltration. Instead, the figure is an embodiment of the shared discrimination experiences in Europe, and as such, seen among our interlocutors as part of the European context.

Overall, experiencing the deterritorialising nature of migration and globalisation enable our interlocutors to create unique contexts that do not rely on a preconceived notion of time-space. Despite keeping nationality or ethnicity-based religious community ties in the diaspora, our research

participants' sources of religious meaning tend to go beyond these ties. Even though most of them frequent a mosque or organisation rooted in their country of origin, this participation does not necessarily take the form of submission to an unquestionable higher religious authority. On the contrary, it includes disagreements and alternative knowledge claims over subject matters such as intergenerational, intracommunal and gender relations. The disputes extend towards such themes as religious-nationalism's compatibility with religious purity and the role of conviction, pressure, and non-interference in religious ethics. Considering these bottom-up religious meaning-making processes, I will conclude the chapter by problematising the state-led religious reform and conservation projects.

Imagining “Radicalised Muslims” as Gray Wolves or ISIS Militants

The governments that export their official religions compete with transnational alternatives in an unprecedentedly globalised “market” in the metaphorical sense of the term (Werbner, 2004; Roy, 2014: 161; Haynes, 2016). On the one hand, centralised forms of religion entered Europe through the official Turkish theology programs and imams, the Qatari charities, the Moroccan promotion of Maliki moderation, the *Islam du juste milieu* (Islam of the middle), and the Saudi intelligence and oil-religion trade. Their countries of origin approach migrant-origin Muslim communities not only as relatives and networks but also as a means of influencing European politics (Adraoui, 2019; Bruce, 2020; Drhimeur, 2021; Maritato, 2021). On the other hand, less hierarchical and more decentralised relationships with Islam arise from European Muslims' changing needs for meaning and the various tools they use to communicate with fellow believers elsewhere (Mandaville, 2003, 2013; Roy, 2004; el-Nawawy and Khamis, 2009: 118, 165–209).

Both trajectories have been taken as threats in Europe: the former as a risk of religious-nationalist foreign infiltration (e.g. “the Gray Wolf radicalisation”), and the latter as Pandora's box which includes, among other things, violent extremisms in pursuit of a total apocalypse in the West and the rest (e.g. “the ISIS radicalisation”). In many cases, the former seems to have appeared as a side-effect of the campaign against the latter. An illustration of it is the gradually worsening image of the Turkish High Board of Religious Affairs branch in Germany, the Turkish-Islamic Union for Religious Affairs, DITIB (Müller, 2017: 60; Germany Cuts Funding, 2018; Bertsch, 2020).

With the “Turkish-Islamic synthesis” being its organisational axiom, DITIB played a cooperative role in the German state's numerous counter-radicalisation projects. Decades before these projects, DITIB's religious-nationalist officers became part of an anti-communist network in West Germany during the Cold War (Ozkan, 2019: 46). As the perceived threat shifted from

communism to Jihadism after the Cold War (Juergensmeyer, 1993; Hippler and Lueg, 1995), DITIB was already well-settled in Germany to promote a Turkish cultural Islam resilient to globalising religious neo-fundamentalism, often called (neo)Salafism regardless of its variations (Sheikh, 2021). Among the organisation's most recent collaborative activities was providing imams for Germany's prisons and teachers for religious education at schools (Neitzert *et al.*, 2021: 16). This transnational regime of governmentality rests primarily on interstate cooperation and signifies a structural influence on the presence of Islam in Europe (Cesari, 2009; Humphrey, 2009; Kaya, 2014; Bruce, 2018; Poots, 2019; Baser and Ozturk, 2020). As a crucial illustration, Belgium's recognition of Islam as a Belgian religion in 1974 resulted from the negotiations with Saudi Arabia and the Muslim League members instead of the Belgian Muslim community (Kanmaz, 2002: 103).

Contestation starts when interstate cooperation ends, as the case of DITIB suggests. After the failed July-15 coup in Turkey, various authorities from Rhineland-Palatinate, North-Rhine Westphalia and Baden Württemberg accused DITIB of conducting intelligence activities on behalf of Turkey ('Germany 2018', 2019: 7–8, 14). With its spillover effect, a Europe-wide public debate questioned if Erdoğan managed to mobilise his relatively new ultranationalist allies, known as Gray Wolves, with the state-led (DITIB) or private (*Milli Görüş*, en. National Vision) religious organisations (Tastekin, 2020). The Macron government became the first to declare a plan to outlaw the Gray Wolf organisation as part of its campaign against "Islamist separatism" (Nussbaum, 2020).

At the time of our interview with Zainab, she was hopeful about the Macron government's economic prospects as opposed to the right-wing identity politics and the "mess" on the French left. In the later stages of the interviewing period, which lasted until January 2022, the PRIME Youth's self-identified Muslim interlocutors from France expressed negative views against Macron as he started a political campaign against "Islamist separatism" and "Islamist-leftism" (*see* Joshi, 2021). Intending to promote a republican "French Islam", the campaign targeted Muslim communitarianism and violent religious extremism without distinguishing between them. As such, it also rested on an amalgamation of universalist and parochial religious radicalisations. During the leadership debate between Macron and Le Pen, dated 20 April 2022, Macron defended the law as a bulwark against "the foreign powers" that exert influence on French soil. In the interstate arena, the proposal was depicted as a mini clash of civilisations by the Macron government and the governments of several Muslim-majority countries funding mosques in Europe (Koca, 2020; Wintour, 2020).

The funding of mosques from abroad has also been securitised by others in Europe, including German, Austrian, Dutch and Belgian authorities at various administrative levels (Borger, 2015; Goebel, 2018; Tremblay, 2020; Chini, 2022). This controversy's mainstreaming in Germany and the

Netherlands is particularly noteworthy, as the two countries traditionally differ from France in accepting religious communitarianism, including that of migrant-origin communities. In both countries, decades-long cooperation with the sending countries to meet “foreign workers” (and then migrants’) religious needs has evolved into the question of why European countries do not educate their imams.

The French government proposes to nurture an Islam compatible with the alleged national values of the country. Including, in fact, a set of rather transnational liberal values, the demand is the embracement of certain expressions in the name of gender equality, sexual liberation, and freedom of expression. This agenda rests on the argument that migrant-origin Muslim communities remain under the hegemony of their countries of origin, where such value expressions are not well-established. Concomitantly, it assumes that the attendees of mosques funded by their countries of origin represent obedience to these countries’ official Islam. Despite having divergent state traditions and trajectories – i.e. Germany from “segregation to integration” and the Netherlands from “multiculturalism to assimilationism” (Kaya, 2009: 201–209 – building a national Islam has become a standard recipe for all. The fear is that migrant-origin communities live in their ethnocentric bubbles and tend to act in Europe as leverage for their countries of origin. They carry Turkish, Moroccan, or Algerian flags on the streets and, instead of Dutch, French or German, they speak these countries’ languages.

Placing Globalisation in the Debate

What is missing in the frame described above is the in-group heterogeneity among migrant-origin Muslims who are keeping ties with their countries of origin. This section lays down several research targets by introducing three aspects of globalisation under-scrutinised in the context of the political climate described above. While touching upon the interlinked concepts of *transnationalism*, *deterritorialisation*, and *circulation*, I introduce several arguments that should be addressed to assess migrant-origin Muslims’ space beyond the receiving and sending states’ politics of religion.

The first question relates to transnationalism and the interlocution processes of migrant-origin Muslims in Europe. In general, migrant-origin Muslims have a delicate position in Islamism’s national/international and violent/non-violent matrix (see Akbarzadeh and Mansouri, 2007: 1–12). With their multiple orientations, they had to liaise with non-Muslims, Muslims of other origins, and their ethnic communities with a colourful mix of religious and political agendas (Grillo, 2004; Vidino, 2010: 39–40). As their audiences diversified, older generations developed various forms of transnationalism, to which the Islamist stream of thought was never alien. Despite the *de facto* national outlook of Islamist movements such as the Muslim Brotherhood, *Milli Görüş*, *Jamaat-i Islami*, and several Sufi orders,

transnationalism often became prevalent in their theory (Masud, 2000; Akbarzadeh and Mansouri, 2007: 6; Diaz, 2014).

Whereas previous research extensively questioned the Muslim multivocality that transcends national imaginations, the post-second-generation migrants' dialogues have not yet been scrutinised in depth. The current state of the literature indicates a tension between reactive ethnicity and egalitarian attitudes (Çelik, 2015; Maliepaard and Alba, 2016; Herda, 2018). An accompanying process is reactive transnationalism, driven by their shared discrimination experiences with others (Snel et al., 2016). The critical question is who the others to understand are and how their grievances are made to fit with those of the ethnocentrically formed diaspora communities. In this context, I will demonstrate how the pro-migrant left-wing vocabulary echoes among the young and middle-aged migrant-origin Muslims, including individuals who talk about Black Lives Matter and LGBT Pride while also speaking in favour of the religious symbols in the public sphere.

These interlocution processes relate to deterritorialisation, which signifies the disconnection of identities with certain territories, such as migrant-origin Muslims' countries of origin. Given that migrant-origin Muslim communities are constituted by territorial alterations, they are open to seeking faith discourses with no need to have a stable territory. Having become an "absolute deterritorialisation factor" (Roy, 2014: 164), the internet shifted the centre of religious activity towards virtual mediums. Even though many migrant-origin individuals lack migration experience except in their family memories and imposed identities, they are bound by such circulatory mechanisms of globalisation. The deterritorialisation of identities is a theme emphasised by the latest phase of diaspora studies (Cohen, 2008: 1–20). Remarkably, this final phase puts into question the relevance of conceptions such as homeland.

Circulation, with all its vagueness as an idiomatic expression, signifies the concurrent transfer of goods and knowledge claims, including words, contexts, the discourses of action, themes, genres and communication practices. Here lies a discursive challenge that hits researchers, among others. Rockefeller (2011) criticised the lazy use of the terms flow and circulation in the context of globalisation. Despite giving merit to this analysis, Russell and Boromisza-Habashi (2020: 15) rightly identified how such metaphors are "precisely the ones that capture the only general observation" about globalisation. As Russell and Boromisza-Habashi eloquently put it, globalisation does not come with a set of corresponding verbs that indicate individuals' isolated actions. While leaving their marks in daily life, the circulating repertoires settle in new contexts as though they represent a frozen state. Hence, with its scope uncertain, the flow is rendered unisolable and undetectable in many contexts. Among our interviewees' restricted understandings of globalisation are working for multinational corporations in Europe, widening one's culinary horizon, fashioning the same discourses with

“Americans” (i.e. standardisation) and refashioning them differently (i.e. variation). Upon that, they recall their migratory experience, which includes going back and forth between their countries of origin and residence.

The organisations such as DITIB play their part in circulation, more often unintendedly than willingly. On the one hand, as discussed above, the European states aim to nationalise and, for that matter, reterritorialise their migrant-origin Muslim communities. On the other hand, the organisations such as DITIB deterritorialised their activities to maintain migrant-origin communities’ allegiance to their countries of origin (Aydın, 2016; Çitak, 2018). In doing so, however, they also contribute to the construction of identifications and engagements alternative to nationalism and ethnocentrism. Hence, cultural frames with a much richer repertoire, from veganism to postcolonialism, appear and engage with the religious identifications of our interlocutors.

While facing and configuring transnational settings under the impact of deterritorialisation, migrant-origin Muslims have not become post-national in the sense that they still have to translate their ideologies into a national context (Grillo, 2004). One way of exploring this process is to focus on the cross-country institutional differences (Avcı, 2005; Bowen, 2009; Kaya, 2009; Tol, 2009). For example, Bowen (2009) demonstrated how prominent Muslim actors in France had adopted a “French approach” to religious norms in compliance with the secular Republican tradition while striving for value pluralism. In the same vein, Tol (2009) questioned how differently *Milli Görüş* was contextualised in Germany and the Netherlands – i.e. the former used anti-Western rhetoric, whereas the latter cooperated with the local authorities. Furthermore, Avcı (2005) saturated the differences between *Milli Görüş* in South and North Netherlands.

An alternative unit of analysis to study the contextualisation process is the individual level. For example, focusing on Muslim women’s discourses in the German public sphere, Weber (2013) questioned how gender violence in Muslim societies has been thematised and criticised by Muslim women. As I noted above, the European governments often problematise the pro-Erdoğan tendencies among migrant-origin Muslims in Europe. That said, what it means for them to be pro-Erdoğan in Europe has often been left unanswered – e.g. supporting him out of a genuine interest in Turkish particularity or supporting him as a European actor.

Suppose Erdoğan for them is the one in Turkey. In that case, the puzzling question is how come many of our interlocutors praise him staunchly while having little interest in or knowledge of Turkish politics. More broadly, contrary to what Turkey and Morocco would like with their official Islam, our interlocutors’ narratives demonstrate a trend toward the spiritual, mystical, or esoteric aspects of religion. Accordingly, the traditional teachers of Islam, including many DITIB imams and *Milli Görüş* teachers, seem to have left their sphere of influence to individuals of affection who lack a

classical education. They are interested in ethics, and the ethical questions they address are the questions of a multicultural Europe rather than Turkey or Morocco.

The Data and Methodology

The research rests on 152 structured interviews conducted with individuals who self-identify as Muslims in Germany, France, Belgium, and the Netherlands (Table 9.1). Our interlocutors' Muslimness was their common denominator. However, various other identifications appeared in their narratives depending on their perceived context (e.g. some identified themselves as "European", others refused to do so; some identified themselves with the nationality of their country of residence, others did not).

The Recruitment Zones and Techniques

The religious organisations (both state-led and private) and the mosques where the migrant-origin communities lead or participate actively are at the centre of our recruitment. Among these organisations are Milli Görüş, DITIB, and Dawah Foundation. In our network, there were political parties and business networks (e.g. DENK in the Netherlands; the Union of Turkish Democrats in Germany), and also a few relatively microcosmic initiatives, such as the Muslim Empowerment Tilburg (MET) in the Netherlands, and *Bien ou Bien* student houses in Belgium. All in all, the research is intended to bring together the diverse voices in the diaspora communities. An extension of this endeavour would be to classify several social types in contrast with one another.

Though we primarily reached individuals who had organisational ties at the time of our interview, our implementation of the snowball sampling widened our scope to include individuals who did not have such relations. Accordingly, in line with the broader descriptions of the Turkish-origin community as a more organised one than the Moroccan-origin community, our Turkish-origin interlocutors were more inclined to communal religious activity (*Turkish n = 59/85; Moroccan n = 27/67*). There was an underrepresentation of community ties in the Belgian interlocutors' narratives since the relevant part of the question was not prompted during these interviews. For this reason, among others, I will not conduct a cross-country comparison.

Our non-random sampling mechanisms do not correspond to allow a systematic comparison between the four countries. The process included (1) an imbalance in the number of interlocutors who knew each other from beforehand; (2) intermediaries who had diverging characteristics and incomparable networks; (3) different and arguably contradictory recruitment strategies (Table 9.1).

Table 9.1 The PRIME Youth ERC Project (ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM, No: 785934)

Self-identified Muslims	Interviews			
	France	Germany	The Netherlands	Belgium
Country				
Interlocutors (Male)	16	21	18	11
Interlocutors (Female)	21	19	20	26
Turkish-Origin (n = 85)	16	38	19	12
Moroccan-Origin (n = 67)	21	2	19	25
Median Age	25,8	24,8	23,9	25,5

Interviewing

During the interviews, which lasted about 90 minutes on average, we asked our interlocutors to discuss their personal histories, neighbourly relations, family and friendship ties, and mobility history. We also asked about their thoughts on diversity, religiosity, the current state of politics and economics, and finally, their future expectations. We did not mention any specific policy, event, political figure, religious or cultural value, or hot topic in the process. In this framework, we invited them to narrativise their lives at the micro, meso, and macro levels in concentric circles (Bronfenbrenner, 1977; Benevento et al., 2022).

Coding and Further Analysis

Based on our coding manual, each interview is coded into twelve principal codes on areas stated above and 157 sub-codes that saturate each bullet point. These thematic codes helped me establish a general framework before delving deeper into the recurring themes illustrating the diversity in the migrant-origin communities' relationship with Islam. The first sub-codes that I scrutinised were about discrimination – *i.* the narratives that emphasise our interlocutors' personal or collective experiences of discrimination; *ii.* the narratives that acknowledge the importance of experiencing discrimination regardless of whether our interlocutors experienced it. I examined the relationship between these two codes in the light of another sub-code that highlights the content of such ties.

Having identified the interaction between discrimination experiences and community ties, I delved deeper into each interlocutors' community ties to explore a more comprehensive array of motivations behind their mosque socialisation (e.g. cultural nostalgia, essential services, civic activity, political networking). In addition, both quantitatively and qualitatively, I investigate the contextualisation of crucial reference points such as President Erdoğan, King Muhammed VI, Black Lives Matter, and Uyghur Muslims. For that matter, I also consider the codes regarding our interlocutors'

interest in the politics of the country in which they live, their countries of origin, and their broader political horizon. Then, I introduce several themes that crystallise the recasting of the belief system in the community. In these sections, I refer to the interviews not as classifiable and quantifiable objects of study but primarily as standalone sources that require further scrutiny. While following this approach, I also aim to bridge the numerical generalisations with the narrative specifications.

Communitarianism as an Antidote to the Internalising Problems

The political theory approaches that aim to reconcile liberal and communitarian understandings of society often refer to the importance of resolving communitarian grievances for the sake of individual self-awareness (Kymlicka, 1991: 165). Our interlocutors' collective grievances play a role in their communitarianism along ethnic and religious lines. The relationship between acculturation strategies and migration-related risk factors, such as internalising (i.e. anxiety) and externalising problems (i.e. aggression), attracts attention also from psychosocial standpoints. While searching for a causal arrow between acculturation and anxiety, researchers explore anxiety both as an independent variable (Ünlü Ince et al., 2014) and a dependent one (Özbek et al., 2015; Janssen-Kallenberg et al., 2017). In the human experience, they are often cyclical as perceived discrimination reproduces anxiety, whereas anxiety restores the distance. Recent research suggests that anxiety is moderated by the sense of community, meaning that communal identifications may alleviate the challenges of perceived discrimination (García-Cid et al., 2020; Novara et al., 2021; Lardier Jr. et al., 2022).

Our interlocutors tend to introduce their memories of discrimination in their personal history narratives ($n = 65$; 42.8%). Most of those with discrimination experiences developed religious community ties at one point in their life ($n = 34$; 52.3%). A larger group of our interlocutors felt the need to evaluate the negative consequences of feeling discriminated against in society, regardless of whether they experienced it personally ($n = 97$; 63.8%). Nearly half of this group also mentioned community ties as part of their experiences of religion ($n = 46$; 47.4%). An examination of these narratives suggests that shared discrimination experiences had as much a role as family upbringing has ($n = 44/152$; 28.9%) in driving individuals to build trust via religious communities: “keep the friends' circle small to watch out who is really there for you” (PYI-GER, 2020a).

The perceived discrimination experience often directly pushed our interlocutors to look inwards – i.e. towards shared identities and similar backgrounds. For example, increased restrictions on wearing the headscarf at a mixed school in Genk pushed Ayşe to move to “a Turkish school” in Mons, where “all pupils are Turkish, and everyone speaks Turkish”

(PYI-BEL, 2020a). Alternatively, a particular discrimination experience is not directly identified but inferred as part of a larger whole in the religious development narratives. For instance, Zeynep (22) never felt discriminated against in Germany due to her headscarf. However, while describing her self-indoctrination process through which she decided to cover herself and visit two mosques, she recalled her distress with her secondary school teacher who had claimed that “Germans are smarter because of their genes” (PYI-GER, 2020b). The mosque community members believed in Zeynep’s account of the incident, which the head of the school did not find convincing.

Motives Behind Mosque Socialisation

By the same token, mosque socialisation does not purely signify a religious indoctrination process in the narratives. Its alternative was instead a total social secession: “If I didn’t have this, I’d be a real hermit” (PYI-NL, 2021a). Many narratives made it clear that mosque attendance met “not necessarily a religious need, but a need to belong to something” (PYI-FR, 2020b; PYI-NL, 2020a; PYI-NL, 2021b; PYI-NL, 2021c). For example, during a period he was depressed, lonely, and inclined to commit violence, Adil’s yearning for mutual understanding led him to a mosque (PYI-GER, 2020b). As such, the Milli Görüş movement in Utrecht became Fatma’s (26) “outlet for identity formation and psychological well-being” (PYI-NL, 2021a). Similarly, Betül (26) reported as a member of Milli Görüş in Amsterdam that many “young people” join the organisation to be called something other than “stupid Turk” or “stupid Moroccan” (PYI-NL, 2021e). Esra described her motivation to keep her ties in organisations such as DITIB and Milli Görüş as collaborating with “other youngsters who are in situations in which they are discriminated against” (PYI-GER, 2021a). These descriptions are in line with the appeal of the Muslim Brotherhood among second and third-generation migrants who feel rejected in Europe (Khosrokhavar, 2010: 142–143; Drhimeur, 2021: 17). When our interlocutors dismissed the mosque attendance as a need, they were thankful for having an already stable religious identity and well-established ties to a community of believers: “when I was younger, [...] I needed [to visit the mosque] much more than I do now” (PYI-NL, 2020b).

More broadly, mosque appears in our interlocutors’ narratives as a reflection of cultural nostalgia (PYI-FR, 2020c; PYI-FR, 2020d; PYI-FR, 2021a; PYI-GER, 2020c; 29 Sep 2020; PYI-FR, 2021a; PYI-GER, 2021b; PYI-FR, 2021b; *see* “nostalgic deprivation” in Kaya et al., 2020), a basic service that covers funeral procedures between Europe and the country of origin (PYI, 2021c), a medium of civic activity to form charities and help drug addicts or unemployed youths (PYI-FR, 2020e; PYI-GER, 2020d; PYI-GER, 2020e; PYI-BEL, 2021a; PYI-GER, 2021c; PYI-NL, 2022a), a place of gathering

to organise leisurely activities such as kermises, camping, movie days, and football matches (PYI-GER, 2020e; PYI-GER, 2020f; PYI-GER, 2020g; PYI-NL, 2021f; PYI-NL, 2021g; PYI-GER, 2021d), an economical option for school tutoring (PYI-GER, 2020h; PYI-FR, 2020f; PYI-GER, 2021e; PYI-FR, 2021d), or a political network (PYI-NL, 2020a; PYI-NL, 2021h). The discussion sessions often revolved around the perceived collective threats, such as the attacks targeting Muslims (PYI-GER, 2020j; PYI-GER, 2020k; PYI-GER, 2020l; PYI-NL, 2020c).

Interest in a European Erdoğan and a Deterritorialised Ummah

A third of our interlocutors expressed a strong interest in European politics ($n = 51$, 33.3%), and nearly as many were following Turkish or Moroccan national politics ($n = 60$; 39.7%). More significantly, in terms of combining the two, some expressed disinterest in their European country's national politics while being interested in that of their country of origin ($n = 15$; 9.8%). A closer analysis of the narratives demonstrates that these speakers expressed interest in their countries of origin through Europe more than the other way around.

Erdoğan was a reference point primarily because he represented the alternative to be seen by our interlocutors' adversaries located in Europe. For instance, in the climate of the controversy over the Prophet Muhammed cartoons in terms of freedom of expression, Erdoğan calling Macron "retarded" was justified by some interlocutors as "a freedom of expression" (PYI-BEL, 2020a). Moreover, Erdoğan being demonised in Europe made him defensible in the eyes of a not-pro-Erdoğan interlocutor just because the process resembled Muslims' discrimination experiences (PYI-NL, 2020d). Regardless of their political views, many others saw the scapegoating of themselves in Europe while talking about Erdoğan's image in Europe (PYI-BEL, 2021b; PYI-GER, 2020g; PYI-FRA, 2020g; PYI-NL, 2021k; PYI-GER, 2020m; PYI-GER, 2021e; PYI-GER, 2020n; PYI-FRA, 2020f; PYI-FRA, 2020a; PYI-GER, 2020o). After making the same argument, Murat (27) concluded his evaluation by considering how Erdoğan is even more popular in Europe than in Turkey:

You know 70% of the Turks in Belgium vote for Erdogan [compared to 40-50% in Turkey]. If you ask why, well, this is the reason why.
(PYI-BEL, 2021b)

For the same reason, Erdoğan became a much more frequently appearing reference point than King Mohamed VI even among most of our Moroccan-origin interlocutors. They made much fewer emphases on Moroccan politics than the Turkish-origin interlocutors mentioned Turkish politics in their narratives (Moroccan-origin = 5/67; Turkish-origin = 39/85).

Their deterritorialisation went beyond the abovementioned reference points. The same Moroccan-origin individuals were much more interested in locations outside their country of residence and origin ($n = 45/67$). Instead of Morocco, these locations were Palestine, Syria, Xinjiang, and the US countries where the Black Lives Matter protests took place. In the light of all these locations, their support for Erdoğan rarely meant that they were under the influence of the official Turkish policy. Their opinions were still contextualised in the European public debates and in reaction to the perceived Islamophobia in Europe. For example, while defending Erdoğan against Macron in their quarrel over the Islamist separatism campaign, Amira (23) also criticised the Turkish-Islam synthesis that combines religious nationalism and communitarianism (PYI-BEL, 2020b).

Instead, our interlocutors have grown interested in combining the ideological pools of anti-racism, environmentalism, gender politics, and veganism – i.e. what interests the progressive global youth culture. For example, using an alter-globalist repertoire against the regimes of food governance (Wrenn, 2011), Zainab amalgamated veganism with her Muslim conservatism. According to her, there is “in fact” very little halal meat, as the badly treated animals cannot be halal (PYI-FR, 2020i). Referring to the hadith transmitted originally by al-Bukhari (1978: 2365), she mentioned a practising Muslim woman tormented in hell due to causing a cat’s death by leaving her thirsty (*see* also Sayeed, 2013: 28). In contrast, Zainab also described a prostitute who went to heaven as a result of feeding a needy cat. This story hinges on Zainab’s conclusion that judging individuals, including sex workers, shall not be the task of others. This point brings me to the question of how our interlocutors strive to reframe communal ties from within.

Recasting the Communal Ties

Once the religious repertoire meets a medium accessed by individuals without necessarily passing through a community, it frees itself from the communal authority structures. Religion and the community, as such, often become alternatives to one another. In this awareness, the individualistic readings of the belief system require disentangling the religious purity from pre-existing social links. Religion as a community activity triggers further secularisation by means of religion, whereas religion without a community may yield an individual spiritual search.

Among our interlocutors who visit the *de facto* ethnically defined mosques, some have come to the realisation that it is not religiously desirable for mosques to be divided in accordance with ethnicity, kinship, tribe, or homeland. “It is the faith that counts, not the origin,” in their words (PYI, 2020f). A few interlocutors also acted passionately in this endeavour. For example, they ensured that the Turkish mosque’s discussion sessions attracted the interest of “more outsiders” in Schaerbeek (PYI-BEL, 2020c).

Najla (23) appreciated the ethnically diverse mosque communities whom, she described, are as pure as children on a playing ground: “they don’t care about differences, their play is innocent” (PYI-NL, 2020e). Mosques in diverse public spheres, such as the university campuses, often witnessed tension between the ethnically-defined communities and religious transnationalists: “I felt I had other visions of the world different from the Egyptians” (PYI-BEL, 2021c). Some of our interlocutors opted out of the mosque meetings where the participants knew each other beforehand and were inclined to think similarly (PYI, 2020p; PYI-FR, 2021g; PYI-FR, 2021f; PYI-GER, 2021a; PYI-NL, 2021h). For example, Ömer (24) made it clear that breaking up with his friends at the mosque “allowed me to focus much more on faith” (PYI-NL, 2021h).

Their vigilance against confirmation biases illustrates a pursuit of reflexive self-awareness (Koca, 2022). In order to escape the community-led confirmation bias, many of them diversified the mosques they visit or blended the experience with the deeper pool of online sources (PYI-GER, 2020q; PYI-FR, 2021e; PYI-FR, 2021f; PYI-GER, 2021f; PYI-FR, 2021g; PYI-NL, 2020f; PYI-GER, 2021a). Commonly, they explained their motivation by rationalising the desire to go beyond the boundaries of their communities: “Of course, I also had an Islamic upbringing, but at some point, you just want to know more” (PYI-NL, 2020g; *see also* PYI-NL, 2020h; PYI-GER, 2021a).

Two of our interlocutors notified us about their church visits for a more transcendental religious experience: “all houses of God are beautiful” (PYI-GER, 2021c; PYI-GER, 2020m). Despite being the few who frequented churches to produce a religious meaning, they were not the only ones who called for an interfaith front against the threats to religious values or symbols in the public sphere. According to Ferit (24), it was a pity that the religious Christians in Europe refrain from sharing their faith-based messages: “I would wish for Germany to become more Islamic or in general more Christian” (PYI-GER, 2020q). Some of the new Muslim organisations differentiate their identities from the mainstream by inviting rabbis and priests to their meetings (PYI-NL, 2020i; PYI-NL, 2020j; PYI-FR, 2020b). In their discussion sessions, the groups speak Dutch, German or French rather than Turkish or Moroccan: “[although] we do have a Turkish background, [...] we were all born here and speak Dutch better than Turkish.” (PYI-NL, 2021i).

One repercussion is the creation of microcosmic communities in this larger whole (*see* Pisiou, 2015). From the Hague, Mahmood (30) summarised the experience “youngsters” seek as “Islam 2.0” (PYI-NL, 2020k). Like Mahmood, Adil (26) found the recipe in homegrown figures addressing a transnational youth culture, such as Pierre Vogel who, as a convert, de-ethnicise religion (PYI, 2020b). Mehdi (23) volunteers for a group called Dawah, which aims to provide the Muslim youths with a kind of “Islamic inspiration” to integrate into the Dutch society (PYI-NL, 2020l). Referring

to the limits he sees in the traditional mosque education based on “memorising the Quran”, Mehdi distinguishes between guiding youths in daily life and teaching the verses. Anecdotally, he described an individual who did not receive much help from the mosque community while trying to quit drug addiction: “Contrary to the mosque, we teach them how to behave” (PYI-NL, 2020l). This generation of mosque sceptics found many new organisations. “It was a conscious choice to have this foundation outside of a mosque,” said Badr (26), a founding member of the MET (PYI-NL, 2020m). Hatice shared her doubt as to whether mosque communities or theology students have a more sophisticated understanding of Islam than others: “Some of them haven’t internalised [the religion], they aren’t conscious” (PYI-GER, 2020f). Mehmet (25) identified his generation’s (i.e. “the third-generation”) religious need as learning how to operationalise the beliefs in “real-life situations” instead of memorising the verses and orders (PYI-GER, 2020pa). Having considered these limits, Leyla evaluated her delicate balance in the community organisation: “Sometimes I am inside, sometimes outside” (PYI-GER, 2020r).

Unease with Nationalism, Ethnocentrism, and Traditionalism

The diaspora communities also include individuals who problematise some settled traditions in Muslim countries. Instead, they promote more decentralised and universalistic readings of the belief system. The range of dissatisfaction goes between objections to religious nationalisms exported by the counties of origin and criticisms towards the traditional Muslim languor. These criticisms demonstrate the variety of representations in the diaspora organisations. For instance, Osman (29) has been a member of *Milli Görüş* since 2014. In the youth council of the movement, he introduces to youngsters not only Erbakan, the founder of the Milli Görüş movement, but also Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, and Rosa Parks as role models. While defining his main objective as lifting the barriers between Turks and Moroccans, Osman produces a universal imagination that goes beyond ethnocentrism. He criticises the religious nationalism prevalent in Turkey: “the Turkish nationalists [...] want to help some people prior to others, but this is not what Islam means” (PYI-BEL, 2020c).

Intergenerational Tensions

There is a generational element in the tension over nationalism. Mert (26) understands his parents’ ties with Turkey: after all, “they were born there.” However, having grown up in “Brussel’s diversity” together with his brother, he argued that they do not feel the same about the sensitivities of Turkish people, from “laïcité” to “nationalism” (PYI-BEL, 2020d). İrem (24)

reported that she has difficulty understanding “the conflict between Turks and Kurds[...]: why Sunni people should be better than Alevi people or why a homosexual partnership should be inferior to a heterosexual relationship” (PYI-GER, 2021g).

Depending on one’s capability of making the religious repertoire deconstruct such perceived inequalities, this line of thinking may steer one away from the belief system altogether. As I have questioned in the introduction, an illustration of this tension is Zainab’s criticism of Moroccan authoritarianism from a “Westernised” standpoint. She aimed to adopt this standpoint without giving up her colonised Moroccan background and religious identity (PYI-FR, 2020a). Like Zainab, Duygu (30) realised that the “global vision” she tried to maintain was not shared by most of her relatives (PYI-FR, 2021g). Feride (30) experienced a similar tension with her nationalistic relatives living in Turkey: “They are not open-minded: they only know Turkey, they have only known about it” (PYI-FR, 2021h).

Alternatively, the same line of thinking yields a spiritual search against the elders’ secularisation by means of religion. Beyond their in-family differences of opinion ($n = 41/152$; 27.0%), some interlocutors differentiated themselves from their parents by calling them traditional people, or “cultural believers”, neglecting some fundamental aspects of the belief system (PYI-NL, 2020k; PYI-BEL, 2021d; PYI-BEL, 2020e; PYI-FR, 2020e; PYI-FR, 2020h).² Some are admittedly more reactive in ideological or faith matters than their parents. While referring to the gap between immigrants, on the one hand, and young people with immigrant backgrounds on the other, Mohammed (24) drew a bleak picture of his father: “he is the immigrant liked by the Whites because he keeps his mouth shut and his head down” (PYI-FR, 2021i). Another interlocutor associated criminal behaviour among migrant-origin Muslims with the lack of a proper religious education in their countries of origin (PYI-BEL, 2021d). This divergence surfaced in our interlocutors’ emphases on a selection of religious symbols, such as the veil, and explicitly anti-colonialist and anti-racist performances.

The Ethics of Non-Interference

Another aspect of the intergenerational and intracommunal tension is religious ethics – i.e. our interlocutors’ philosophical reflection upon their moral conduct. Having been forced by her ex-husband and his family to wear a headscarf, Didem (30) argued that “the majority of Muslims have betrayed the message of Islam” (PYI-FR, 2021j). Neriman (25) had problems with her father as she was “hanging out with guys” (PYI-GER, 2020s). She also had difficulty explaining to him that 80% of her academic department were males. Malak (27) criticised her father’s understanding of religion, as he threatened to disinherit her when she started to live in a shared apartment with her boyfriend: “I would not call [my father’s religion] Islam. Because

[...] faith only works with conviction” (PYI-GER, 2020t). Ömer (26) built his life around social work in drug rehabilitation, in contrast with his father, who gave the verdict that “drug addicts and prostitutes will go to hell” (PYI-BEL, 2020b). Ömer operationalised the same belief system to respect others’ life trajectories: “It is not up to me to judge them.” To him, Islam does not have clear-cut guidelines applying in the same way to everyone.

In these narratives, the trouble is caused by those that fulfil their lust for domination in the name of religion. An illustration in this context was the case of Lale Gül, who wrote an autobiography criticising the Turkish-origin Islamic communities in the Netherlands, where she grew up. While disagreeing with Gül’s denigration of the belief system, Nurten (26) made it clear that not Gül but her parents should be held responsible: “Her parents have said to her, ‘you are going to hell,’ but they cannot say that at all, they are not God” (PYI-NL, 2021i). Murat (30) recalls such “typical Turkish things” in his family, including “no miniskirts, no shorts”, not smoking in front of parents, and no relationship with an irreligious woman or a non-virgin. In disappointment with the resilience of such attitudes, he concluded that his ethical counterarguments “go in one ear and out the other” (PYI-GER, 2020u).

Indeed, many parents are not against independent thinking, but the factors that cause them to be criticised and those that make them worthy of praise are intermingled in the narratives. In appreciation of her family, Leila (22) differentiated between being born a Muslim and choosing it freely. Questioning the role of her parents in her religious development, she concluded: “I was lucky enough to have parents who gave me the freedom to choose” (PYI-FR, 2021g). When Najla (23) decided to wear a headscarf, her father asked her repeatedly if she did so under anyone else’s pressure. Najla expressed her happiness to be the one who made this decision (PYI-NL, 2020e). Imams were not necessarily against free-thinking either. Muhammed (30) explained his transition from a “blind belief” to a self-conscious and self-responsible one with the help of an imam who told him, “if you are in doubt about something, then you have to look for the answer yourself” (PYI-NL, 2020k). Common in these cases is the appreciation of self-agency.

Tradition under the Test of Creolisation

The explicit and implicit dress codes also create tensions in the ethnically defined mosque communities. While describing their aim as attracting young people ashamed of going to mosques, some members of MET imagined a girl “who does not wear a headscarf” (PYI-NL, 2020m; PYI-NL, 2020n; PYI-NL, 2020j). Such gatekeeping leads some interlocutors to distance themselves from organisations such as DITIB. Merve (28), a formerly active member of the organisation in Cologne, revised her sense of belonging after

disagreeing with the organisational structure that imposes a single meaning on symbols such as the headscarf: “I like the people, but I no longer like the association that much” (PYI-GER, 16 July 2020).

Beyond these questions of agency, the dress codes are under the influence of creolisation, which marks the convergence of different cultural groups reterritorialised together. Mustafa (30) prefers clothing that makes it difficult to know if the carrier is a Muslim or a hipster (*see* Ajala, 2017). This ambiguity solves the labelling problem against young Muslims in society. While observing a diverse set of Muslim appearances in Amsterdam, Mustafa developed an interest in the traditional clothing outside of the Turkish bubble in which he grew up. Although he ended up mixing bits and pieces from the Afghan and North African garments such as djellaba, he could not wear them in “this Turkish mosque” because “the mosque people do not like” them (PYI-NL, 2020d).

Among others, Nagihan’s relatives were somewhat captive in their cultural clusters: “they are very communal, so they don’t care [about different viewpoints]” (PYI-FR, 2021j). Diversifying one’s news sources played a decisive role in reaching different conclusions about life. According to Nebahat (29), limiting oneself to the Turkish TV would make young Turkish-origin individuals’ vision precisely like that of their parents (PYI-FR, 2021c). Although Gözde (24) inherited the religious thinking of her parents, she also noticed a divergence in lifestyles as “my mother does not have an international environment as I do” (PYI-GER, 2020g). Amina (20) criticised elders for not understanding what youngsters “encounter every day”. She explained her argument by underlining that the latter do not categorise people based on nationalities and are concerned with discrimination and diversity. After all, the first person who read the adhan was black (PYI-GER, 2021h). After mentioning the Black Lives Matter demonstrations and the protests for LGBT rights, Amina concluded: “We want more openness” (PYI-NL, 2020h).

Disagreements over the Borders of Acceptable Diversity

The last anecdote arouses the question of acceptable diversity. Many of our interlocutors attend mosques despite having problems with the religious expertise claimed by the mosque authorities. In some cases, this turns out to be a disillusioning factor. A noteworthy illustration is İlayda’s struggle in the DITIB community. “You are born into [DITIB],” says İlayda about her ties with the organisation as a Turkish-origin German citizen. The discussion sessions and preaches about the borders of acceptable diversity surfaced her fundamental disagreement with her parents and the organisation:

A huge problem is the LGBTI topic. I accept and tolerate and understand the people and their views.

(PYI-GER, 2020p)

Although she continued to attend the organisation meetings at the time of our interview, she started to “question things they say”.

Dissatisfaction with one’s surroundings in one’s religious habitat, including one’s family and one’s society of origin, paves the way for developing different senses of belonging with the others. For example, from Paris, Asmaa’s (29) search for religious purity helped her self-identify more with France than with Morocco. She considered that she did not have a proper religious education from her family. Therefore, she felt alone in her Islamic “spiritual quest”. She criticised Moroccan society for following traditions blindly. Despite having suffered multiple times from the reactions against her veil in France, mixing with Muslim citizens of other origins at mosques helped her deculturate herself from the remnants of Moroccan customs: “for giving me this opportunity, I say thank you to France from the bottom of my heart” (PYI-FR, 2020i). After a similar experience, Gamze (25) realised that the other people in “this brasserie” may welcome a Muslim while also taking alcohol there. As opposed to these distractions that isolate her from society, her solution is to “focus on myself and ask what it is that I want”. By the same token, she criticised parents who do not let their daughters travel alone. Evaluating the role of family pressure in the straightforward explanations of racism, she argued that the feelings of being unwelcome are partly rooted in such parents’ prejudicial senses of appropriateness (PYI-BEL, 2020f). Adib (24) sees Islam as an opportunity for Belgium as it orders one to be “nice and friendly” towards one’s surroundings and, at the same time, be critical for the better. Hence, he argued that such Islamic virtues alleviate society’s hopelessness and nihilistic and suicidal tendencies (PYI-BEL, 2021a). Ferdi believes that becoming a better Muslim makes him “a better Dutch citizen” because, in his understanding, Islam is about helping society altruistically (e.g. spending time with the elders, praying and contemplating, keeping the future in mind) (PYI-NL, 2020a).

Religion as Spirituality

Another visible trajectory that contributes to the diversity described above is the belief system’s disentanglement from the political load of the public religions. One interlocutor described the trend as attaching importance to the brain, cognition, and emotions instead of following a clear-cut scripture (PYI-GER, 2020r). It is “a form of meditation”, according to another interlocutor (PYI-NL, 2021i). The Quran as such is rather available in the spirituality section of the bookstores.

While seeing Islam as a meditative trip, very few of our interlocutors imagined a physical trip to Hajj ($n = 7$; 4.60%). The trip is towards the inner self and encourages the self to comprehend Islam as a source that calms down, soothes, and reduces stress and irritation (PYI-FR, 2020c; PYI-FR, 2020j; PYI-FR, 2020a; PYI-BEL, 2021e; PYI-FR, 2020i). The trip includes

developing forgiveness, modesty, and benevolence in relation to others (PYI-FR, 2020k; PYI-BEL, 2020c; PYI-FR, 2020j; PYI-FR, 2020f; PYI-NL, 2020a; PYI-BEL, 2021e; PYI-GER, 2020p; PYI-GER, 2020v). Looking inwards privatises the beliefs, inspires contemplation in quiet (PYI-FR, 2020c), and helps become non-judgmental, non-confrontational and tolerant (PYI-FR, 2020a; PYI-FR, 2020h; PYI-FR, 2020j; PYI-GER, 2020b; PYI-FR, 2020f; PYI-GER, 2020p).

Many interviewees reported that their faith makes them more inclusive in their social interactions: “I have also had friends who are not Muslim” (PYI-NL, 2021f; PYI-FRA, 2021b; PYI-FRA, 2021g; PYI-FR, 2021b). Sometimes they could not convince others. For instance, Fatma (26) had a hard time convincing her coworker that she was not disturbed by the short dresses of her officemates: “She kept asking [about it] because I didn’t fit [into] the stereotype she had of me” (PYI-NL, 2021a). According to Mehmet, the mosque activities fail to address “the human aspects” of Islam, which he describes as education of general morality in contrast with formalised rules (PYI-GER, 2020pa). Such an education, he argues, would make it clear that one should favour a “good Cristian, Jewish, Agnostic over a bad Muslim”.

Conclusion

This research aimed to map the diverse and convoluted religious paths migrant-origin Muslims take in Europe, despite forming straight rows to pray together at mosques. Young to middle-aged Muslims’ socialisation at mosques is far from representing a clear-cut process of religious indoctrination. The ties they keep with the organisations rooted in their countries of origin do not suffice to indicate an equalisation of their ideas and interests. The study focused on 152 interviews to infer various aspects of religious diversification and saturation in the Turkish and Moroccan-origin communities. It referred to a series of conceptions related to globalisation – i.e. circulation, deterritorialisation, and transnationalism. I concluded that our interlocutors interact with a globally circulating religious repertoire reterritorialised and recontextualised in Europe and in line with the locally produced emotional needs, interlocution processes, and ideological priorities. Although many of them recall symbols from their countries of origin, they interact with them not only through the public debates in Europe but also alongside many others they recall from elsewhere.

I also argued that our interlocutors’ relationship with Islam goes beyond the propaganda of the sending and the receiving states in several ways. Some interlocutors’ emphasis on the spiritual aspects of Islam, which contradicts the formalised public religious norms, have been securitised by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet) under the label of deism. Similarly, some interlocutors’ problematisation of religious nationalism and ethnocentrism is also not ideal from the standpoint of the sending states as

it limits their ability to operationalise the sacred repertoire selectively. In addition, the intracommunal and intergenerational tensions add new dimensions to the mosque socialisation processes and the value expression about following the elderly. The saturation of this religious field requires identifying the radicalisation possibilities outside the realm of “Gray wolves” and “ISIS”, and outside the scope of violent radicalisation.

These arguments have implications for state-led religious reform or conservation projects as well. A community of believers that feels discriminated against will not accept the terms imposed by the state authorities that share the blame. Structuring national Islams following the state officials’ words is likely counterproductive for the self-identification of migrant-origin individuals. On the other hand, the sending states’ religious personnel, lacking the native language skills and the awareness of European specificities, will not be able to “conserve” their official religion in the diaspora communities either. However, the remaining relevance and power of the two authoritative claims suffice to demonstrate the limits of the hyperglobalist accounts of globalisation. Therefore, future research shall focus on the polarisation in the many-voiced migrant-origin communities and the political economy of relations through which the state authorities appropriate the religious sphere.

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Notes

- 1 This study is conducted as part of European Research Council Advanced Grant Project “ISLAM-OPHOB-ISM: Nativism, Islamophobia and Islamism in the Age of Populism” (No. 785934).
- 2 In this research context, I focus on those who grew up in conservative communities and then criticize them, instead of those who discover religiously conservative communities after becoming more religiously conservative than their parents.

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