

Freedom through Submission

Muslim Minorities

Editorial Board

Jørgen S. Nielsen (*University of Copenhagen*)
Aminah McCloud (*DePaul University, Chicago*)
Jörn Thielmann (*EZIRE, Erlangen University*)

VOLUME 36

The titles published in this series are listed at *brill.com/mumi*

Freedom through Submission

Muslim-talk in Contemporary Denmark

By

Johannes Renders



BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

Cover illustration: Mads Claus Rasmussen/Ritzau Scanpix

This book is based on a three-year doctoral project which has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program, under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement no. 676258.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Renders, Johannes, author.

Title: Freedom through submission : Muslim-talk in contemporary Denmark / by Johannes Renders.

Description: Boston : Brill, 2021. | Series: Muslim minorities, 1570-7571 ; 36 | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2020054304 (print) | LCCN 2020054305 (ebook) | ISBN 9789004448940 (hardback) | ISBN 9789004448957 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Liberty-Religious aspects-Islam. | Muslims-Denmark. | Muslims-Denmark-Cultural assimilation. | Islam-Denmark. | Denmark-Ethnic relations.

Classification: LCC BP190.5.F7 R46 2021 (print) | LCC BP190.5.F7 (ebook) | DDC 305.6/9709489-dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020054304>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2020054305>

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 1570-7571

ISBN 978-90-04-44894-0 (hardback)

ISBN 978-90-04-44895-7 (e-book)

Copyright 2021 by Koninklijke Brill nv, Leiden, The Netherlands.

Koninklijke Brill nv incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Hes & De Graaf, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Rodopi, Brill Sense, Hotei Publishing, mentis Verlag, Verlag Ferdinand Schöningh and Wilhelm Fink Verlag. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, translated, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior written permission from the publisher. Requests for re-use and/or translations must be addressed to Koninklijke Brill nv via brill.com or copyright.com.

This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

Contents

Acknowledgments	VII
Transliteration, Translation, and Dates	VIII
List of Figures	IX
Introduction	1
1 An Ethnography of Muslim-Talk on Freedom	6
2 An Anthropology of Religious Discourse	11
1 Is This Really Freedom?	21
1 Questioning	24
2 Resistance	47
3 Redefinition	71
2 Allah Named Himself	77
1 Ineffable and Perfect	79
2 Willing and Knowing	88
3 Planning and Attracting	107
3 Willing Submission	119
1 Always Surrounded	121
2 Willingly Surrendered	135
3 Already Muslim	146
4 Everything Is for Allah	161
1 Worship-Subjection	163
2 Spiritual Combat	182
3 Knowing-Belief	195
5 This Is Real Freedom!	207
1 Emancipation from Authority	209
2 Liberation through Authority	230
3 Iterative Choice	243

Conclusion	256
1 Freedom as Submission	257
2 Freedom as Fantasy	260
3 Freedom as Promise	264
Bibliography	269
Index	296

Acknowledgments

This book is based on the PhD dissertation with the same name, successfully defended at Aarhus University, department of anthropology, the 29th of November 2019. I wish to thank once again all those close to me during my three years in Denmark, enriching my journey with their blessings, criticism, and friendship. My deepest gratitude to Lene Kühle for her consistently wise and open-minded supervision, and Cameron Warner for his straight talk and enthusiasm. To Anders-Christian Jacobsen, for his kind support. To the excellent defense committee, for the engaging dialogues, their constructive feedback, and encouragement: Jørgen Nielsen, Nadia Fadil, and in particular Christian Suhr, for his passion and valuable feedback. My gratitude also goes to all my Muslim interlocutors, for the edifying conversations, the earnestness, the invaluable lessons, the trust. To all those who have been willing to read, listen, and speak frankly throughout the research period. To my ex-fellow Early Stage Researchers, for the engaging conversations and friendship: Renze, Kristian, Giovanni, Valeria, Morten, Joshua, Michael, Ilaria, Karen, Laurel, Andrea, Elisa B, Elisa Z, Sara. To the PhD and Postdoc students at the anthropology, religious studies, and theology departments of Aarhus University, for the company, laughs, and commiseration. I am grateful for those among my family and friends who supported me up to this point with their optimism and encouragement, and most of all for Nanna Sandager Kisby, who kept me sane and loving throughout the years.

Transliteration, Translation, and Dates

For the transliteration of Arabic terms I use a modified version of Alan Jones's (2005) scheme. All Arabic terms are transliterated and italicized except in cases where they have come into general use and are found in the Merriam-Webster English dictionary (e.g., Allah, Quran, sharia, hadith, instead of Allāh, Qur'ān, sharī'a, ḥadīth). The titles of Arabic publications are always transliterated. When quoting interlocutors, I relate the terms used by the individual, sometimes inconsistently (e.g., Allah and then God, *Qadar* en then destiny, predestination, or fate); when quoting other works, I follow the style adopted by the author. When transliterating Arabic names, I use the spelling commonly used in English publications (e.g., al-Ghazali instead of al-Ghazālī). Since Danish is not my first language, most of the interviews were conducted in English, a handful in mixed Danish and English, and a few in Arabic, with the assistance of an interpreter. During the fieldwork period, I learned Danish and studied enough Arabic to be able to decipher the relevant Quranic verses, catch key terms in conversations and sermons, and monitor translations by third parties. All translations from Danish are mine. When it comes to the Turkish Muslim community, I relied on their output in Danish or English (e.g., websites or social media). I did not have sermons in Turkish transcribed and translated into English. When translated, the original quotes have been omitted due to space restrictions, but are available for consultation on demand. Please contact the author also when it comes to sources (sermons, pamphlets, news articles, etc.), lists of which are available for research purposes. Quotes from the Quran are taken from a variety of translations, including Yusuf Ali (YA), Sahih International (SI), Muhammad Sarwar (MS), Mohsin Khan (MK). All dates are given according to the Gregorian calendar. All interlocutors' names are anonymized pseudonyms, except in the case of publicly accessible statements, such as those on (public) social media or newspapers.

Figures

- 1 Nye Borgerlige political campaign poster from 2017, depicting a woman in niqab with the heading "*Frihed, også for muslimske piger*" (freedom, also for Muslim girls). Image reproduced from www.facebook.com/nyeborgerligeaalborg 43
- 2 The "Salah Mat" is an "Interactive Touch Sensitive Educational Prayer Mat. Designed to inspire the love of Salah within children," produced by www.mysalahmat.com, sold in Denmark since January 2019 on the Muslim webshop JustHalal.dk. Image reproduced from www.JustHalal.dk 177
- 3 Image depicting a collection of ethical rules, including Quranic references, titled "*Etiketter fra Quran.*" Created by *Udforsk Islam*, circulating on Danish-Muslim social media in 2018. Reproduced from www.facebook.com/UdforskIslam 201
- 4 A short cartoon named "*befri ...*" (liberate ...) originally appearing on the international blog *Muslim' Show* (www.themuslimshow.tumblr.com), translated and spread on Danish social media by *Muslim Show Danish*. Reproduced from www.facebook.com/MuslimShowDk 228
- 5 Homemade video titled "*Ramadan belønninger*" (Ramadan rewards). Created by a Danish Muslim, depicting a man calculating the extra *ḥasanāt* acquired through recitation of the Quran, posted on *Religionen Islam's* Facebook page. Reproduced from www.facebook.com/ReligionenIslam 238

Introduction

I would like to show with precise examples that in analyzing discourses themselves, one sees the loosening of the embrace, apparently so tight, of words and things, and the emergence of a group of rules proper to discursive practice. These rules define not the dumb existence of a reality, nor the canonical use of a vocabulary, but the ordering of objects. (FOUCAULT [1969] 2002, 49)



At the end of 2018's Ramadan, Lars Løkke Rasmussen fulfilled his duty as Liberal prime minister of Denmark by tweeting: "I wish all Danish Muslims, who have embraced Denmark and our freedom-values, a good Eid al-Fitr! #Eid-Mubarak" (F029).¹ That one of the most influential politicians in the country would choose to mention Muslims, Denmark, and freedom in the same sentence is hardly accidental: a series of socio-historical developments and less discernible ideological negotiations had made it 'sensible' to make the charged qualification.

The statement came some two years after the award-winning exposé *Moskeerne Bag Sløret* (Mosques Behind the Veil), and two months before the implementation of the much-debated *maskeringsforbud* (covering-ban). These and many other events sparked a problematization of both freedom and Islam and, together with the lingering process of nation-building and its attendant concern for *danskhed* (Danishness), have combined to produce a regular explosion of dispute in the papers, unmaskings on national television, and inflamed social media threads. The positions and opinions are countless: some condemn the 'liberal hypocrisy' behind the ban on religious attire,² or policies

1 Lars Løkke Rasmussen (@larsloekke), "Ønsker alle danske muslimer, som har taget Danmark og vores frihedsværdier til sig, god Eid al-Fitr!" Twitter post, June 15, 2018, 8:19 p.m., <https://twitter.com/larsloekke/status/1007689103704580096>.

2 David Rue Honoré, "Jeg har gået i dansk vuggestue, dansk børnehave og dansk folkeskole. This is made in Denmark," *Berlingske*, April 6, 2018. Britta Søndergaard, "Muslimske stemmer er delte om det kommende burkaforbud," *Kristeligt Dagblad*, October 6, 2017.

targeting religious preachers;³ others insist on drawing lines between free- and hate-speech,⁴ or the need to ‘liberate’ Muslim women.⁵ While more contained than the 2005 *Jyllands-Posten* Cartoon Crisis and its violent aftermath (Klausen 2009), eruptions such as these ensure that Islam remains a lightning-rod for dispute in Danish society.

Why precisely freedom, Islam, and Denmark? Within a context where public talk of Islam is largely mediated by an incessant succession of controversies, it is relevant to shed some light on what exactly makes Islam so controversial, and for whom. Looking for the pain points in the public debate, it appears that freedom is weaponized both by and against a Muslim minority ever struggling to bolster its reputation as a respected contributor to Danish society. Denmark has a long track-record of upholding a certain form of freedom as a cultural value, leading some to consider the Muslim perspective a challenge or even a threat to the status-quo. For their part, Danish Muslims take issue with the dominant discourse that pits freedom against Islam, leading them to conceptualize and formulate freedom in ways that are informed by both Islamic tradition and current debates. Freedom thus functions as a contested nodal point in competing webs of meaning, and is one of the keys for an in-depth analysis of their entanglement.

In scientific and philosophical reasoning, wrote Louis Althusser (1971, 21), “words (concepts, categories) are ‘instruments’ of knowledge.” But in political and ideological struggle, “words are also weapons, explosives or tranquilizers and poisons.” The Marxist philosopher went as far as stating that, occasionally, “the whole class struggle may be summed up in the struggle for one word against another word. Certain words struggle amongst themselves as enemies. Other words are the site of an *ambiguity*: the stake in a decisive but undecided battle.” Especially in Denmark, although not exclusively, ‘freedom’ is such a site, a contested concept over which various parties fight to establish specific chains of associations. A number of voices in the Danish public debate would have their audience believe that ‘freedom’ disagrees with ‘Islam’; that ‘Islam’ is caught between ‘freedom’ and ‘Denmark’; that ‘Denmark’ is to be enlightened by ‘Islam’—and so forth. These are voices from parliament seats, state-

3 Sandra Meinecke, “Said Mansour: Far til fem, på kontanthjælp, terrordømt og forvist for altid”, *DR*, January 5, 2019.

4 Jacob Mchangama, “Hadprædikanter, Indrejseforbud og Ytringsfrihed”, *Justitia*, March 30, 2016. <http://justitia-int.org/ny-analyse-hadpraedikanter-indrejseforbud-og-ytringsfrihed-2/>.

5 Alex Ahrends, “Forbud mod burka er for de frihedselskende”, *Kristeligt Dagblad*, February 13, 2018.

run media, Twitter accounts, academic journals, minbars, tabloids, vandalized walls. They come from conservative, progressive, nationalist, fundamentalist, cynical, idealist, and pious camps; they overpower a silent majority by incessantly striving to fix meaning where it best serves partisan interests, confirming, debunking, and settling truths.

This struggle results in scarcely contained frustrations and tensions. In recent years, up to 81% of Danish Muslims agreed, or mostly agreed, with the statement that, over the past decade, popular attention has become increasingly negative. This has led an estimated 17% to contemplate leaving the country.⁶ For some, the implementation of the 2018 *maskeringsforbud* has been the final drop, leading even families who enjoy financial stability to depart from the land of *hygge* and tolerance.⁷ Is this undeniable social tension merely caused by what a few hostile and ominous voices proclaim in mediatized tirades, or is there more going on? Can interventions by the Danish state override a simmering debate on cultural values by pinning down the meaning of freedom, Danishness, tolerance? Does Muslim discourse constitute a threat for the hegemonic status quo? Is there even a Muslim problematization of freedom in Denmark? If so, *what constitutes a meaningful and successful articulation of human freedom according to Danish Muslims?*

The following is an excerpt from a recent book by Waseem Hussain, well-regarded imam, Muslim chaplain at Denmark's biggest prison, and chairman of the influential *Dansk Islamisk Center*. This and innumerable other reports attest to the fact that there is a 'talk' of freedom specific (not exclusive) to the Danish context, and that the tone is more often than not quite grave:

As Muslims, we are constantly reminded and encouraged what to think, accept, and like in Denmark. Not a day goes by without us being instructed about Danish freedom-values (*frihedsværdier*). Likewise with norms (*værdisæt*), demands to reform Islam, and all sorts of other things, which most Muslims equate with the loss of their freedom to choose for themselves how their religion should be. It is paradoxical that we constantly must be taught (*belæres*) about freedoms, while the freedom to be a Muslim, as one would like to be, is under pressure. In my work I see the importance of having freedom all too well. It is, after all, the greatest pun-

6 Peter Sinnbeck, "Synet på islam: 8 af 10 danske muslimer oplever en forværring," *Politiken*, March 4, 2017.

7 Kirsten Nilsson, "Forsidehenvisning: Niqabforbuddet fik Fatima til at forlade Danmark med familien," *Politiken*, October 12, 2018.

ishment for prisoners. If you take people's freedom away from them, other goods don't matter that much. Freedom is the most important thing. And Muslims increasingly feel that the freedom to be a Muslim is taken from them.⁸ (D067)

Whenever I interviewed Danish Muslims for the first time, there usually was a similar polemical accent, or at least an expression of concern. It was undeniable that I was entering a highly politicized field, which is part of the reason why I chose to rely on a certain methodical distance, prioritizing 'observation' and discourse over 'participation' and individual experience, as phenomenological anthropology would have it (Katz and Csordas 2003). In the ongoing conversation vis-à-vis public, engaged, and activist approaches toward anthropology (Bangstad et al. 2017; Goldstein and Perry 2017; Fassin 2017), many scholars ask themselves what they should do, with their data, among colleagues, in the public debate. Yet few dwell on what they already did, positioning themselves as social scientists in the field. Some see the mechanisms leading up to the 'ethical choice' as they do syntax: rules that can be taken for granted, in order to concentrate on the content. To question and re-think this positioning is sometimes shunned as pointless postmodern navel-gazing, a giving into the "mood" of "moral and epistemological crisis" belonging to the 1980s (Geertz 2002, 11).

I do not presume the availability of an external, fully-detached vantage point; rather, I suggest that a methodical zooming in and out can help us sharpen our focus on the mechanisms by which words become things, rather than becoming caught between its cogs. Michel Foucault famously proved himself a master of this zooming out, with his historical work on the production of truth. Late in his career, the philosopher-historian pondered his long-term objective of learning "to what extent the effort to think one's own history can free thought [*affranchir la pensée*] from what it silently thinks, and so enable it to think differently" ([1984] 1990, 9). Foucault's grandiose impact is a testament to the effectiveness of this effort, and his work attunes with my intention to facilitate thinking differently, without, in the process, undoing the coherence of the discourse under analysis, or pointing out beneficiaries of its outcomes. In short, the ethical conundrums that come with a thorny research subject such as the one at hand require an increased reliance on methodology, fine-tuned to the object and aims.

8 Waseem Hussain, *Imam bag tremmer* (København: Gyldendal, 2017), chap. 16, e-book. Translated from Danish.

At its best, anthropological work undoes established conclusions and syntheses, dissolving the ‘human’ by going “back towards that which foments his positivity,” fulfilling its role as “counter-science” (Foucault [1966] 2005, 413–414). The task is not, in Tim Ingold’s (2011, 14) words, to take stock of the world’s contents, but “to follow what is going on, tracing the multiple trails of becoming, wherever they lead,” thereby revealing the innumerable ways of being-in-the-world, of “dwelling within the symbolic universe” (Žižek 2000, 82). An ethnographic immersion in Denmark and its Muslim environments, an engagement with the Islamic tradition, and an inquiry into the multifarious ways of talking about freedom, is an opportunity to unsettle whatever sedimentations and obstructions we might encounter, to reveal how the meaning of freedom flows and crystallizes. Not in order to reach yet another immovable ‘bottom of things,’ but rather to think in a new register—to help restore the free flow of thought.

One way to accomplish this goal is to untangle the structured totality resulting from articulatory practice, i.e. ‘discourse’ (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001, 105); to show how discourses, *as practices*, “systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault [1969] 2002, 54); to reveal the ways in which human beings are interpellated as subjects of ideology (Althusser [1970] 1971), coming to occupy symbolically predefined subject positions (Angermüller 2014, 72). In other words, to expose the effects of discourse on society and ourselves when it comes to signifiers such as freedom. The question, then, is not so much what freedom *is*, but rather what a particular conception and way of speaking about freedom *does*, and what it reveals about the speaker’s location in the discursive field.

When it comes to Islam as a category of analysis, my study strives to demonstrate how the ideological field we call ‘Islam’ is the result of a dynamic montage of ‘empty signifiers’ such as freedom, destiny, and liberation, held together by certain ‘nodal points’ and the intervention of Islam itself as ‘master-signifier.’ Yet the mapping and analysis of religious discourse does not exhaust Muslim-talk as an object of study; it rather paves the road for a Žizekian *symptomatic* reading of the ideological text. Throughout the book, and in the conclusion, there are therefore openings into a psychoanalytical analysis of the ideological kernel of enjoyment (Žižek [1989] 2008, 45, 140).

Kareem, one of my interlocutors, would sometimes use a common Danish expression both when articulating his deepest impetus to believe, and when discerning a clear formulation of his religious sentiments: ‘*det giver mening*’ (it gives/makes sense). One of my drives throughout this study has been a curiosity as to what makes a statement meaningful; not just in the sense of expressing value, but also in being sensible/intelligible *per se*. This study is thus also an

investigation into the mechanisms by which statements both give/attribute and make/create ‘sense,’ socketing into a machinery of meaning-production. Instead of trying to make Kareem’s ‘meaning’ my own, I would ask myself where he was speaking and listening *from* in order for him to experience that meaning as true. Admittedly, for some of my Muslim interlocutors, the result might be somewhat insipid. One imam, after reading a chapter draft, observed that “when one does not understand God, but considers people’s relationship with God as a scientific equation, we end up in the black and white (picture of the world).” To him, spiritual knowledge acquired through belief gives the world color, an “extra dimension” (C056). To be sure, my ambition with this study was not to open my eyes to this ‘extra dimension,’ but to extrapolate what constitutes a meaningful articulation of freedom for those holding this ‘spiritual knowledge’.

As will hopefully become clear in the following chapters, data and nuances do not ‘solve’ the framed controversies and debates, they provide the ammunition. In the case of the debate on freedom, the theological content is precisely what allows for resistance and redefinition of established narratives, and is therefore definitely threatening to those that have a stake in their continuation. Therefore, I find it crucial to be aware of how one’s interventions play out in an ongoing ideological struggle, and to reflect on one’s ideological commitments (see Smith 2014). It should be clear my study is not advocating a Muslim position, or claiming its superiority over that of its critics. I am convinced that an ethnography of e.g. ‘Liberal-talk’ on freedom in Denmark would yield as many insights as one of ‘Muslim-talk’. The “hymn to freedom” penned by the 2005 Cartoons-Controversy’s orchestrator Flemming Rose (2015) contains as many thought-provoking statements as Waseem Hussain’s (2017) “Imam behind bars.” While I do attempt to reconstruct the discursive network necessary to make sense of Muslim-talk on freedom, I do not imagine Islam-skeptical parties need this information. Some find the public, media, and politicians repeatedly culpable of lacking the proper contextual knowledge to speak accurately about Islam. Yet there is nothing foolish about Rasmussen’s best wishes to “Danish Muslims” who “embraced Denmark” and “our freedom-values” (F029): it is a cunning move, a timely articulation of the Liberal freedom discourse.

1 An Ethnography of Muslim-Talk on Freedom

During my fieldwork among Danish Muslims, it was plain to see from its use in conversation that the term ‘freedom’ and its cognates were taken to mean something more than what can be found in a dictionary. Most importantly,

articulations involving freedom come with a certain amount of implied/tacit knowledge.⁹ My 'Muslim-talk' denotes the textual and oral content of the Muslim speech-community, making continuous reference, whether tacitly or explicitly, to the Islamic tradition, but also to a rationale forged though intensive and sustained engagement with its dynamic vocabulary and truths. With 'Muslim-talk on freedom' I thus refer to the ways in which Danish citizens, self-identifying as Muslim, leverage this knowledge and speak about freedom in ways that are particularly (not necessarily exclusively) meaningful within their own community.¹⁰ Moreover, Islam presents itself as a coherent system with its own discourse on freedom, and it is tempting to contrapose it to the neoliberal discourse dominating the Danish political sphere. However, as this study demonstrates, disentangling the two supposedly distinct networks is not as easy as it seems. Muslim-talk should be seen as dynamic, developing in reaction to various stimuli, coming from the international ummah but also local public debates.

In considering the triad Islam-freedom-Denmark, I intend to coordinate Danish-Muslim associations with freedom and its cognates, tease out the logic that binds them, and describe how this logic relates to the linguistic uses of freedom in the public debate. In other words, the task is to look into the connections that Danish Muslims make, in the name of Islam, between freedom and a determinate range of practices and ideas. I will describe how public freedom-talk is fed into the religious machinery and thrown back into the civic arena; a process by which it is refitted with points of shared contact, establishing common denominators and new connections, making previously obscure statements meaningful. This makes the study as much about the mechanisms of sense-making and ideology as it is about Islam and freedom. Hence the primary research question: *What constitutes a meaningful and successful articulation of human freedom according to Danish Muslims?* In order to achieve some verifiable insight into all this, I set out to perform three distinct tasks.

9 Because of the rich history of the signifier, it is tempting to laden it with those connotations found in philosophy, theology, lexicology, jurisprudence, and the like. In the context of this study, freedom gains its meaning through its localization in a living matrix of religious notions; through determinate language-use, practices, and context, in negotiation with a public conversation. It is therefore essential to stick to Muslim-talk on freedom in Denmark and not digress to academic definitions of the notion.

10 Hymes (1972) suggested the term 'speech-community' for those who share certain rules concerning the 'proper' performing and interpretation of speech. These ways of speaking involve 'styles' set in particular 'speech-situations' (e.g., Friday prayer, a festivity), making up what Hymes called 'speech-events,' comprised by 'speech-acts'.

First, I aim to analyze how Islam as master-signifier informs Muslim-talk on freedom. 'Islam' as master-signifier, retroactively structuring the symbolic order, 'fills' empty signifiers such as freedom with meaning, and confers identity to Muslim individuals. The task is thus to detect the regularities by which Muslim statements acquire their significance, making the intelligibility of human will and freedom dependent upon them, while simultaneously invalidating a range of alternative significations. It will be key to this study to demonstrate how, in Denmark, it is *Islam-as-submission* that regulates statements on freedom, and which other notions depend on it.

Second, I aim to explore the specialized knowledge involved in bringing out the general complexity and range of Muslim-talk on freedom; identify what kind of statements Danish Muslims seek to establish as true; address the ways in which statements on freedom proliferate and crystallize in social practices/organizations. This systematic analysis of discourse involves paying attention to the setting, form, and content of everyday speech, the audience, its goals, history, and development.

Third, I aim to show how Muslim communities partake in the negotiation of freedom in the public sphere, identifying some counter-discourses that Muslims employ to create the conditions allowing to introduce Islamic truths in public debates, latching onto established narratives while eluding a liberal purview.

To execute these aims, I have performed multi-sited fieldwork, primarily in Aarhus, where I have been living for three years. The field included various Muslim environments relying on written/spoken Danish, Arabic, or English, both online and throughout the country—including several mosques in Aarhus and Copenhagen. The data collection took place mainly between January 2017 and January 2019. Throughout my stay in Denmark, I have actively monitored Muslim and public media in search of the different places where the term 'freedom' and its cognates occur. I have never attempted to reconstitute what freedom *itself* might be, in the form of a pre-discursive, fundamental experience, nor to reveal some kind of secret kept by the Muslim community. The goal was to stay on the analytical level of what is being said, maintaining the discourse's own consistency. My data was out in the open: I dealt as much as possible with what was stated, not the intentions, feelings, or experiences behind it.

Many Muslims read the Quran regularly, but all Muslims are exposed to some form of knowledge—written (books, educational websites), auditory (sermons, lessons), visual (television preachers, YouTube), etc. Since, to an extent, anthropologists already expose themselves to these same media in the field, it is essential to keep track of as much of the content one has been in contact with as possible, in order to be able to trace statements back to their

source. Gumperz and Hymes (1972) already prescribed a systemic analysis of discourse, accounting for the form, content, and setting of everyday speech and writing, its addressers and audience, its goals and impact, its background and development. In the present study, I have striven to be painstakingly systematic and organized in both the documenting and analysis of Muslim-talk, although most of it had to be left out for a more readable final product. In practice, this meant collecting the discourse fragments in which uses of freedom (and related notions) occur, and compiling a sizable archive of actual utterances by Danish Muslims.

My representation of the ways Danish Muslims speak of freedom is thus the product of an evolutionary coding of the archived statements I assembled over the period of one and a half years. This archive contains the products of fieldwork, including fifty-five in-depth interviews/conversations, recorded, transcribed, and coded in Nvivo (identifiable throughout the book by their respective source codes, e.g., C001); interventions by Muslims in Danish newspapers (N); documentation found in various Muslim environments, including pamphlets and recent publications by Danish Muslims (D); *khutbah* and speeches held in Danish mosques, recorded on location and found online (S); social media pages, profiles, and groups (F); web pages (W); events organized by Danish Muslims (E); official political statements and legal action concerning the Muslim minority (P). Anchoring the inquiry in these statements—i.e. the basic units of discourse—from private (e.g., in-depth interviews), semi-public (e.g., sermons), and public (e.g., newspaper articles) settings, served as a constant reminder of the materiality of discourse.

One thing that needs to be clear from the start, is that this archive of statements, while being verbatim quotations of Danish Muslims, is riddled with inconsistencies. One cannot, after all, expect coherence from every member of any community. More than that, there are many competing narratives within the community, different points of emphasis, and so forth. The point of an ethnography of Muslim-talk is not to create a flawless coherence, but to show how contradictions *can* exist within a more or less regulated and coherent system. Ideology is always at work to address these contradictions, to refine, as it were, its own internal consistency over time. As I will argue, this process is never complete.

With the exception of political and legal statements, the first criterion for the archive's sources was that the speakers/writers be Danish citizens who self-identify as Muslim. Admittedly, 'Danish Muslims' is a quite heterogeneous group comprising many ethnic backgrounds, languages, political outlooks, and denominations. Still, from the outset, I have assumed Muslim-talk on freedom to be cross-ethnic and cross-sectarian. The archive thus includes statements

from well-known public figures as well as ordinary mosque-goers, social media influencers as well as semi-active users. Since the majority of Danish Muslims and sources are Sunni, I will only specify Shia, Sufi, or Ahmadi when appropriate.

The second criterion was that the statements be limited to those delivered in Denmark between January 2016 (with a few exceptions up to 2014) and January 2019. I have chosen the temporal parameters in order to limit the range and amount of material involved, such as is fitting for a synchronous analysis. These dates also coincide with the release and aftermath of the controversial documentary-series *Mosques Behind the Veil*, which first aired in March 2016, constituting a key discourse-instigating event. A second significant event was the implementation of the *maskeringsforbud* (August 2018).

Another factor that characterizes my approach is a necessary management of knowledge. Prior to this project, I had almost no knowledge of Muslim theology, terminology, or practices. This proved to be an advantage; beginning from a point of ignorance, I was more easily able to track which insights/information I acquired during this time-frame, and who/where they came from. This would naturally influence the course of the conversation, where my interlocutors were compelled to articulate their most basic convictions, without taking anything for granted. I strove to limit my knowledge-intake to exclusively Danish Muslim sources. Upon encountering relevant material in academic papers and literature, I would check for confirmation among the ranks either of my interlocutors, or other Danish-Muslim sources (such as social media and educational websites).

The main results of this ethnography of Muslim-talk in Denmark are conveyed by the title 'Freedom through Submission,' and reflect a well-known Islamic orthodoxy: first, Muslim articulations of freedom must be understood in light of the master-signifier Islam-as-submission; second, in Danish Muslim-talk, freedom (as ethical practice) is exercised *through* a cultivated relinquishing of the will to Allah as ultimate Authority; third, freedom (as moral goal) is aspired to and achieved *through* a submissive yet proactive attitude towards Divine Decree/Destiny. The subtitle specifies that the study involves statements qualified by Danish citizenship and belonging to the global Muslim *'ummah*, lists the key associations, and communicates the idea that these utterances refer to subject-positions rather than flesh-and-blood individuals.

It is important to note that most Danish Muslims I encountered were quite protective of terms such as 'submission' and 'surrender,' wary of misunderstandings or superficial renderings of their significance. These notions are, after all, the very core of '*islam*' (from *sīn lām mīm*, meaning submission as well as safeness and peace). Linking 'freedom' to 'submission' is uncontroversial and

accepted by most of my interlocutors, but many insist on several qualifications, some of which have to do with audience design, and others with specific theological preoccupations, which I relate in subsequent chapters. Moving forward, it is key that one brackets one's habitual associations with the terms and gradually 'rediscovers' their location in Islamic discourse.

2 An Anthropology of Religious Discourse

I consider my ethnography of Muslim-talk on freedom as a contribution to the anthropology of discourse genre. Within the discipline, the ethnographic study of language use was pioneered by anthropologist-linguist Edward Sapir (1921) as the 'study of speech,' and repackaged as the 'ethnography of communication' by linguist John Gumperz and anthropologist Dell Hymes (1972; see also Hymes 1964). Yet the genre acquired its focus on discourse and practice only when it was revisited in a Foucauldian spirit by anthropologists such as Lila Abu-Lughod (1986; 1991). In *Writing Against Culture*, Abu-Lughod (1991) critiqued the use of the ambiguous category of 'culture' as the true locus of anthropological inquiry, because it operated much like its loathed predecessor: race. Culture has been important to anthropology because "the anthropological distinction between self and other rests on it. Culture is the essential tool for making other" (Abu-Lughod 1991, 54–55). In the anthropology of Islam, "some anticolonial movements and present-day struggles have worked by what could be labeled reverse Orientalism, where attempts to reverse the power relationship proceed by seeking to valorize for the self what in the former system had been devalued as other." The suggestion was then to exchange the other-making notion of 'culture' for 'discourse' and 'practice,' because they work against the first's idealistic undertones and assumption of boundedness (Abu-Lughod 1991, 54; see also Asad 1983).

As I see it, the contemporary anthropology of discourse builds on this tradition and draws from correlated but distinct efforts in a multitude of often overlapping fields, including linguistic anthropology, semiotic anthropology, ethnolinguistics, conversation analysis, narrative inquiry, content analysis, sociolinguistics, historical discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis, linguistic pragmatics, political discourse theory, deconstruction, stylistics, and more. All these fields contribute to enrich the theoretical and methodological framework of the present study, and have the term 'discourse' as their common denominator.

The concept of discourse has its roots in philosophy's transcendental turn, in which Kant's synthetic a priori and Husserl's intuition of essences each played

key roles, shifting attention from material facts toward the conditions of their possibility. Theories of discourse, however, moved away from ahistorical and/or invariable conceptions of these conditions, insisting on the historicity and variability of discourse (Laclau 1993). Ferdinand de Saussure's (1916) formalization of linguistics allowed for its abstract schemes to be applied, with great success, in other fields, leading contemporary research came to be increasingly sign-rather than man-centered.¹¹ In post-Saussurean linguistics, the idealist notion of the subject as the 'creator' of reality, the all-powerful agency of a Cartesian-like subject (Laclau 1993), was exchanged for a notion of structure. This move was based on the idea that our cognitions only ever become meaningful in pre-established yet ever-changing discourses (Torfing 2003, 88). In line with these developments, I define discourses as variably successful attempts to temporarily stabilize/fix meanings and modes of interpretation. Or, as Torfing (2003, 85–86) puts it: "a discourse is a differential ensemble of signifying sequences in which meaning is constantly renegotiated," and that "in the absence of a fixed centre, fails to invoke a complete closure."¹²

Perhaps the main reason why 'discourse' has been such a fruitful analytic notion is that, in both its pragmatic and semantic aspects, it cuts across the usual distinction between thought and reality. Most importantly, it does not simply designate an inconsequential linguistic region within the social (as 'text' might do). Instead, it is co-extensive with and co-constitutive of the social.

11 Lacan (1966) developed a semiotics of the unconscious, Lévi-Strauss (1958) a semiotics of kinship and myth, Althusser (1969) and later Laclau (1985) a semiotics of the political, Barthes (1957) a semiotics of literature, and Foucault (1969), most famously, a semiotics of historical discourse. In these works, explanation involved not "the tracing of an event to a mind which would be allowed to count as its source," but "the description of systems of signs" (Culler [1981] 2001, 38). Foucault ([1969] 2002, 54) refined this approach by stating that we should no longer resort to "treating discourses as groups of signs (signifying elements referring to contents or representations) but as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak."

12 This last idea is heavily indebted to the deconstruction of totalizing structures accomplished by Derrida (1967) in his *Writing and Difference*, where he shows that a structure exists only as an open field of signification characterized by a temporary and ambiguous order—an order established by a multiplicity of shifting centers. Derrida ([1967] 2001, 365) wrote in the essay *Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* that "if totalization no longer has any meaning, it is not because the infiniteness of a field cannot be covered by a finite glance or a finite discourse, but because the nature of the field—that is, language and a finite language—excludes totalization." According to Derrida, this field is in effect that of 'play,' by which he meant "a field of infinite substitutions only because it is finite, that is to say, because instead of being an inexhaustible field, as in the classical hypothesis, instead of being too large, there is something missing from it: a centre which arrests and grounds the play of substitutions."

A common reference point for discourse theorists and analysts is Wittgenstein's (1953) well-known notion of 'language-game,' which approximates that of discourse in that it denotes a type of variably complex speech-making, paired with particular actions, in which individuals *habitually* engage. In other words, a 'language-game' is "an attempt to convey the embeddedness of speech-making in routine social relationships and behaviors, the formulaic way in which speech accompanies everyday social interaction and amounts to a whole "form of life" (Rapport and Overing 2014, 118). The concepts of discourse and language-game share an insistence on the entwining of speech and behavior, between what we consider as simply linguistic and socio-cultural.

Some decades ago, the notion of 'discourse' was judged by some "at least as terrorist as the old-time culturology," the "new superorganic" selectively dictating "what can be perceived, imagined and expressed" (Sahlins 2002, 62; 1993). Yet up to the present day, no anthropologist has managed to seriously discredit and render obsolete Foucault's intervention, except in the form of after-dinner entertainment. To some extent, Marshall Sahlins's concern was justified. While there is a need to conceptualize a phenomenon like Islam as something more than an incoherent collection of opinions, and to account for sameness as well as inconsistencies, discourse should not become the totalizing signifier. It must be clear that discourse theory provides the tools to work on a certain level of analysis, but does not preclude other approaches to the subject. Of course it is not the case, as Rapport and Overing (2014, 124) lament, that for Foucauldians "when people speak [...] the playing out of a language-game is the only thing occurring;" but even most critics acknowledge that it *does* occur, and the means to study it are there.

Islam can be conceptualized as a 'discursive formation' inasmuch it is the "result of the articulation of a variety of discourses into a relatively unified whole" (Torfinn 2003, 300), whose coherence is given in the shape of a regularity in the dispersion of its smallest units: statements (*énoncés*).¹³ The point is not to determine the truth or even the individual meaning of these statements, but rather to uncover the rules of their formation, the conditions of existence for discursive events, albeit in a present, living narrative (Foucault [1969] 2002). A Foucauldian historical-archaeological analysis allows to identify "the law of *existence* of statements," the rules that define "the forms and limits of the *sayable*," refraining from trying to capture "the fugitive unheard

13 In Foucault's ([1969] 2002, 41) terminology, we are dealing with a 'discursive formation' "whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, [...] a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations)."

subtlety of a word which has no text" (Foucault et al. 1991, 59). An anthropological study is less ambitious, and can only address a slice of the statements composing a formation such as Islam: it must restrict itself to what is being said today, a synchronous rather than a diachronous analysis. As a discursive formation, Islam is continuously in the process of producing meaning: it determines "*what can and should be said*" (Pêcheux [1975] 1982, 111), through sermons, pamphlets, scriptures, and so forth. Everything has to be made meaningful in terms of its core principles, from eternal salvation to hygiene and diuretics. This does not mean that all *must* be regulated for the sake of regulation; the point is to forge connections, to organize life as a meaningful totality.

Music, for example, might be celebrated as 'spiritually uplifting' *nashīd*, or subjected to strict controls such as bans on non-vocal instrumentation, as the Muslim Q&A website *Islamsvar.dk* would have it (W074).¹⁴ Backed by a long list of Sunni sheikhs, the website functions as a sort of accessible fatwa-bank, whose goal is to "ensure that Danish-speaking Muslims have the opportunity to gain credible and balanced knowledge of Islam" (W089).¹⁵ The result is a myriad of entries providing authoritative judgments on everything from the most minute everyday actions (is it allowed to pluck one's eyebrows?) to perennial ethical dilemmas (free will or predestination?). Even if a quotidian act such as 'eating an apple' can be deemed neutral/indifferent (*mubāḥ*), i.e. not involving Allah's judgment, this 'neutralization' still constitutes an attribution of meaning. Moreover, while the majority of actions might fall under this latter category, it does not mean they are ethically inert. As Hussain puts it: "there is no reward in eating apple as such, but if one also intends to eat the apple so that one can get energy and thereby worship *Allahu ta'ālā*, there will be rewards in it" (D062).¹⁶

Mapping Islam in this way does not signal a regress into essentialism. In an attempt to avoid this much-loathed fallacy, some have tried to distance themselves from 'Islam' as a coherent totality altogether. Gabriele Marranci (2008, 15), for instance, relates a version of a typical basic outline, received from a sheikh early in his career: "Islam derives from the Arabic three-syllable root

14 Waseem Hussain, "Er det tilladt at høre musik?" *Islamsvar.dk*, October 3, 2010, accessed August 1, 2019, <http://islamsvar.dk/halal-og-haram/medier-og-underholdning/er-det-tilladt-at-hore-musik/>.

15 Waseem Hussain, "Om Islamsvar," *Islamsvar.dk*, accessed August 1, 2019, <http://islamsvar.dk/om-islamsvar/>.

16 Waseem Hussain, "De Islamiske Regler (Fard, Sunna, Makruh og Haram)," *Islamsvar.dk*, August 30, 2010, accessed August 1, 2019, <http://islamsvar.dk/artikler/islamiske-regler-fard-sunna-makruh-haram/>.

s-l-m. From this root derives the verb *salima*, to be safe, from which can be derived ... *istaslama*, to surrender, *salaam*, peace, *salaama*, health or safety and *muslim*." Marranci—convinced that a shared theological framework/history are not enough to prove a standard, transnational unit—shelves this formulation, arguing that embodiments of Islam are as many as its interpretations. According to this logic, it is not Islam that shapes Muslims, but rather Muslims who make Islam. I argue that this fashionable move from creed to believers, in a haste to discount orthodox articulations of the former, leads us rather to essentialize the latter, casting them as beings endowed with a dubious amount of creativity. Most practices and utterances serve to maintain and reproduce Islamic discourse, not design it; even adaptation and subversive repetition of Muslim identity starts from within its unmanned yet moving borders.

The main critique of this study would be that it downplays human agency and the reflexive capacities of individual Muslims. However, it does not follow from the previous that the agency plays no role. The constant efforts by Danish Muslims attune to the particular socio-historical circumstances are as visible as they are significant. It is a plain misunderstanding, as Rapport and Overing (2014, 125) appear to do, to accuse discourse theory of the kind of "mystification" which obscures the "human consciousness and sophistication" possessed by human beings to "transcend" their own institutions. In fact, this is precisely what Foucault saw as the function of thought itself: it is that which allows one to step back from a particular way of acting or reacting, "to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals" (Foucault 1997, 117). Moreover, the human ability and impetus to transcend their own institutions, for Foucault ([1976] 1998, 95), comes with power itself: "where there is power, there is resistance."

Of course there are complex individuals 'behind' the subject-positions, but they are not *beyond* discourse. They bring about change by positioning themselves as nodal points in discursive networks, becoming points of reference that temporarily halt the slippage of meaning. In a sense, when occupying a subject position, we are what we know. If what we know is Islam, i.e. if we situate ourselves within Islamic discourse and speak *as* Muslims, then this knowledge literally formulates our word and thought. Its power is manifested through the productive feedback-loop it generates/sustains: Islam shapes Muslims shaping Islam shaping Muslims. While 'thought' does make it possible to 'step back' from a way of acting, it seems somewhat naive to assert, as Rapport and Overing (2014, 126) do, that it is "never difficult" for the individual "to see her- or himself both present and absent: a conscious player in the game (however reluctant and formally disempowered) but never unconsciously played by it." Moreover, if one really desires to play, would one not *want* to forget it is a game?

It is key to not see the collection of statements in this book as coherent and consistent, but rather as *striving* for coherence. Asad (1986, 10–11) rightly warned to not reduce Muslims to what he called ‘Islamic dramatis personae,’ enacting a predetermined story, but rather to “look for connections, changes, and differences, beyond the fixed stage of an Islamic theater.” Once again, fixing the ethnographic gaze on Muslim actors would indeed lead to the description of consistent characters, and the perception of Islam as a complete, accomplished tradition. As I demonstrate in the following chapters, there are plenty of dilemmas, ambiguities, and inconsistencies in Danish Muslim-talk. There are differences in opinion, debates, and ‘internal interventions’ (Amir-Moazami and Salvatore 2003, 53). Yet, my study also shows that a key motivating force for Muslim speakers is the incessant striving for consistency and unity, even if it is never truly reached.

Recapitulating, in performing a synchronous analysis of the inner operations of established religious discourses, I begin by tracing the constellation of utterances surrounding a specific term (freedom) from a specific subject position (Muslim) that is tethered to a specific discursive event (e.g., the *maskeringsforbud*). With these parameters in place, I proceed to discern those articulatory practices which relentlessly attempt to ‘fix’ meaning and dominate the field of discursivity. To take notice, in other words, of repeated attempts to arrest the flow of difference(s) through the construction of privileged nodal points; such as are responsible, in part, for the establishment of meaning. This is what Laclau and Mouffe ([1985] 2001, 105) termed *articulation*: the process by which an ‘element’ (unarticulated differential position) transforms into a (potentially polysemic) ‘moment’. In other words, a contingent intervention, temporarily fixing meaning in an undecided field of discursivity.

Looking into articulations of freedom reveals some of the privileged discursive points of this partial fixation, also known as *nodal points* (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001, 113) or *points de capiton* (Lacan [1966] 2001, 231). Only empty signifiers, such as freedom, can become privileged signifiers able to fix the meaning of a signifying chain. As Laclau reminds us: “This limitation of the productivity of the signifying chain establishes the positions that make predication possible—a discourse incapable of generating any fixity of meaning is the discourse of the psychotic” (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001, 112). While nodal points play the most important role in creating/sustaining the identity of a particular discourse—providing, as they do, fixed loci of meaning—this does not mean that they exhaust the richness of meaning in the field they fix. These are, after all, empty signifiers without a definite signified, such as ‘nation,’ ‘party,’ ‘religion.’ They are defined by their lack of content rather than by density of meaning, which is why they have a structural role as intersections in a

discursive network. Jacob Torfing (2003, 99) offers a summary of this process: “a variety of signifiers are floating within the field of discursivity as their traditional meaning has been lost; suddenly some master-signifier intervenes and retroactively constitutes their identity by fixing the floating signifiers within a paradigmatic chain of equivalence.”

This makes ‘Islam’ the master-signifier under consideration, i.e. a signifier retroactively structuring the symbolic order, fixing the ideological field. In the early Lacan (1966), the master-signifier is the signifier which guarantees the consistency of a community, but at whose signified is at the same time “an enigma for the members themselves—nobody really knows what it means, but each of them somehow presupposes that the others know, that it has to mean ‘the real thing’, so they use it all the time” (Žižek 2000, 106). Of course there is no scarcity of explanations, but at the same time the notion must allow for a seemingly infinite depth. As one of my interlocutors puts it: “You would need three or four lifetimes to understand it (Islam) fully!” (see 4.3). What symbolically binds Muslims is the shared reference to to ‘Islam’ as an ambiguous center, the vanishing mediator between the individual and Allah as the ‘big Other,’ the ultimate guarantee of Truth.

Several parts of my study can be conceived as forms of discourse analysis, a broad label that includes a host of auxiliary fields and has steadily been acquiring the status of a discipline in its own right (Wetherell, Taylor, and Yates 2001; Angermüller, Maingueneau, and Wodak 2014).¹⁷ Within the social sciences, researching discourse amounts to investigating “the relationship between speaking/writing as activity or social practices and the (re)production of meaning systems/orders of knowledge, the social actors involved in this, the rules and resources underlying these processes, and their consequences in social collectivities” (Keller 2013, 2). So while ‘discourse theory’ develops a broad theoretical perspective on the construction of meaning through discourse, ‘discourse analysis’ concentrates on its empirical investigation, and while it does offer a range of tools, it does not refer to a particular method.

17 The great variety of approaches are united by a shared set of theoretical perspectives, with each emphasizing certain of these more than others: some form of social constructionism; a decentering of both structure and subject (favoring the analysis of different subject positions within a given discourse, and so the construction of a variety of centers, each partially fixing identities within an open-ended structure) (Torfing 2003, 299–300); the adoption of linguistic pragmatics, i.e. an interdisciplinary social-cognitive perspective on language-use (Blommaert and Verschueren 1998, 5); Foucault’s thought concerning the link between power relations and knowledge production (M. Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 12).

Two decades ago, some considered the use of discourse theory in the study of religion “uncharted territory” (Murphy 2000, 403), with some notable exceptions (e.g., Lincoln 1989; Masuzawa 1993).¹⁸ Although systematic and methodical applications might be few (e.g., Heather 2000; Brown 2001; Granholm 2005), the principles of discourse theory have pervaded all humanities, and few today study religion without referring to its pragmatics. My study is a further step in this territory, and a plea for the complementarity of ethnography and discourse analysis (see also Hammersley 2005). The empirical study of discourses can never be isolated from the more theoretical endeavor to explain the linguistic constitution of a meaningful reality, and although the majority of the following chapters are inductive/descriptive, theories of discourse and ideology will function throughout as an interpretative filter.

Finally, one might ask whether this idea of Islam as a living discursive formation does not amount to a Marxist notion of ideology, generically defined as the system of representations and ideas that dominate both a social group and the mind of its members. My approach has many affinities with a theory of ideology as intimated by Marx, developed by Althusser, and refurbished by Žižek, but is more indebted to a post-Marxist, Foucauldian outlook. As an analytical concept, provided ‘ideology’ is yoked to a settled notion of truth, regardless of content, it will not suffice to examine the ways in which adherence to a particular discursive system *produces* its truths. Rather than discounting advances in the analysis of ideology, I see my approach as preceding and complementary to it. Since scholars such as Althusser and Pêcheux have showed that meaning exists antagonistically, this analysis involves tracing the ideological positions of struggle responsible for meaning-production. As Pêcheux ([1975] 1982, 111), following Althusser, states: “*words, expressions, propositions, etc., change their meaning according to the positions held by those who use them, which signifies that they find their meaning by reference to those positions, i.e., by reference to the ideological formations ... in which those positions are inscribed.*”

An anthropology of discourse is a “discursive reading” of the ideological text, demonstrating how a montage of various empty signifiers results, through the intervention of articulation and fixing of certain ‘nodal points,’ in a given ideological field (Žižek [1989] 2008, 140). Most of Žižek’s studies, on the other hand, are “symptomatic readings” of the ideological text, employing the discursive

18 While several scholars of religion saw discourse theory as a good alternative to phenomenological approaches and as a way to undo the opposition between humanities and other disciplines (McCutcheon 2007; Hjelm 2014; Martin 2017, 104), rules and conventions remained unclear, and the studies of discourse and religion remained mostly theoretical (Wijsen 2013, 70).

map traced by various scholars for a critique of ideology. Still, a careful mapping has to precede such critique, in order to avoid spectacular yet misleading claims in a haste to get to the ideological core, as Žižek (2008) himself has perhaps been culpable of in the case of Islam.

The first chapter follows the arguments of Danish Muslims as they counter the institutional uses of ‘freedom’ and ‘Danishness’ accusations of discrimination, hypocrisy, and oppression. In order to situate the debate, I provide some historical and political context regarding Islam in Denmark. I address how the hegemonic liberal-secular juxtaposition of ‘Islam’ and ‘freedom’ is in many cases refused and actively contested. I argue that the unhinging of the signifiers from the chain of discourse running through Danish language-use allows for a reconfiguration the public debate on freedom.

The second chapter documents how Muslim-talk on freedom is anchored in particular understandings of the Divine. I discuss the rationale behind the Names of Allah, the subject of Divine Will and Destiny (*al-Qaḍā’ wa al-Qadar*), the oft-invoked notion of a Divine Plan, and the primordial state of purity/innocence (*fiṭrah*). I argue that these are essential building blocks, since the individual is interpellated as Muslim subject with reference to her place in a Divine Scheme and reversion to a ‘natural state’.

Chapter three examines the tensions Muslims experience and navigate in highlighting an agential mode that passes through a logic of submission to Allah. At the heart of it lies a mystical stance that links the world and human experience with Allah, and which enables individual subjects to conceive of themselves as ephemeral creations in relation to this overpowering truth. Hence, the question of freedom, agency, and predestination becomes a human (and thus situated) concern, rather than a transcendental one. ‘Willing submission’ here involves the recognition of how humans are always-already in submission to Allah.

Chapter four turns to the question of ethics as the way ‘willing submission’ is put into practice. Freedom is described as something that does not simply involve conscious thinking but also bodily practice as exemplified by Muslim prayer. Involved in this operation are the complex dynamics of the so-called ‘struggle of the self,’ and a ‘spiritual combat’ against the corrupting forces of Shaytan.

The fifth and final chapter reflects on the three main forms of ‘real freedom’ derived from Muslim-talk in Denmark. Discussing emancipation from worldly authority, I follow my interlocutors into a discussion on the covering-ban. In outlining the theme of liberation through the Authority of Allah, I involve the notions of safety, success, and merit. I conclude with a discussion on ‘iterative

surrender,' the continuous and never truly fulfilled commitment to Allah. I conclude with a discussion on 'aliberal freedom', arguing that, at least in the case of Denmark, liberal notions of freedom cannot be contrasted with the ontology of cultivated submission, and that the two are rather increasingly entwined.

Is This Really Freedom?

Questioning, Resistance, Redefinition

On a little-frequented corner of YouTube, Copenhagen Abdul Wahid Pedersen shares some thoughts about freedom.¹ A video titled *'Frihed'* features the imam sitting in a room, speaking for just a few minutes, with a collection of prayer beads in the background. Pedersen starts by tackling the uses of the term in the media.

“Freedom is one of the words we hear very often in the public debate. The issue is simply what freedom is. When one follows the debate, one could get the impression that freedom is about being able to do or say anything, without limitations and virtually without responsibility.”² Pedersen then poses the crucial interrogative: “But the question is: is this really freedom?” Next comes his argument:

“I think one should define freedom somewhat differently, if one speaks of *real freedom*. Freedom, for me, is certainly not a matter of being able to do anything, anytime, anywhere, and to anyone. For freedom lies much deeper. Freedom is about liberating oneself from one’s ego, liberating oneself from the way the ego constantly strives to advance its own interests, the ego’s own interests. If one can liberate oneself from that, and it’s a lifelong process, but if one can, then one can become free.”

“And the best tool to work with oneself in this way, is actually prayer. Not only the kind of prayer where one sits down and symbolically folds one’s hands—not that there is anything wrong with that—but the kind of prayer where one prostrates in the dust (*kaster sig i støvet*) before one’s Creator. Because only by doing just that, the ego is taught something about how little the ego really is in relation to the Creator’s Will.”

-
- 1 Pedersen’s Danish heritage, openness about his spiritual journey, and conversion to Islam made him one of the once most visible and sought-after Muslim public figures in Denmark. Today he has more or less ‘retired’ from the spotlights, and focuses on his humanitarian work at *Danish Muslim Aid*.
 - 2 All quotations are verbatim transcriptions of interviews, sermons, etc., with slight corrections of syntax and spelling. Italics indicates emphasis by the speaker. The source code can be found at the end of the passage (in this case W031).

“One can only find the ultimate freedom by prostrating before the creator, by recognizing that it is only the Will of the Creator that will be realized in all circumstances, and that one’s own will can only be realized if the Creator allows it. If one prostrates into the dust (*bøjer sig i støvet*) before/for one’s Creator, one can liberate oneself.”

“It takes time, it takes a lot of continuous effort for many years, but with a dedicated and well-intentioned work one can get very far during the course of a normal life” (W031).³

In this chapter, I will track three stages in Pedersen’s speech. First, there is *concern*, manifesting here as a problematization of the uses of freedom in the public sphere. What Pedersen finds disturbing, and many Danish Muslims with him, is a ‘shallow’ understanding of the notion; the supposedly widespread idea that freedom means “being able to do or say anything.” In the first sentences, the religious motivations for this concern remain tacit. Some Danish Muslims choose to keep it this way in their public interventions, either tactically, or in an effort to compromise with the reader/listener. Pedersen uses this concern as the launching pad for his argument; it is of little consequence whether the premise is an accurate portrayal of the state of affairs, what counts is the need to establish a relatable narrative. In the first section, I start by briefly outlining two key historical phases: the period up to the 1990s, in which Islam is perceived as ‘coming’ to Denmark, and the Danish ‘securitization response’ to 9/11. I will argue that the way freedom functions in the Danish political discourse is closely related to a widespread perception of freedom and liberality as core cultural values. These values are frequently presented as essential components of a ‘Danishness’ articulated, sanctioned, and promoted by institutional powers, producing certain ‘undesirable’ subject positions.

Second, there is *resistance*. Pedersen does not directly confront politicians or media with their uses and abuses of the term; he questions the signifier itself: “is this really freedom?” It is of course a rhetorical question, an erotesis. Through the act of questioning, the term ‘freedom’ is emptied out, its meaning invalidated. In other cases, as I will show, the questioning of, and resistance to, the public debate has to do with the manipulation of this hegemonic discourse on freedom: there is a political stake and challenge. The questioning we see in Pedersen’s speech precedes the political resistance which targets the effects of power tied to public talk on freedom in Denmark. In the second section,

3 Abdul Wahid Pedersen, “Frihed,” YouTube video, 3:33, May 8, 2016, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://youtu.be/xmgLivD4ayM>.

I sketch a third historical phase, in which various controversies and debates lead to an increased Muslim mobilization. I will then outline the challenge that the Danish Muslim community poses to articulations of the political-cultural understanding of freedom at the institutional level, inspecting the resistance to the 2018's *maskeringsforbud*, with the Danish niqabi of *Kvinder I Dialog* on the frontline. I will also argue that the religious narrative is not always leveraged in the same way. In the Danish case, the more the struggle is visible, the more the religious discourse that fuels it is silent. Resisting the hegemonic discourse on freedom (and associated power effects) is more productive when playing by (yet modifying) the rules of that discourse.

Third, there is *redefinition*. The statement “freedom lies much deeper,” is followed by a hypophora, with Pedersen answering his own question. Now the imam can initiate his discursive challenge, modulating a contested signifier by getting at a ‘true’ experience of the signified. This has the effect of re-integrating ‘freedom,’ which, with the initial questioning, had been rendered a sort of floating signifier in a religious discourse. There is thus a simultaneous unhinging and fixing of freedom as a nodal point in the chain of signification. This challenge can be subtly radical, since it aims to bring about a paradigm shift in the popular understanding. Again, we find the same sense of discursive competition as in the political debate, but on a semantic level. In the third section I focus on this attempt to redefine freedom, discussing the suggestion by a young Muslim commentator of understanding freedom as a certain harmony between actions, belief, and identity. I conclude with some remarks on the ‘field of discursivity’ to explain what, in terms of discourse theory, allows Danish Muslims to question hegemonic articulations of freedom.

This third part is the bridge between the socially engaged Muslim presence in Denmark and the folk/ordinary-theological narrative that fuels it (see Das 1984). The conditions are in place for religious narrative to insert itself: “real freedom” resides in liberation from one’s ego and sensual attachment to the world. This feat is achieved, we are told, through recognition of the Divine and His Will/Power over humanity; an understanding of the relative nature of human freedom, including its limits and dangers; and finally prayer, ego-reduction, self-abasement, submission to an ultimate authority. The striking final metaphor contains the whole message: “if one prostrates in the dust for one’s creator, one can liberate oneself (*hvis man bøjer sig i støvet for sin skaber, kan man frisætte sig selv*).” This very physical submission (prostrating) to the only true authority (the creator) is the crucial condition (if) for freedom (as liberation), containing both a sense of radicality (bowing all the way), mortification (in the dust), and sustained urgency (lifelong process).

1 Questioning

In a mini-documentary titled “Danish freedom,” produced by the state-sponsored *Danmarks Radio* (Danish Broadcasting Corporation, henceforth *DR*), the viewer is told: “As Danes, the freedom to do what we want is something we can be very happy with. It is perhaps also something we sometimes take for granted ... (one should) appreciate the freedom to do and say whatever one desires” (W039).⁴ Telecommunications company *Telia* advertises in Denmark with a video of an American biker driving a Harley-Davidson in the desert, and the slogan: “Free data, because you’d rather be free. Free from restrictions, free to talk and surf as you please” (W045).⁵ *Socialdemokratiet*, the largest party in the *Folketinget* and winner of the 2019 parliamentary elections, declares on its website: “When it comes to creating a society that sets people free, we have come far in Denmark in the last 100 years. ... Real freedom to create the life one wants” (W046).⁶

The term ‘*frihed*,’ together with its cognates, is ubiquitous in the Danish public sphere and politics, from billboards to party manifestos and election campaigns. The idea of freedom revolving around the individual’s desires/ambitions is also pervasive. So pervasive, in fact, that its critics, whether casually commenting on double standards or vehemently warning about the dangers of freedom itself, rarely make it onto the stage. While these critiques sometimes take the form of straw man arguments, such as the claim that “the West” perceives freedom as an unnuanced “right to do exactly what you want” (F015; W031; D033), they have been refined over the years. These are reactions to vague public expressions of a notion of freedom supposedly shared by the general population, found on popular media, advertisements, official political statements, and so on. They establish clear antagonisms, identifying oppressors and victims.

In this first section, I do not intend to perform a full analysis of the discourse on freedom in Denmark, nor to establish whether Pedersen is correct in his assessment. I merely intend to propose ‘freedom’ as a cultural marker and instrument of governmentality in the Danish context, in order to make sense

4 *Verdens Lykkeligste Land?*, episode 2, “Frihed,” featuring Chris Pedersen and Michael Laudrup, aired on May 17, 2018, on DR2, https://www.dr.dk/drtv/episode/verdens-lykkeligste-land_-frihed_48659.

5 “Abonnementet ONE—nyd friheden,” Fri data kampagne (2018), Telia, accessed December 1, 2018, <https://www.telia.dk/privat/kampagner/2018/fri-data/>.

6 “Integrationspolitik: Den Nye Frihedskamp,” Udlændingepolitik, Socialdemokratiet, accessed December 1, 2018, <https://www.socialdemokratiet.dk/da/politik/udlaendingepolitik/integrationspolitik-den-nye-frihedskamp/>.

of Muslim concerns and do justice to the double-edged political and discursive challenge outlined in the second and third sections. In order to do this, I will start by discussing a thorny yet fundamental factor in the questioning of 'Danish' freedom: the Muslim concern with national belonging. This will require some historical context, accounting for the emergence of a Danish Muslim community. After this, I outline the post-9/11 securitization response, and the subsequent talk of a 'freedom struggle' involving Islam in Danish politics. I conclude by proposing freedom as a signifier of disorientation, allowing veiled interests to appear under the guise of universality.

1.1 *Islam 'Comes' to Denmark*

Historical accounts tend to frame the Muslim presence in Denmark as a coherent yet heterogeneous social unit whose formation, development, and character can be explained by historical analysis. Such analyses typically follow a set pattern: they start with the 'handful' of Muslims present in the country in the first half of the twentieth century, detail labor immigration, emphasize the impact of refugee waves, and finally address the Cartoons Controversy. In Denmark as in Europe at large, the Muslim presence is storied as a 'new' development, and as Nadia Fadil (2019, 119) notes, the so-called 'Muslim-question' operates as one of the main cultural fault lines informing the debates on the ideas of both nation and continent (see also Asad 2003, 164). The commonplaces that abound in accounts of the 'rise of Islam' in Denmark are far from innocuous: they position the supposedly coherent-yet-diverse Danish Muslim community as a foreign presence in the country, keep alive the memory of a time predating the arrival of this presence, and provide a historical rationale prone to be weaponized by nativist camps. Scholars set out to explain "how Islam came to Denmark" and how Muslims "have been integrated" (Simonsen 2012, 13), explanations left almost uncontested by alternative readings of history and 'effective' historical knowledge, capable of disintegrating its supposed unity/consistency/continuity. The following socio-historical overview should be taken as a necessary yet problematic narrative that affects the reasoning of all those partaking in the debate on freedom and Islam in Denmark.

Historians consider the advent of the Protestant Reformation in Denmark, circa 1536, a point from which to trace the state of religion in contemporary Denmark. Luther's condemnation of Muhammad's prophethood and the Ottoman Empire was essentially in line with the medieval Catholic stance (see Francisco 2007), and set the tone of a 'Danish' engagement with Islam. With regard to the status and role of the 'People's Church' (*Folkekirke*), the 1849 constitution, drafted by the Lutheran bishop-theologian-politician D.G. Monrad, including its revised editions up to 1953 declared that "The Evangelical

Lutheran Church shall be the Established Church of Denmark, and as such, it shall be supported by the State" (§ 4).⁷ The so-called 'promise-paragraph' (*løfteparagraf*) to lay "down by Statute" the "constitution of the Established Church" (§ 66) was never kept, and the *Folkekirke* stayed a pillar of the Danish polity alongside the government and legal system. As in other European countries, the historical Luther eventually became an empty signifier demarcating Christian orthodoxy, but the Lutheran perspective on Islamic faith/practice has had centuries to impregnate the structures of Danish society. While long remaining a theological curiosity, it has served as an antagonistic reference point in defining 'true Christianity' (Simonsen 2012, 13–15). Today, the *Folkekirke* still answers to the *Folketing* (Parliament), including its Muslim members. When the *Folketing* comes back together after the summer holidays, the event is marked with a Lutheran mass celebrated in *Christiansborg Slotskirke* by a *Folkekirke* pastor. Inviting an imam (or even a Catholic priest) would be unthinkable.⁸

After dealing with Luther, a typical historical survey might then affectionately mention Knud Holmboe (1902–1931), 'one of the first Danes to convert to Islam' (Aoude 2002; Holmboe 1931; 1937). Since very imprecise statistics on religious minorities count only a 'handful' of Danish Muslims in that period, historical accounts fast forward to the 1950s, when the Ahmadi Movement established a small community of converts in Denmark, and then a mosque in a Copenhagen suburb in 1967 (Valentine 2008, 69, 75; J.S. Nielsen and Otterbeck 2016, 64). This fact, together with Holmboe's story, is sometimes used to offset the belief that it was migrants and refugees who *introduced* Islam in Denmark (Simonsen 2011).

The guest-workers narrative usually starts with the arrival of Turkish, Moroccan, Pakistani, and Yugoslav migrants in the late 1960s, responding to the inviting Danish job market, and benefiting from a nearly unrestricted labor immigration policy (J.S. Nielsen 2012; J.S. Nielsen and Otterbeck 2016). At times, scholars focusing on Muslims neglect the waves of migrant workers predating the 1960s, hailing from such places as Sweden, Germany, and Poland, thus skewing the timeline forward (Østergaard 2007, 283–305). This time, however, following a pattern of labor immigration set by France, the United Kingdom, and Germany, non-European workers throughout the old empires flocked to those industries in need of hands. Their plan, the story goes, was to work, save,

7 The *Folkekirke* is neither a Free Church (independent from the government) nor a State Church (with a creed officially endorsed by the state), but a hybrid unique to Denmark.

8 Brian Patrick McGuire, "Religionsfrihed Og Religionslighed—En Blandet Arv," *Kristeligt Dagblad*, September 8, 2010.

and return with capital to their countries of origin. Most historical accounts emphasize this plan in order to make sense of later developments, when ‘it appeared’ that these (presumed Muslim) ‘unskilled and semi-skilled’ ‘foreigners’ from ‘rural areas’ were ‘here to stay’ (Coleman and Wadensjö 1999; Haddad 2002; J.S. Nielsen 2012). As in other European countries, chain-migration was eventually curbed in the early 1970s, with new regulations drastically reducing the number of available work permits.

From the early 1980s, having one of the most liberal refugee systems in Europe, Denmark saw successive waves of immigration from Iran, Lebanon, Palestine; and later Somalia, Bosnia, Iraq. Again, earlier waves from Hungary, Eastern Europe, and Asia (Østergaard 2007, 333–344), are rarely deemed relevant to accounts of Islam in Denmark. The new refugee waves prompted much discussion, again increasing the number of non-European foreigners via family reunification—just what the restrictive work permit regulations were meant to curb. To some scholars, reunification policies made Islam ‘visible’ in Denmark, because the media and institutions began to refer to the diverse groups of ethnic minorities by their ‘shared’ religious identity: Muslims. As Jørgen Bæk Simonsen (2012, 18) notes, “this change became part and parcel of a new political trend that in no way was intrinsically related to the dynamics of migration, the migrants, or the refugees but was rooted in a debate among Danes”.

Since the government cannot legally register the religious affiliation of its citizens, excepting members of the state-sponsored church (75% of the population in 2018),⁹ the task of defining, identifying, and counting ‘Muslims’ and ‘mosques’ falls upon universities and research institutes. Limited statistics and methods, however, have led to counting e.g. Pakistani atheists or individuals self-identifying as Danes of Turkish descent, as Muslims. Danish scholars mostly use official statistical data on immigrants and their countries of origin to estimate the sum total of Muslims in Denmark: from the circa 29,300 (0.6%) in 1980 (Jacobsen 2012), to 306,000 (5.3%) in 2017,¹⁰ and an estimated 320,000 (5.5%) in 2019 (Jacobsen and Valdemar 2019).¹¹ Lene Kühle and Malik Larsen (2019, 64–68) have estimated 300,000 (5.2%) individuals, with a margin

9 Kirkeministeriet, “Folkekirkens Medlemstal,” *km.dk*, January 1, 2020, <https://www.km.dk/folkekirken/kirkestatistik/folkekirkens-medlemstal/>.

10 Brian Arly Jacobsen, “Hvor mange muslimer bor der i Danmark?” *Religion.dk (Kristeligt Dagblad)*, February 8, 2018, <https://www.religion.dk/religionsanalysen/hvor-mange-indvaendrer-lever-i-danmark>.

11 See also “Indvandrere og efterkommere,” Befolkning of valg, Danmark Statistik, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.dst.dk/da/Statistik/emner/befolkning-og-valg/indvandrere-og-efterkommere/indvandrere-og-efterkommere>.

of 15000, but nuanced the count with a discussion on what constitutes a ‘Muslim,’ whether groups such as the Alevi should (or would want to) be included in their numbers, and the extent to which ‘Muslim’ is a consistent religious category (2019, 68–74). According to a German study from 2009, Muslim migrants are not distinctly more religious when compared to German society as a whole, and only 18% describe themselves as ‘highly religious’ (Haug, Meussig, and Stichs 2009; Rohe 2016, 93). There are no recent Danish studies that can confirm that this is also the case in Denmark. Respondents self-identifying as Muslim are rarely asked the extent to which they are actually religious, and questions are designed to produce answers that seem clear at first glance, but from which is difficult to draw conclusions (Kühle and Larsen 2019, 72).

Reference to ‘foreigners’ and their numbers in historical sketches of Islam in Denmark plays directly into the ethno-cultural homogeneity that has characterized the country for centuries, and continues to mark the imagination of ‘ethnic’ Danes (M.H. Pedersen and Rytter 2011). It entrenches the narrative that Muslims and Islam are something “relatively new” in Denmark (see Jensen 2006, 644), and facilitates the increasing polarization between ‘Muslims’ and ‘Danes’.¹² The general debate throughout the 1960s about how to expand and balance the modern welfare state, in negotiation with the policies of the liberal-conservative government (which at the time legalized abortion and pornography), contributed to a change in the political landscape around the 1973 elections, seeing the rise of the right-wing, populist *Fremskridtspartiet* (Party of Progress). *Fremskridtspartiet* paved the road for a more aggressive rhetoric, disrupting traditional peaceable political attitudes (Østergaard 2007, 361).

New immigrants found themselves in a raging debate on gender equality, welfare statism, and pedagogical methods. Predictably, confusions arose; especially in those places where the legal system and public sector professionals were confronted with ‘foreign’ worldviews and practices (Elverdam 1991). The significant increase of non-Western pupils in schools during the 70s and 80s, for instance, demanded some systemic adjustments to accommodate their parent’s wishes.¹³ Meanwhile, the establishment of the first Quran schools and

12 The situation was different in countries such as the United Kingdom and France, where colonial enterprises had brought a steady influx of non-natives, dispersing the growth of Muslim minorities and striking a different tone.

13 It seems probable that the oft-mentioned doubts some newcomers expressed concerning the values promoted by public institutions were more than the opinions of a few recalcitrant, un-attached guests. Perhaps the value-conflict was/is more fundamental; in the last decades, several studies argued that across Scandinavia there are clashes between Mus-

mother-tongue classes made commentators reconsider the ‘future plans’ and ‘temporary status’ of migrants. These schools were explained as a means to secure the children ‘an introduction to the culture and the religion’ they were part of, i.e. not Danish (Ihle 2007; Shakoor 2008). With prospected emigration as a key justification, the Ministry of Education facilitated this process, promoting classes in Turkish, Arabic, and Urdu. The early establishment of private schools and mosques, later accelerated by the demands of refugees in the 80s–90s, suggest that the ‘return’ argument was perhaps nothing more than a political pacifier.

From the outset, the diversity of Muslim migrant groups was marked by different degrees of involvement from their countries of origin. Turkey maintained a tight connection with the sizable Turkish community in Denmark by, among other things, securing state-sponsored imams; Pakistani migrants, by way of contrast, relied on themselves, and the help of private *da‘wā* organizations (Simonsen 1990). In 1971, the efforts of embassies from Muslim-majority countries resulted in the establishment of Islamic cultural centers and mosques. The various degrees of foreign involvement seem to have played a role in both the speed and manner in which the diverse minorities organized religious services, lobbied for government support, and complied with the various regulations of the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs. Already in the 1970s and 1980s global networks played an important role, with large *da‘wā* organizations supporting the establishment of local mosques and cultural centers (Kühle 2006; J.S. Nielsen and Otterbeck 2016; Kühle and Larsen 2019). Organizations with strong ties to specific states invested much energy in disseminating sponsored interpretations of Islam. These efforts were also motivated by a desire to correct misinterpretations and ‘distortions’ proliferating in the West.

Simonsen (2012; see also Haddad 2002) called the foreign importation of ideological interpretations of Islam “defensive,” because “the overall goal was to enhance an interpretation of Islam not rooted in the concrete world where the Muslims involved were actually living, but rooted in a future social setting of which they would eventually be part.” The ‘defensive attitude,’ coupled with foreign involvement and alliances, and the establishment of state-supported private schools (*friskole*) cultivating other-than-Danish cultural/religious identities, all contributed to an ever-stronger “discourse of difference between Muslims and Danes”—an us vs. them mentality (Simonsen 2012, 24; Galal and Liengaard 2003; Ihle 2007).

lim migrant families and professionals in public health/education (Tiilikainen 2003; Filio Degni, Seppo Pöntinen, and Mulki Mölsä 2006; Haga 2015; Sealy 2017; Suhr 2019).

1.2 *The Securitization Response*

If, as in other Western democracies, there were some anxieties in Denmark about Islam and Muslim integration, they markedly intensified with the events of 9/11, triggering a far-reaching securitization response (Kaya 2010; Bleich 2013; Fox and Akbaba 2015). Security-studies scholars define the so-called post 9/11 ‘securitization of Islam’ as “a process that is constructed around a perceived Islamist threat and the promotion of actions outside the normal bounds of political procedure that requires the commitment of greater resources” (Fox and Akbaba 2015, 175). After 2001, in the name of national security, most Western countries developed myriad new policies, institutions, and political discourses undermining the rights and freedoms of Muslims citizens.¹⁴ As Sherene Razack (2007, 6) has observed, such responses “naturalize the suspension of rights and the rise of anti-Muslim racism in the post-9/11 period, uncoupling them from the past and, significantly, from the *ongoing* management of racial populations of which they are part.”

Veena Das (1997, 5–6) identifies the institutionalization of “a new modality of historical action,” a notion picked up in Denmark by Mikkel Rytter and Marianne Holm Pedersen (2014, 2305). In *A Decade of Suspicion*, the two frame 9/11 as a key event: prompting the reconfiguration of established categories, generating “new meanings,” and producing “spaces for social imaginaries and political action that were not previously possible or even conceivable.” Rytter and Pedersen focus on the security response, addressing the creation of new policies and laws, and exploring altered identities and alliances.¹⁵

Transpiring a few months prior to general elections (20 November), the 9/11 attacks contributed to the formation of a new right-leaning government, supported by the Islam-critical, right-wing populist *Dansk Folkeparti* (Danish

14 The efforts of the international ‘Copenhagen school’ of security studies, and work such as that of Jonathan Fox and Yasemin Akbaba (2015), analyzing the causes and extents for different kinds of religious discrimination among various minorities in dozens of Western democracies over the decades, has demonstrated the SOI has measureable consequences for the religious freedom of Muslims in the West.

15 According to Erik Bleich (2009, 355), the repercussions of the actions undertaken by the Bush administration manifested in a hybrid security/integration response: “a security dimension has been layered onto pre-existing concerns about integration, melding with parallel worries about immigration, crime and the public’s association between Muslims and violence.” Various authors in Bleich’s edited volume have shown how, in various countries, certain domestic events weigh more heavily on public responses and policy-making than others (Bowen 2013; Joppke 2013; Klausen 2013). In the Danish case, this process resulted in a strengthened monitoring and governing of both external and internal margins of the state, the latter “represented by the Muslim immigrant family” (M.H. Pedersen and Rytter 2014, 2306).

People's Party, henceforth *DF*). The 2001 elections broke old political patterns by ousting the Social Democrats and setting a new right-leaning trajectory (Jöhncke 2011; M.-L. Johansen and Jensen 2017). The newly formed government immediately put security high on the agenda, and ultimately transformed one of the most liberal immigration and refugee systems in Europe into one of the most restrictive (J.S. Nielsen 2012, 3). Other measures taken in the security/integration response included: mechanisms of selection favoring refugees with 'integration potential' (Whyte 2011); the establishment of anti-radicalization programs (Kühle 2011c); the institution of the 'administrative expulsion' (without formal hearings) of foreigners involved in terror activities (M.H. Pedersen and Rytter 2014).

Like other countries, Denmark saw the normalization of a state of emergency: procedures and measures that were instigated in reaction to a critical situation, soon became accepted instruments within the jurisdiction of the state (Andersen 2008, 56; Bleich 2009). According to Beck (2002, 44) the perception of terrorist threats replaced *active trust* with *active mistrust*: "Since the dissolution of trust multiplies risks, the terrorist threat triggers a self-multiplication of risks by the de-bounding of risk perceptions and fantasies." The state of active mistrust also contributed to public disillusionment with integration.¹⁶

Meanwhile, the Danish public debate saw the rapid proliferation of narratives involving essentialist images of 'Islam' and the 'West' (Jung 2011); talk of 'good Muslims' and 'bad Muslims' (Mamdani 2002; 2004); and clashes between civilizations (Pittelkow 2003; Hansen, Brix, and Hedegaard 2006). *DF* began to openly evoke the Nazi occupation in speaking of Muslim minorities (Kvaale 2011, 233), and some politicians portrayed Danish converts to Islam as traitors forsaking their 'Danishness' (Jensen 2008, 390–391; Mårtensson 2014).

Studies on the effects of the security/integration response on Danish Muslims led to a sizable body of Danish literature accentuating the frustrations that come with the constant association of Islam with violence (M.H. Pedersen and Rytter 2012; K.-L. Johansen 2002; Galal and Liengaard 2003; Hervik 2006b; Schmidt 2007). Pedersen and Rytter (2014, 2313–2314) identify three trends that fuel these frustrations: exclusion, hyper-visibility, and silencing. Some of the

16 Rytter and Pedersen (2014, 2311) observe that, while the security/integration response incorporated a novel security dimension, the measures taken also drew upon an existing Danish "tradition of state intervention." The new procedures fed into a long-term political strategy of social engineering, a continuous balancing of the welfare state (Jöhncke 2011), and a general acceptance of intrusive governmental procedures. This effected immigration policy, meaning that the efforts toward achieving 'integration' were in practice closer to some called 'assimilation' (Pærregaard and Olwig 2007; Jöhncke 2011).

interventions meant to increase safety made certain groups less secure, as with the discussion on radicalization (Kühle 2011b; 2011c). Secondly, Danish Muslims were subjected to a panoptic, surveilling gaze (Khawaja 2011), making them increasingly visible in the Danish social landscape. This was particularly the case for young women wearing religious attire (Schmidt 2007; Degn and Søholm 2011; Andreassen 2012). Thirdly, the repeated confrontations and requests to denounce extreme practices have led to a general political retreat of Danish Muslims from the public sphere (Hervik 2011; S. Jørgensen 2011).

The term ‘radicalization’ itself, used with different agendas in security, integration, and foreign-policy contexts, has been, above all, a source of confusion associated with the rise of neo-nationalist discourse (Sedgwick 2010). Moreover, counter-radicalization plans, such as those implemented in 2009, have proven iatrogenic in their effects.¹⁷ Lasse Lindekilde (2012, 123–124) showed how the label “radical Muslim,” among other things, wrongly conflated “Muslims who would not vote in democratic elections for religious reasons with the very few Muslims in the West who actively work to undermine democracy.” Both Kühle (2012) and Lindekilde (2012; 2008) have demonstrated how the proliferation of the ‘radicalization discourse’ in Denmark has led to a fear among Danish Muslims of being identified as ‘radical.’ This process has diminished the depth of the public debate, and the degree to which non-conforming but non-confrontational Muslims are willing to cooperate with institutions and authorities.¹⁸

During his 2002 New Year’s speech, PM Anders Fogh Rasmussen launched the *kulturkamp*: a ‘cultural war’ waged against those values, ways of life, and religious practices deemed incompatible with the Danish ones. The former prime minister went as far as stating that “the outcome of the *kulturkamp* determines Denmark’s future. Not the economic policy. Not technocratic changes to the legislative system” (N143).¹⁹ The ‘war’ led to the popularization of a new fear-inducing notion: parallel societies (*parallelsamfund*) (v. Freiesleben 2016)

17 The Danish Ministry of Refugee, Immigration and Integration Affairs, *A Common and Safe Future—Proposal for an Action Plan to Prevent Extremist Views and Radicalisation Among Young People*, June 2009, <https://ec.europa.eu/migrant-integration/librarydoc/a-common-and-safe-future-proposal-for-an-action-plan-to-prevent-extremist-views-and-radicalisation-among-young-people>.

18 The securitization response also affected Danish police officers and social workers involved in countering violent extremism, who, according to Mette-Louise Johansen (2018, 9), find themselves “navigating the politics of anxiety,” attempting to cope with “the possibility of public moral outrage being directed at the welfare state when issues of security and integration arise.”

19 Arne Hardis and Hans Mortensen, “Kulturkamp,” *Weekendavisen*, January 17, 2003.

(N118).²⁰ Around this time, some ministers declared that Danes should not passively stand by while “a parallel society is developing in which minorities are practicing their medieval norms and undemocratic mindsets,” and that “cultural armament” is “the best vaccine” against these tendencies (Kublitz 2010, 112–113).

In line with the cultural war of values were the development of various state-sponsored ‘canons of culture,’ such as the 2004 *Kulturkanon* launched by Mikkelsen, and the 2016 *Danmarkskanon* launched by MP Bertel Haarder. Mikkelsen and Haarder advanced a tradition dating to 1901, when other influencers produces similar lists (Brandes 2000). Talk of Danishness has endured across time, whether heart-felt or ironic (Hauge 2013). The official promotion of certain Danish values/traits/icons simultaneously fixed the un-Danish ones, leading to the formal deligitimization and marginalization of the country’s various minorities. According to Ralph Grillo (2003, 166), “cultural anxiety”—i.e., concern about cultural identity and loss—“manifests itself among both minorities *and* majorities.” When it comes to Denmark, his claim was substantiated by, among others, Richard Jenkins (2011, 2000). The perceived loss of history, values, and identity has led to a denunciation of both external (global economy, European Union) and internal (minorities, immigrants) transgressors. It is telling that this widespread and well-documented cultural anxiety occurred in tandem with the disintegration of the central ideological state-apparatus, and the real threats to its cultural hegemony. To some commentators, the 2001 terror attacks made the cultural anxiety, articulated first and foremost by *DF* and *Fremskridtspartiet*, a mainstream political concern (Gad 2011).

1.3 “I Will Never Be Danish”

The ten ‘shared’ Danish core values that, through extensive polling, made Bertel Haarder’s ‘canon’ were: the welfare state/society, freedom (*frihed*), trust, equality before the law, gender equality, the Danish language, associations and voluntary work, liberality/tolerance (*frisind*), the Christian heritage, and of course the untranslatable Danish word for coziness: *hygge* (W047).²¹ Sociologist Peter Gundelach has observed that such projects do not amount to anything, and yet, based on his life-long study of Danish values, Gundelach also notes that defining Danishness is a very Danish tendency: “Overall, one can say that we

20 Sara Omar and Christian Birk, “Sara Omar: Parallelsamfundene og samfundet som helhed er i krig,” *Kristeligt Dagblad*, March 24, 2018.

21 Bertel Haarder, “Danmarkskanon—10 Værdier for Fremtidens Samfund,” *Danmarkskanon* (2016), accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.danmarkskanon.dk/>.

agree that there is something that is Danish, and something that is un-Danish, and that it is better to be Danish than un-Danish" (N124).²² Nor, as the long trail of academic literature testifies, is this tendency confined to popular media and political initiatives (Gundelach 2002, 21; Iversen, Gundelach, and Warburg 2008; Henkel 2010; Jenkins 2011). In short, there is an apparent need to nail down a politically approved version of national culture, which includes a notion of freedom.

Of course, 'Denmark' as an imagined community would not exist at all without a strenuously constructed and continuously maintained sense of national identity. From Grundtvigian social philosophy to corporate interests, and, most importantly, the feeling of historical continuity upheld by tales of Vikings or mermaids, every element adds to the maintenance of the socially cohesive nation that is modern Denmark. The collective imagery constituting the Danish long-term identity does not require historical exactitude. As Jenkins (2011, 223) argues, inconsistency is to be expected and may even be necessary: "It is *as* symbols that these themes have their reality and power. ... Shared symbols work because they mean different things to different people" (see also Jenkins 2008, 132–147). According to Jenkins, the collection of symbols so familiar to Dane serve as reference points, enabling them to proceed throughout daily life without being confronted nonstop by social heterogeneity and its frictions: "it is precisely the imagined nature of *danskhed* that allows it to be a collective canopy" (Jenkins 2011, 224; see also Gundelach 2002; Iversen, Gundelach, and Warburg 2008). Gundelach also argues that the average Dane is quite 'liberal' when it comes to what it takes to be considered Danish: language proficiency, national identification, and social contribution.

The success of the Danish nation-building project, and the historical convergence of the political right and left, has yielded a shared ideological space; a space wherein to determine what Danishness 'is,' and by extension, 'should be.' Convergence in this context does not imply consensus, and involves a machinery of normalization that unavoidably has its victims. In the last decades, numerous publications by scholars working on *danskhed* have shown how political actors leverage the notion to protect the characteristics of a privileged part of the Danish population, earning their privilege through historical ties to the country (Pærregaard and Olwig 2007; Rytter 2007; Schmidt 2011, 261). Needless to say, the matter of *danskhed* is ripe with classic anthropological issues: from the creation of otherness through time, emphasizing difference

22 Lisette Arent Schausen, "Det Er Bedre at Være Dansk End Udansk," *Jyllands-Posten*, July 11, 2016.

and remoteness as a strategy (Fabian 1983), to the framing of nationhood as an inherently limited and sovereign imagined political community (Anderson 1983).

Although the idea of Danishness as superior-yet-threatened finds its most aggressive advocates in populist parties such as *DF*, the notion is present across the whole political spectrum (Schmidt 2011). The argument goes that certain backward cultural practices are preventing immigrant groups from becoming ‘proper Danes,’ resulting in the development of the aforementioned un-Danish parallel-societies (v. Freiesleben 2016). Lars Løkke Rasmussen (*Venstre*, PM from 2009–2011 and 2015–2019), made a similar association in his 2019 New Year speech: “If too many feel like outsiders, or stay outside, then there is dissonance instead of harmony.” Rasmussen goes on to recount how, in high school, “Ibrahim” entered his class after the summer holidays “as the first and only one with a foreign background.” The prime minister notes that, at the time, “there were about 50,000 people with non-western background in the whole of Denmark. Today there are close to half a million.” Observing that “our country has changed” in just one generation, he states this is a problem “in the sense that we have challenges that we would not have if we still would be a uniform population. Made from the same mold. Brought up (*flasket op*) with the same values” (W067).²³

The culturalization/ethnification of Danish politics and the state, especially regarding immigration, has led to a schizophrenic situation in which legislative measures are enacted to secure the international right to immigration, while, at the same time, striving to protect cherished Danish values against ‘un-Danish’ practices (Hadetoft 2006). An example is the current family reunification policy, which seeks to secure the right of Danish citizens to marry non-Europeans, while also ‘filtering out’ un-Danish marriages and spouses. The official application form thus includes questions such as: How did you meet your spouse? Are you and your spouse/cohabiting partner closely related? Were you both present at the ceremony? (W090).²⁴ Whether an individual is granted permanent residence depends on their ability to prove an intention to naturalize through activities such as actively learning Danish and enrolling one’s children in Dan-

23 Lars Løkke Rasmussen, “Lars Løkke Rasmussens nytårstale 1. januar 2019,” Statsministerens nytårstale, Regeringen, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.regeringen.dk/statsministerens-nytaarstale/lars-loekke-rasmussens-nytaarstale-1-januar-2019/>.

24 “Ansøg Om Ægtefællesammenføring,” Udlændingestyrelsen, Styrelsen for International Rekruttering Og Integration (SIRI), accessed December 18, 2018, <https://www.nyidanmark.dk/da/Applying/Familie/Familiesammenforing/Aegtefaelle%20eller%20ofast%20samlever>.

ish day-care programs (Stenius 1997). In short, cultural homogeneity allows for the argument that the way in which citizens organize their family lives is of public and political concern (Schmidt 2011).

Zainab Nasrati is a young Muslim voice who aptly articulates how the constant attempts to define *danskhed* are, whether accidentally or maliciously, excluding Muslim citizens. As she says:

To be Danish is not sacred (*helligt*), even if it's *hyggeligt*. ... It's good that we have ... something that other cultures do not have. In this way we are 'different people and tribes' that can meet and learn from each other, see Quran 49:13 ... Excluding Muslims from being Danish, is by no means only an attack on the rights of the Muslim population As soon as we compromise the rights we have had since 1849 to punish some individuals, they will stop being applicable on all of us. ... *Danskhed* is a very special thing, ... but no politician ... should be allowed to dictate how we should be. Our interests and attitudes can never be nationally predetermined—not as long as we have the slightest strain of independence and feeling of freedom (*frihedsfølelse*) left in us [emphasis added].²⁵ (W002)

This is a taste of how the young generation of Danish Muslims elegantly blend familiar notions/jargon with a religious discourse that is, presumably, not as distant from common-sense as some would think. It is an intervention that acknowledges the hegemonic discourse; correcting its inconsistencies, without rejecting its core message.

Not all are so optimistic. To illustrate the way the discourse on *danskhed* excludes Muslim citizens, Aaheda, a young and energetic Muslim woman from Aarhus, gives the example of a fragment circulating on social media. In it, Jens, a young man with “Danish mother and Iranian father,” meets a prominent *DF* politician who, despite his ‘Danish name’ and ‘lifestyle,’ tells him that he does not “look Danish.” Jens studied at *Langkær Gymnasium*, an Aarhus high school that garnered controversy for hindering Muslim students from praying on location (N127).²⁶ Aaheda explains how exposure to this kind of viral video demoti-

25 Zainab Nasrati, “Hvordan Udvikler vi Demokratiet? Danskhed Er Hyggeligt—Ikke Helligt,” *Altivisten.Dk*, October 3, 2016, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://altivisten.dk/danskhed-hyggeligt-ikke-helligt/>.

26 Heikki Yding and Villy Vestergaard, “Rektor Siger Nej Til Fællesbøn På Langkær Gymnasium,” *DR*, September 15, 2016, <https://www.dr.dk/nyheder/regionale/oestjylland/rektor-siger-nej-til-faellesboen-paa-langkaer-gymnasium>.

vates *nydanskere* (Danish citizens with an ethnic background other than Danish) willing to integrate:

The tough guys don't watch the TV and see what the journalists and *Politiken* say, but they open Facebook. ... And when they see a clip of his (Jens's) life ... it looks very very Danish in my eyes. ... And he (the politician) *knows*, the boy (Jens) has a Danish name and a Danish mother. And when you see that, if you're a little tough, gang member, you say 'even if I call my son Morten, even then *I will never be Danish*, ... why should I try?' ... Then: 'okay it's a lost match ...' So you have the freedom to choose, yes, but ... we call it '*overfladisk*' (superficial) in Danish, it's just talk, it's democratic values and blablabla (both laughing). (C032)

At the heart of Aaheda's comment lies the well-documented frustration of those young Muslims who are born in Denmark (or moved at a very young age), master the language, and still face systematic discrimination and mistrust (D065; D067; D068; D069).²⁷ Her story also applies to herself, having personally attempted, and failed, to look beyond her family's Arab community and associate with an (ethnic) Danish friend group (C032). She recounts her struggle with compromising her Arab and Muslim identity/values, feeling caught between two worlds, each pulling her in different directions, each expecting her to conform in full to group rules. Aaheda sees the stereotypes employed by politicians, she is aware of how her peers are lured into a state of despondency, and yet she also recognizes their effect on her own life and decision-making process.

The issue of a minorities-excluding facet of Danishness has been noticed by non-minorities as well. In 2016, the OHCHR 'Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief,' Heiner Bielefeldt, called on the Danish government to further its efforts in promoting a more inclusive 'Danishness' (W084).²⁸ In the report, the OHCHR instructs the government to somehow signal that "Islam is

27 Özlem Cekic, *Fra Føtex til Folketinget* (København: Gyldendal, 2009). Waseem Hussain, *Imam bag tremmer* (København: Gyldendal, 2017). Tarek Ziad Hussein, *Det sorte skæg: om at være dansk muslim* (København: Gyldendal, 2018). Abdel Aziz Mahmoud, *Hvor taler du flot dansk!* (København: Politiken, 2016).

28 Heiner Bielefeldt, "Preliminary Findings of Country Visit to Denmark by Heiner Bielefeldt Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief," Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), March 22, 2016, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=18500&LangID=E>.

not a threat to Danish identity,” a message conveyed in a major Danish newspaper with the headline “The UN criticizes Danish Danishness” (N123).²⁹ Nor is the issue a new phenomenon in terms of media and political attitudes. For decades, Hervik (1999; 2002; 2006a; 2011; 2012) has argued and substantiated the idea that the mainstream media throughout the 90s played a major role in creating the conditions for ‘the normalization of a (neo)racist mentality’ in Denmark. Many of his participants spoke of a fight for “respect and recognition in the public space of their identity as being Danish, ethnic and Muslim at the same time” (Hervik 2002, 12). Today there are new Danish Muslim voices asserting these difficulties. The cartoon crisis of 2005, the 2016 *Moskeerne Bag Sløret* controversy, and the 2018 *maskeringsforbud* all contributed to a new wave of Muslim voices in the public debate, crystallizing in literary and organizational enterprises.

For Aaheda, the acknowledgment of this (mutual) dichotomization, and the resolution that a Muslim with immigrant background can “never be Danish,” is not conducive to bridging the differences posited by unsympathetic nativist Danes. Nevertheless, it does constitute an act of resistance to the inimical political discourse, a strategic resignation rather than a direct confrontation. There is something excessive in Aaheda’s story, noticeable in others as well (C045; C047; C054)—a way of portraying worst-case scenarios as a way to elicit better compromise, triggering an (advantageous) emotional response. A striking example is Gorilla Media’s *JegErDansk* campaign (W085).³⁰ Part of this campaign was a video that went viral in 2017, with the goal to “showcase the damage that is caused by the hateful rhetoric towards minority communities” (W086).³¹ The video shows the portraits of four children, presumably of immigrant descent, each stating their (mostly Arabic) names and age (7–11), while a moving piano melody plays in the background. Each are asked where they come from, and all reply “Denmark,” they are asked “why,” and reply “because I was born/raised in Denmark,” and are finally told: “no, you’re not Danish.” The confused/distraught reactions of the children make the video somewhat disturbing; one of the girls breaks in tears. “It is not acted,” assures the father of the girl and co-owner of the creative agency (N130).³² One of the campaign-

29 Kim Kristensen, “FN Kritiserer Danske Danskhed,” *Information*, February 10, 2017.

30 Gorilla Media Denmark, “#JegErDansk (#IAmDanish)—Viral Video Campaign,” YouTube video, 3:12, February 28, 2017, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://youtu.be/e7mqfmZS5xM>.

31 “From the 2nd Annual Shorty Social Good Awards: #JegErDansk (#IAmDanish),” Shorty Awards, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://shortyawards.com/2nd-socialgood/jegerdansk>.

32 Christian Nørgaard Larsen, “Video Med Grædende Scarlett Skaber Kæmpe Debat: »Du Er Ikke Dansk«,” *Berlingske*, March 2, 2017.

ers, introduced to me by a Muslim friend as “one of Denmark’s influencers,” explained that this was how “to get back at racist politicians and contest hostile coverage of Muslims and immigrants” (C036).

1.4 “We Are Faced With a New Freedom Struggle”

Haarder’s *Danmarkskanon* posited both ‘liberality/tolerance’ (*frisind*) and ‘freedom’ (*frihed*) as fundamental to a Western, democratic tradition. By this is meant both freedom “of the people,” and freedom of the individual. It implies self-determination as a natural condition for human flourishing and happiness. “Freedom is the fundamental value of Danish democracy,” reads the official explanation. In the Western tradition, “the freedom of the people is linked to the freedom of the individual citizen, because popular self-determination is considered to be a prerequisite for the individual to unfold and express himself freely and live a happy life.” The explanation takes care to add that “democratic freedom is not unlimited. One has freedom with responsibility of one’s actions.” When it comes to ‘*frisind*,’ the description reiterates that the principle is based on the premise of self-determination. Being *frisind* means “having a prejudice-free and tolerant attitude and mindset.” Moreover, “*Frisind* is related to the concept of freedom and thereby a part of the democratic values” (W047).³³

Of all the instances one could list where freedom is associated with *danskhed*, this is one of the most significant. It is institutionally sanctioned/promoted, functioning as a cultural marker and a legitimizing condition for political action. It is not so much the notion itself, but its proposed relations, that produce a plethora of sociopolitical effects. Haarder’s writers manage to cram into the short passage a great deal of extremely complex and charged notions: freedom, Danish, democracy, West, individual, self-determination, unfolding, self-expression, happiness, responsibility, and so on. The ordered list reveals what the authors suppose a Danish audience would deem a natural arrangement.

In the political arena, the function of freedom as a cultural marker is evident from its widespread use in manifestos and programs across the spectrum. While there is often an emphasis on classic liberal ideas of freedom (e.g., the right to self-determination and limited governmental regulation), the term figures in the public statements of all parties, no matter which stance they take toward the so-called *værdipolitik* (value-policy) and *fordelingspolitik* (distribution-policy). I have already mentioned *Socialdemokratiet*’s “real free-

33 Bertel Haarder, “Danmarkskanon—10 Værdier for Fremtidens Samfund,” *Danmarkskanon* (2016), accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.danmarkskanon.dk/>.

dom to create the life one wants." The liberal *Venstre*, for its part, has claimed the vernacular adage "*frihed under ansvar*" (freedom with/under responsibility), stating "Human beings thrive best in freedom with responsibility" (W062).³⁴ This expression appears in disparate areas, from schools to corporations, and is one of the various forms the cultural marker can take. Other parties do not stray far from the two poll leaders:

The ... goal is to preserve Denmark's independence and *freedom*, so we can safeguard the people's government and develop this great country ... We will fight any attempt to curb *popular freedom*, and we will work, so that the traditions that form the basis of our *free society* are defended wherever ... threatened [emphasis added].³⁵ (Dansk Folkeparti's manifesto, W058)

More *Freedom*. We are good at taking responsibility for ourselves and each other. Therefore, our lives must not be regulated in detail with prohibitions and rules. You are best judge of your life, so you should have the *freedom* to [emphasis added].³⁶ (Liberal Alliance's manifesto, W060)

Denmark must continue to be a pioneering country for *individual freedom* and health in relation to body, gender, and sexuality. We must work to ensure equality across different ... identities, and work to protect the *individual's freedom* [emphasis added].³⁷ (Alternativet's manifesto, W057)

The insistence on freedom as a fundamental value is not relegated to the political arena. Danish historian of ideas Hans-Jørgen Schanz (2012), writing on the concept of '*frihed*', argued that, with the mainstreaming of neoliberalism, the notion of freedom evolved to be fetishized as a good in itself. He goes on to argue that the term is overvalued and should be 'cleansed' of its 'silly' connotations. This is important because of its institutional function: if freedom is

34 "Venstres Principprogram," Venstre, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.venstre.dk/politik/principprogram>.

35 "Principprogram," Dansk Folkeparti, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://danskfolkeparti.dk/politik/principprogram/>.

36 "Principprogram," Liberal Alliance, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.liberalalliance.dk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Liberal-Alliance-Principprogram.pdf>.

37 "Alternativets Partiprogram," Alternativet, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://alternativet.dk/application/files/9814/9820/5528/alternativetspartiprogram.pdf>.

constructed as unrelated to duties, the result is pure narcissism, threatening the separation between public and private sectors, upon which political freedoms are based. Schanz's perspective, language, and audience are Danish. Recognizing the Wittgensteinian language-game it partakes of, he fine-tunes his contribution to support what he considers a positively productive hegemonic discourse on freedom. In the form of popular science, academic interventions can thus sustain the idea of freedom as a foundational value, rather than maintaining the complexity revealed by, in this case, analytic philosophy.

When it comes to immigration policy, and by extension Muslim communities, one of the forms in use is what some refer to as the *frihedskamp* (freedom struggle), a term originally denoting the fight for freedom during Nazi occupation. The notion of *frihedskamp* is anything but a marginal political phenomenon. *Socialdemokratiet* invokes the idea in their official immigration policy. After claiming 'freedom for the individual' as a key value, the policy states:

Unfortunately, non-western immigration to Denmark has also meant that we currently have areas in our country where freedom does not exist for all. ... The consequences of social control are deeply disturbing. Forced marriages, honor killings, pressure to wear the veil, forced re-acculturation trips, prohibition of going to leisure activities. All that takes place in Denmark. *We are faced with a new freedom struggle.* ... Therefore, it is also a struggle for our democracy. And for religion always to be subordinate to our democracy [emphasis added].³⁸ (W046)

Charles Taylor (1998), adapting the Rawlsian notion of 'overlapping consensus,' argues that, in religiously diverse societies, citizens have different motives (religious or not) for subscribing to the state's independent and 'secular' ethic. Relentless political disagreements over core political principles and their justifications cannot be resolved authoritatively, but only through persuasion and negotiation. Asad (2003, 6), in his *Formations of the Secular*, counteracts this reasoning. He points out that, when it comes to matters the government and its supporters deem to be of national significance, threats of legal action and violence are embraced quite readily once negotiations stall. "When the state

38 "Integrationspolitik: Den Nye Frihedskamp," Udlændingepolitik, Socialdemokratiet, accessed December 1, 2018, <https://www.socialdemokratiet.dk/da/politik/udlaendingepolitik/integrationspolitik-den-nye-frihedskamp/>.

attempts to forcibly establish and defend ‘core political principles,’ when its courts impose a *particular* distinction between ‘core principles’ and ‘background justifications’ ..., this may add to cumulative disaffection.” A secular state, according to Asad (2003, 8), does not “guarantee toleration,” but rather “puts into play different structures of ambition and fear. The law never seeks to eliminate violence since its object is always to *regulate* violence.” Likewise, freedom, as a core political principle, is not justified with persuasion, but touted as something to cherish and defend. As *Venstre* puts it in their manifesto: “The state’s task is to maintain individual freedoms” (W062).³⁹

Political talk on freedom is not restricted to general principles, but also deployed in campaigns involving the Muslim minority. Perhaps the most blatant way this freedom-struggle discourse has crystallized in actual legislation is the much discussed masking-ban. During the 2017 local elections in Denmark, the right-wing party *Nye Borgerlige* campaigned with a poster depicting a woman in niqab with the heading “freedom, also for Muslim girls” (F051).⁴⁰ *Nye Borgerlige* has grown rapidly in recent years, going from zero to four seats in 2019. In an interview with *Berlingske*, the party’s leader stated that Islam must have no influence in society; girls should be prohibited from wearing the veil during school hours, “and of course, it is most important that we face the big challenges with foreigners in our country. If we do not get rid of them, everything else may not matter.” When confronted with the contradiction in wanting to simultaneously increase freedoms and forbid Muslim girls to wear the veil, Vermund stated: “Islam is of course in opposition to the values—democracy, equality, freedom—on which our society is based. Therefore, we say that if you are a Muslim and want to be a believing Muslim, you should be it in private” (N122).⁴¹

The *Danske Folkeparti* makes a similar argument when it comes to the *maskeringsforbud*. According to MP Alex Ahrendsen, politics sometimes reduces freedom to a matter of limited regulation and legislation, the consequence being that “oppressed Muslim women are sacrificed on the altar of liberalism.” Proffering a series of personal anecdotes, Ahrendsen decries the situation of “girls pressed to wear different types of Muslim headgear,” empha-

39 “Venstres Principprogram,” *Venstre*, accessed August 1, 2019.

40 Nye Borgerlige Aalborg, “Frihed, også for muslimske piger,” *Facebook* (social media), October 28, 2017, <https://www.facebook.com/Nyeborgerligeaalborg/photos/a.882639295194958/1347770215348528/>.

41 Jens Beck Nielsen, “Hvis vi Ikke Får Bugt Med Udlændinge-Udfordringerne, Kan Alt Andet Være Lige gyldigt,” *Berlingske*, September 22, 2016.



FIGURE 1

Nye Borgerlige political campaign poster from 2017, depicting a woman in niqab with the heading “*Frihed, også for muslimske piger*” (freedom, also for Muslim girls)

IMAGE REPRODUCED FROM WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/NYEBORGERLIGEAAALBORG

sizing “the big challenges we face in the parallel-societies,” and maintaining that “the state is not value-neutral and defends the values on which Danish society is founded.” The conclusion is that “a masking-ban is for freedom-lovers” (N104).⁴²

Another, less visible way the particular political-cultural understanding of freedom is used/implemented at the institutional level is in the so called *frihed og folkestyre-kravet* (Freedom and democracy requirement), appearing in a recent (November 2017) agreement between the governing parties concerning ‘the strengthened monitoring of independent schools’ (*friskole*) (P067; P068; P069). In short, this governmental action intensifies control over all independent schools in order to curb material and teaching that contest the fundamental Danish values of freedom and democracy. With the *Frihed og folkestyre-kravet*, the parties involved seek to ensure that:

42 Jens Nørgaard Larsen, “Alex Ahrendsen: Forbud Mod Burka Er for de Frihedselskende,” *Kristeligt Dagblad*, February 13, 2018.

new schools throughout their work prepare students to live in a society such as Denmark with freedom and democracy as well as develop and strengthen the students' democratic formation and their knowledge of and respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights, including gender equality.⁴³ (P069)

Education Minister Merete Riisager (*Liberal Alliance*), in commenting on the action, contraposed the values of certain *friskole* with those that promote a society of mutual "peace and freedom." In a Facebook post she writes: "Without going into pending cases, I can say that a school which for example teaches students that infidels must be fought, that boys and girls do not have the same rights, or that religious laws trump worldly laws, collide with the (*frihed og folkestyre-kravet*) law" (F031).⁴⁴

The principal force of governmental action lies in its normality (Foucault 2007; 2008), i.e. its appeal to society's unquestioned norms. This does not make them wrong, but it does make their power-effects extremely hard to counteract by those social groups that are somehow disadvantaged or excluded in the process. Moreover, leveraging these norms makes such marginalization hard to see. Asad (2003, 15–16) would argue that all this is closely connected to the politics of national progress, and the continuous attempts to establish conceptual binaries such as modern vs. non-modern, West vs. non-West. Many heeded his call to unpack the myriad assumptions underpinning secularism as the "modern doctrine of the world in the world." Indeed, analyzing the process by which these binaries are established and subverted has taught us much about how people "live the secular," and most importantly, how they "vindicate the essential freedom and responsibility of the sovereign self in opposition to the constraints of that self by religious discourses" (ibid.).

1.5 *Freedom as a Signifier of Disorientation*

The ways in which freedom has been defined as a cultural value can be questioned because, on its own, it is one of those elusive, polymorphous terms that resists clear-cut demarcation. Since we cannot give it an ostensive meaning,

43 "Aftale med styrket tilsyn med de frie grundskoler," Undervisningsministeriet, Regeringen, November 7, 2017, <https://www.regeringen.dk/publikationer-og-aftaletekster/aftale-med-styrket-tilsyn-med-de-frie-grundskoler/>.

44 Merete Riisager, "Friskole Frihed Og Folkestyrekrav," *Facebook* (social media), July 15, 2017, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/merete.riisager/posts/1876891855670841>.

there is never a one-to-one relation between its lexical definition and an actual phenomenon or understanding. In semiotics, it is a classic example of a 'floating' (Lévi-Strauss 1950; Žižek 1989) or 'empty' signifier (Barthes 1977; Laclau 1996), lacking a definite signified, absorbing rather than emitting meaning.⁴⁵ Which is precisely the reason why it mobilizes such a large number of perspectives and articulations.

Why do my Muslim interlocutors or Danish politicians talk of *real* freedom (W03; W046)? What does it mean to *know* what freedom is? As an empty signifier, 'freedom' is liable to be hegemonically 'filled' by a specific interpretation. In Ernesto Laclau's (1996, 36) terminology, such hegemonically determined signifiers are responsible for structuring the social sphere; whenever such determinations are challenged, we find talk of politics. In actual Danish politics, as I have shown, parties as different as *Venstre* (Denmark's Liberal Party) and *Socialdemokratiet* (the Social Democratic Party) align and present their particular interpretations of freedom as renderings of freedom *an sich*. Why all this fuzz over a term? Once again, because freedom, as an empty signifier open to various ascriptions of meaning, only acquires a specific meaning once spliced into a certain discourse. Discourse determines the specialized language to which knowledge has to conform in order to be regarded as meaningful, and, even more importantly, true. The essentialist rhetoric employed by Danish politicians allows for e.g. criticism of something like 'freedom of religion' or 'freedom of speech' to be framed as an attack on 'freedom' itself, justifying increasingly draconian measures.

It is clear the term has become *de rigueur* in most political campaigns, and positioning oneself as its paladin is (still) an efficient way to gain approval. The crucial point is that political power often involves control of other via the medium of speech: the powerful are those with the right/duty to decide when and how others can speak (see Foucault 2000; 2014). Anthropologist Robert Paine (1981b, 9), distinguished political rhetoric as a particular kind of discourse for which "saying is doing". This means that, as in music, the doing and the effect of rhetoric are inextricably linked, for example in the attempt to persuade an audience. Political rhetoric aims to gain control through the routinization and

45 To some theorists, there is a difference between a floating signifier, involving a certain overflowing of meaning, and an empty signifier, which would be a signifier without a signified. With Ernesto Laclau, I understand the 'floating' and the 'emptying' of a term as two sides of the same discursive operation. We can say that the signifier 'freedom' is floating, because it is different in liberal, muslim, conservative, anti-muslim discourses. At the same time, this 'floating' requires a tendential emptiness, a loose relationship between signifier and signified. When its meaning is 'fixed' by a master-signifier, its floating is arrested and the term is 'filled' with significance.

institutionalization of its language, the gradual assertion of the right to speak (Paine 1981a). The pervasiveness of freedom-talk in Danish politics implies that freedom is part of the ‘controlled language’ essential to authority.

Moreover, as an empty signifier of liberal discourse, ‘freedom’ produces certain ‘desirable’ subject positions within the Danish public sphere, with an ensuing logic of in/exclusion. It is then no wonder that we find statements indicating an identification with ‘undesirable’ subject positions: “I will never be Danish” (C035). It is also predictable that we find forces counteracting this power on the level of language. By examining how Muslims reflect on this freedom-talk, I discuss how such discourse is articulated, contested, and appropriated. As I will argue in the next section, a blatant example is the Scandinavian branch of Hizb ut-Tahrir, specifically attacking the governmental freedom-talk. Similarly, politically moderate voices seek to change the political by questioning the meaning of the term freedom itself (see 1.3).

While ‘freedom’ as a signifier has the power to gather an extremely diverse crowd under its banner, it also tends to breed conceptual confusion and abuse. According to philosopher Frank Ruda (2016a, 1), freedom has become “a signifier of disorientation,” which can function in an utterly repressive way. Borders are closed to preserve ‘freedoms’; temporary job contracts are advertised as an opportunity to ‘freely’ explore different opportunities; concern for ‘free’ choice justifies restrictions on religious garments etc. Ruda (2016b) gives the example of the company *Virgin Enterprise*, which claimed that a fixed number of vacation days was disadvantageous for its employees: these employees, it was argued, should be ‘free’ from such prescriptions; they should be able to decide for themselves if, and when, they were in need of vacation. The ‘freedom to decide’ led to the emergence of unbearable self-regulation, decreased the number of taken holidays, and resulted in a disastrous competition among employees.⁴⁶ At times, the rhetoric of ‘freedom’ allows veiled interests to appear under the guise of universality, while producing its opposite.

When freedom becomes a signifier of disorientation, the first urge is to appeal to a ‘true meaning.’ However, such meaning is not self-evident; the attempt to pin it down invariably gives rise to dispute. Even more so, freedom is what W.B. Gallie (1956) would call an “essentially contested concept,” meaning that there will always be distinct and disputed versions of its significance, each inconsistent with the other (see also Lakoff 2006, 15). To employ an essentially contested concept means “to use it against other uses and to recognize

46 Editorial, “The Guardian View on Unlimited Time off: Too Good to Be True,” *The Guardian*, September 24, 2014.

that one's own use of it has to be maintained against these other uses ... both aggressively and defensively" (Gallie 1956, 172). As a result, groups spanning the entire social spectrum all claim privileged access to a 'true,' 'real,' 'deep' understanding of freedom.

All this is not to say that 'freedom' is devoid of meaning. When there is a use, there is a meaning. If, as the late Wittgenstein (1953) put it, 'meaning *is* use,' then meaning as such is inextricably tied to specific speech-communities (Hymes 1972). Confusion and/or conflict over meaning comes from belief in a shared *private* meaning: the conviction that one's personal interpretation of the term is the same as everyone else's. As in Wittgenstein's 'beetle-in-a-box' analogy, the actual thing inside box each person holds is irrelevant to the shared public meaning of the term 'beetle'. It is the use people make of the term that determines its meaning, not the 'something' hidden from view. Belief in a shared private meaning unwitting reliance on a 'picture theory of language,' according to which language represents facts about the world, making claim either false or true.

To properly investigate the politics of meaning, we need then to abandon the idea that words have an unambiguous meaning of their own, fixed for all alike in a determinate system of language. The meaning of words shifts from one discourse to the next, and discourses are known to conflict, even when they share a common tongue. If we want to obtain knowledge of 'freedom,' we must therefore attend to its relations, place, and function in the field of a particular discourse; at the group-specific social practices and pragmatics involved; and at the antagonistic relations that set up the meaning(s). Whatever 'knowledge' we acquire through this process will be, at best, a partial version of that belonging to the speech community in question. Knowing what freedom *is* amounts to locating the signifier in a discursive field, characterized by a temporary closure of meaning.

2 Resistance

The first of August 2018, the day a much-debated *maskeringsforbud* (also called *tildækningsforbud* or *burkaforbud*, depending on the speaker) was put into effect, a demonstration converged upon Nørrebro's square *Sorte Plads* in Copenhagen. Among the organizers, including *Socialistisk Ungdomsfront* and *Party Rebels*, was the Muslim activist group *Kvinder I Dialog* (Women In Dialogue, henceforth *KID*), who played a key role in representing the Muslim position in the debate. At the *Sorte Plads*, the niqabi were not the only 'covered' demonstrators. Members from various sympathizing communities wore

all sorts of masques, with the police looking on. The signs paraded by the *KID* participants featured slogans writ in in red and black, such as “*liberalt hykleri*” (liberal hypocrisy),⁴⁷ “*mit tøj, mit valg*” (my clothes, my choice), and “*det er vores valg, ikke jeres*” (it’s our choice, not yours). Others brandished signs such as “*sluts & queers imod tildækningsforbuddet*” (sluts and queers against the masking-ban).

In a *Berlingske* reportage appearing the following day, one non-Muslim participant declared: “the unholy alliance between Orthodox Muslims and the queer community is key to (the success of) the demonstration.” This unlikely bond was the focus of most of the reports by major media outlets. Attention was also concentrated on the state of exception it revealed. The leader in the *Jyllands-Posten* read: “The legally notified demonstrations were both an infringement of an existing ban on masking in demonstrations and a clear violation of the new general masking-ban. ... It’s primarily up to the police to assess whether one or more people’s masking has a so-called credible purpose, and it is precisely in this that lies a controversial detail, that has gotten surprisingly little attention” (N128).⁴⁸

I intend to distinguish these overt acts of resistance from the more ambitious act of redefinition, because the former engages an established meaning, embroiling itself in struggles external to the Muslim one. I also want to focus on the particular ways in which any form of resistance must be articulated in order to achieve success. One of the things that will become clear is that the vocabulary employed in the articulation of Muslim struggle is directly related to public exposure. In other words, resisting a public discourse on freedom (and its associated power effects) is more productive when playing by the rules of that very same discourse.

2.1 *Muslim Mobilization*

The activist groups coordinating the 2018 demonstrations mobilized a Muslim community alert to social changes, but it took several decades of efforts to reach this point. The 1990s saw the development of Muslim associations which Simonsen (2008, 122–123) has described as part of a newly found ‘proactive Islam’ (*offensiv islam*), indicating a movement from ‘defensive silence’ to

47 The slogan “liberal hypocrisy” has been used in the past by the minor party *Enhedslisten* to criticize the political compromises of right-wing parties (W051). See “Liberalt hykleri,” *Enhedslisten*, February 25, 2011, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://org.enhedslisten.dk/artikel/liberalt-hykleri-19836>.

48 Editorial, “Ledende artikel: Burkaparodi,” *Jyllands-Posten*, August 2, 2018. See also Mikkel Fyhn Christensen, “Forbud og frihed i praksis,” *Berlingske*, August 2, 2018.

'creative participation'. Led by second-generation immigrants born or raised in Denmark, these associations were accustomed to local needs and social context. Knowing how to maneuver Danish bureaucracy/regulations facilitated the creation of schools, NGO's, and (crucially) the multiplication of officially 'recognized religious communities' (*anerkendte trossamfund*).⁴⁹ These associations were geared to address the daily challenges of Danish Muslims, to guide new converts, and generally to contribute in making Islam a permanent part of society (K.-L. Johansen 2002; Galal and Liengaard 2003). Together with the steady rise of Muslim public figures, artists, writers, and politicians, the 1990s saw the budding of a "Danish expression of Islam," attuned to local challenges and possibilities (A.W. Pedersen 2012, 247–248). To Simonsen (2008, 122–123; 2012, 25), this expression has occasionally been over-emphasized (and praised) as a local "interpretation of Islam." In my own fieldwork, as discussed in this section, the 'defensive' attitude Simonsen wrote about was definitively still present.

The new generation of Danish Muslims is often said to have critiqued their precursors, calling for a more intensive engagement with society. Figures like Abdul Wahid Pedersen (2012) led the way, being the first to hold Friday sermons (*khuṭbah*) in Danish (around 1997), and representing the 'Danish expression of Islam' in deeds and words (N137).⁵⁰ Criticizing the lack of institutes to train local imams, and the attendant reliance on 'imported imams' unfamiliar with the peculiarities of the Danish context, the new generation was instrumental in developing new facilities preparing autochthonous religious authorities able to address local challenges. However, as some Muslim leaders have recently observed, facilities are still inadequate, with most Danish imams completing their training abroad.⁵¹

The by now infamous set of cartoons commenting on Muhammad, published in the newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005, sparked a heated debate and launched a series of events that escalated internationally, culminating in attacks on Danish embassies in Lebanon, Syria, and Iran (Klausen 2009). The editorial accompanying the cartoons suggested that Muslims should accept the "insults, mockery and ridicule" that came with freedom of speech in a "modern, secular society" (Rose 2005; Lindekilde, Mouritsen, and Zapata-Barrero 2009). A decade later, Flemming Rose (2015, 13), the editor responsible

49 All officially recognized religious communities have to fulfill certain requirements, and are collected in a register (www.km.dk/andre-trossamfund). The first mosques had already received formal recognition in the 1970s.

50 Akbar Ahmed, "Imam Abdul Wahid Pedersen," *Al Bilad Daily*, July 31, 2017, <https://www.albiladdailyeng.com/imam-abdul-wahid-pedersen/>.

51 Waseem Hussain, *Imam bag tremmer* (København: Gyldendal, 2017), chap. 7, e-book.

for the publication, would stand firm in his conviction that the Muhammad-drawings “integrated Danish Muslims into the Danish tradition of satire.”

The crisis led to an unprecedented mobilization of the diverse Muslim communities, who came together to discuss possible responses. While there was, ultimately, no consensus, this mass gathering was an exceptional development in itself (Larsson and Lindekilde 2009). Together with the request for foreign support by some influential Danish Muslim activists, this contributed to the public redefinition of the Muslim communities: from a Danish minority, to representatives of a global religious network, inimical to Danish democratic values (M.H. Pedersen and Rytter 2014, 2309–2310). While the events that followed the publication of the Jyllands-Posten cartoons facilitated the process of securitization, they thus also contributed to the development of new agencies and Muslim voices in the public debate (see Lindekilde 2008; Kublitz 2010, 107). Muslim public engagement boomed, from repenting Islamists (Akkari 2014; 2018), to young Muslim influencers (A. Mahmoud 2015; A.A. Mahmoud 2016; Cekic 2017; Hussain 2017; Hussein 2018), and daring reformers (Akkari 2014; Khankan 2018; Omar 2017), who all in their own ways contributed to shaping the Danish Muslim community.

The establishment of the first Muslim cemetery was hailed as a first step towards official ‘recognition’ of the place of Islam in Denmark; evidence of the country’s religiously pluralistic character (Lægaard 2010). According to some, the accelerated construction (or attempts thereof) of mosques signaled an unprecedented sense of belonging among Muslim communities, empowering their assertion as an integral part of Denmark (J.S. Nielsen 2012). Kühle (2006; 2012; 2016) documented an increase in mosques of 48% between 2005 (115) and 2016 (160), and argued that the manner in which state and society relate to Islam influences the way it develops in Denmark, mentioning, for instance, the difficulties involved in obtaining land for construction and preacher-visas (*forkundervisum*) for imams (2006, 180), noting the sense of discrimination produced by these difficulties (2006, 34). In 2019 the number of mosques, defined as “a place where public Muslim prayer is organized at least once a week,” had grown to circa 175 (Kühle and Larsen 2019, 58, 61).

Understanding the contemporary construction of diversity requires us to look at the main actors in the reproduction of discourse and ideology. This is perhaps the basic intention behind the work of scholars such as Peter Hervik (2004; 2011; 2018), Lasse Lindekilde (2008; 2014), and Stig Hjarvard (2011; 2016), all of whom looked at the Danish mediatization of conflicts surrounding Islam and religion in general. Even before 9/11 and the various terrorist attacks in Europe, media reporting on political events in Muslim-majority countries worldwide has contributed to an almost uninterrupted negative attention to

Islam. These reports, mixed with feelings of insecurity and powerlessness induced by domestic financial and political crises, led to Muslims becoming the scapegoats for these uncertainties (Sheikh and Crone 2012; Lindekilde 2014).

The media were especially instrumental in inciting debates on gender and Islam, raging across Europe for decades. These were exacerbated by the late 1980s headscarf crises in France, and culminated in Denmark around 2018 with the controversial covering-ban (*maskeringsforbud*). The veil-discussion is in many ways intertwined with a broader concern with media broadcasting. Rikke Andreassen, (2011) for instance, shows how the news media tend to reduce all types of religious veiling to 'the headscarf,' disregarding the diversity in motives and style (see Ismail 2017).

The difficulties experienced by the Danish Muslim community are sometimes due to "institutional structures" maintaining difference. Even though Danish society is seen as one of the most secular societies in Europe, "Danish society and institutions are thoroughly impregnated with Lutheran Christianity" (J.S. Nielsen 2012, 3–4). As Kühle (2011a; 2012) has shown, Muslim organizations must adapt their activities and formats to the rigid patterns developed by the Lutheran church in order to be seen as 'religious' (thereby opening up the possibility for state sponsorship) (see also Fetzer and Soper 2005). In the 2010s, political activity continues to remain distant from the multicultural and religiously plural social reality, thwarting the institutional recognition of Islam (Christoffersen 2012). Several political parties continue to reassert the centrality of the *Folkekirke* for national identity, leading to a significant role for Lutheranism in society, affecting the political legitimacy of alternative religious communities (see Henkel 2012; M.V. Nielsen and Kühle 2011). This bias makes Muslim activists, in particular, susceptible to being categorized as threatening and/or un-Danish (Jakobsen 2011).

Another difficulty is that, through the vagaries of history, Denmark has come to exemplify the mono-cultural nation-state, with one ethnicity, one language, and one religion (Kærgård 2010). Kvaale (2011, 231) ironically explains this remarkable ethno-cultural homogeneity as "the sorry result of a series of military defeats and absent-minded foreign policy, leading to a shrunken empire through loss of neighboring lands and overseas colonies." The wounds of this 'amputated' empire have taken long to heal, and, in some respects, the romanticist nation-building project still lingers on. Kvaale observed that Denmark's ethno-cultural homogeneity has been a historical factor in enabling a rare collective confidence in the state, making possible "a widespread social contract of mutual welfare and security among the citizens, wherein a matter-of-factly conflation of nation and state was not really challenged."

Talk of ethno-cultural homogeneity is yet another fixation in Danish historiographies. It is of course a fact that, compared to other European countries, the non-ethnic Danish population is relatively limited, and that even as of 2019 immigrants and their descendants comprised ‘only’ 14% of the population.⁵² Yet the notion of homogeneity has been put to use in accounts of immigration and the ‘meeting of cultures and religions’; accounts which tend to explain diversity, rather than reveal identity. In this, academia sometimes seems to involuntarily maintain the widely documented idea in Danish society that homogeneity is the norm, and difference a threat (Olwig and Pærregaard 2011; Larsen 2011). Niels Kærgård (2010) has noted the problems with Denmark’s transformation from a culturally homogeneous to a multicultural country, focusing on the formal and informal rules required for the co-existence of different ethnic and religious groups. Bent Østergaard’s (2007) historical work reacts to the debate by portraying the historically continuous immigration as an enriching, beneficial, and even necessary, resource. Yet, this account again reaffirms the Islam’s imported character. Similarly, the hopeful meta-narrative of Nielsen’s (2012) *Islam in Denmark* employs history and sociology to affirm diversity, while linking identity to an ethnic Danish cultural tradition.

There is of course no malice in these approaches, but the intention does not always rhyme with the result. Abu-Lughod (1991, 54) articulated a similar affirmation of difference in anthropological tradition: “As a professional discourse that elaborates on the meaning of culture in order to account for, explain, and understand cultural difference, anthropology also helps construct, produce, and maintain it.” Without its practitioners intending to do so, “anthropological discourse gives cultural difference (and the separation between groups of people it implies) the air of the self-evident.”

2.2 “*Liberalt hykleri*”

The *Weekendavisen*, another major newspaper, issued a more provocative reportage on the *Sorte Plads* demonstration, displaying a creative heading: “With a veil on the eyes: Religious Muslims and the extreme right-wing demonstrated side by side on the first day of the burqa-ban” (N126).⁵³ The article started with a dramatic tone: “A girl, who appears to be five to six years old, gets a niqab-veil for the face from her mother. Only her eyes can be seen now.” *Weekendavisen* identified one of the demonstrators holding a “*liberalt hykleri*” sign with overly

52 Danmarks Statistik, *Indvandrere i Danmark 2019*, November 27, 2019, <https://www.dst.dk/pubfile/29446/Indv2019>, page 7.

53 Leny Malacinski, “Med slør for øjnene,” *Weekendavisen*, August 3, 2018.

precise and colorful terms: a “21-year old Palestinian (sic) woman in niqab” with “brown eyes and long lashes.” She explains the thinking behind the sign:

The ban is hypocritical, because one prides oneself of all these liberal values, claiming that people can do whatever they want, and that one has the freedom to decide for/over oneself (*over sig selv*), but when it comes to us Muslims and our choices to go dressed as we want, then suddenly one is of the opinion that there is a limit.⁵⁴ (N126)

The interviewer then asks her if she is “happy” with these “liberal values,” to which she replies: “Of course. I agree that any individual should be able to decide what to do with his/her own body. We of course think for ourselves and decide what to do with our own lives in general.” Despite the critical tone of the article and its exoticized characters (including a convert with “beard and long robe”), the organization of the rally, and of this particular interview, exhibit pragmatic resistance to a seemingly unassailable force. The interviewee is careful in her choice of words, defining the version of “liberal values” she “of course” agrees with; specifying that humans should be able to decide over their own lives “in general,” and keeping to the specific issue of clothing, which appeals to allied communities. Pressed to explain why she does not vote, the interviewee cites personal reasons that she does not wish to share; when asked if she thinks women should have the same divorce-rights as men, she reproaches the interviewer and cuts the dialog short.

The value of these fragments lies in their ability to demonstrate exchanges between Danish Muslims and a broad audience of compatriots. The intervention is mediated by provocative journalists, but even this reveals something about how publicly engaged Muslims sometimes wish to position themselves. The abrupt termination of the interview is telling, because it demonstrates a refusal to engage with certain polemics that are not conducive to dialogue, an awareness many Danish Muslim have refined over the years.

The mode of interaction with the media is only one side of the story. In a conversation months before the introduction of the ban, Sasha, one of the most active members of *KID*, assumed the same position as the demonstrator. She told me that *KID* are reluctant to use the word ‘freedom’ itself, because of its connotations in the public debate. Their main use for the term is “to tell the politicians and the general public that they’re really, said frankly, hypocrites

54 Ibid.

with regards to freedom.” Because “they” say “you have the freedom to live exactly like you want, as long as it is the way that we want you to live”:

It’s a very, very shallow use of the word freedom. And the interesting thing is, they’re limiting our choice, ... they’re forcing us in the name of freedom. They’re saying: ‘You need to be free. And if you don’t, we’re going to give you ... a fine of 10,000 kroner.’ Or ... a prison stay for three months. ... ‘You need to be free, and you can’t define freedom with your own words. You have to live according to what we say, because ... then you are really free. ... We’re putting you in prison ... for your sake, so you can be free.’ Can you hear how ridiculous it sounds? ... This is why we don’t even use the word freedom, because it’s not freedom. (C054)

Here we see again the ‘shallow/deep’ freedom metaphor used by Pedersen, and the claim that ‘shallow’ freedom is not really freedom at all. Rather than directly proposing the religious narrative, however, Sasha opts to point out a series of double standards and incongruities in “their” use of the word. Sarah, one of her fellow niqabi from *KID*, would also state in a TV-interview some months before the ban:

Politicians try to cover up what this is really about. It’s about Islamophobia. It’s about that they are afraid and insecure about Muslims. ... They say, among other things, that this (touching her niqab) is a symbol/promotion of Islam, so this is just an excuse. I believe that this law is incompatible with Danish values. ... What is left of liberalism when you remove the constitutional freedom rights? Tax cuts—is that all? ... Søren Pape (Minister of Justice in 2018) and the likes of him all go against their core values. ... And the arguments they use to forbid the niqab are the same they can use to forbid the headscarf.⁵⁵ (W052)

Sarah’s language in this interview is tuned to an audience who would not respond to a purely religious narrative. ‘Islam’ only ever appears in a negative construction (Islamophobia) or in the terms of the political discourse. In these fragments we can see three uses of *liberalt hykler*. One that directly employs the slogan in protest signs; one expressed through communication with a het-

55 *Aftenshowet*, “Maskeringsforbud,” featuring Mark Stokholm and ‘Sara,’ aired February 12, 2018, on DR1, <http://hdl.handle.net/109.3.1/uuid:c6108061-93e7-49a7-b717-c7325f6f3992>.

erogeneous audience; one that comes up in statements directed at sympathetic audiences (including conversations with myself).

Three things come to mind. Firstly, we are dealing with the basic practice of audience design: speakers design their utterances taking into account their audiences' knowledge (Fussell and Krauss 1992). Secondly, as Marshall McLuhan (1964, 9) observed half a century ago, the medium imprints itself upon the fabric of whatever is transmitted through it. Thirdly, the context of an inter-group demonstration or a national TV-interview elicits the kinds of articulation that lead to the establishment of what Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 131) have called "unified chains of equivalence." In other words, the Muslim demonstrators' engagement with the media seems essential for the construction of a centralized antagonism. It induces the alliances seen at the demonstration, but also pushes Danish Muslims to formulate their struggle in terms that make sense to a non-Muslim audience.

For many Danish Muslims, hypocrisy, double standards, and a general disillusionment with what some of my interlocutors regard as the *frihedsideal* (freedom ideals) are some of the main reasons for intervening in the public debate. *Liberalt hykleri* is not merely a problem in the political sphere and news media, but also in the behavior and beliefs of fellow citizens. Well-connected Copenhagen imam Nabil sees many of his fellow Muslims questioning what they see as an "ideal of freedom" that never really lives up to its name. Soft-spoken and cautious, he displays great skill in taking up a simultaneously detached and involved perspective.

Many of them, the way Muslims see it, especially Muslims ... raised in Denmark, in the West, is that freedom today is only an ideal. But we don't have a culture of freedom, ... Muslims are saying: 'you're trying to curb our rights when at the same time you're saying, we're doing this to be more free.' ... I think that it is very much alive in the Muslim conscience, ... and therefore the whole concept of freedom is questioned, ... (and even) insulted. It's like: 'is that what you call freedom?' And they say: 'well, we'd rather be without it, if that is what freedom is'. (C037)

Nabil goes on to say that public debates, aggressive political rhetoric, and systematic discrimination cause much "dismay and frustration" in the Muslim youth. Many of them, including Danish Muslim intellectuals and imams, have given up debating, discouraged by the entrenched "double standards of the West" (C037).

This passage shows that freedom is not challenged as some abstract idealized notion, but rather in the ways it seems to manifest in contemporary Danish

society. On one end of the spectrum, a distinction is made between ‘superficial’ and ‘deep’ freedom, both of which have their meaning and function. This, in turn, is often sharpened into a distinction between a misguided ‘false’ freedom, and a ‘real’ one worth pursuing. At the other end of the spectrum, there is the complete rejection of ‘dangerous’ freedom, which is supposed to give way to a complete compliance with divine command. Interview material seems to suggest that, especially in times of crisis for the community (such as during the implementation of the *maskeringsforbud*), there is a general shift in opinion and language-use towards the critical end of the spectrum. The different articulations of freedom are no longer a normal fact of daily life, but an issue that needs to be vocalized.

2.3 “But It’s a Free Country!”

If young Muslims like Aaheda understand and tolerate the contradictions inherent to the public discourse on freedom, still others understand and refute them. The extent to which individuals and groups have considered the complexities of the subject is, of course, hard to judge, but it is clear that in many cases opposition is hardly in want of information/education. The Muslim women’s organization *De Kvindelige Dawahbærere* (The Female Dawahbearers, henceforth *DKD*), in their commentary on the entry-ban lists for imams guilty of hate-speech (*hadforbrydelser*), maintain that the hypocrisy and double standards of certain political decisions are symptomatic of the failure of freedom as a foundational societal value:

By compromising one’s own freedom values, one undermines one’s whole foundation. It’s hypocritical ..., but in addition, it must be seen as a declaration of failure for one of the building blocks of society, when one must undermine one’s own values to ensure one’s protection. ... It seems that the solution is not an entry-ban, but rather an imam-education, that can train imams to speak against the so-called hate-speeches by other imams. It’s an amputated Islam, a secularist Islam. This is the solution for the Western system, so it does not feel threatened. This is a testimony of a fragile foundation.⁵⁶ (W037)

56 De Kvindelige Dawahbærere, “Ved at Gå På Kompromis Med Sine Egne Frihedsværdier, Undergraver Man Hele Sit Fundament,” *De Kvindelige Dawahbærere* (blog), April 17, 2016, accessed August 1, 2019, <http://dekvindelighedb.blogspot.com/2016/04/ved-at-ga-pa-kompromis-med-sine-egne.html>.

The Scandinavian branch of *Hizb ut-Tahrir* (Party of Liberation, henceforth *HuTS*) produced a similar argument in a press release condemning the “forced secularization” of children from age one which had been introduced by the government. Here, the organization uses the notion of *frihedsværdier* (freedom-values), so often deployed by Danish political parties, against their own policies:

With the Imam-law’s restriction of ‘freedom of expression,’ entry-ban, niqab-ban, and in continuation of the efforts against ‘social control,’ ... the strengthened monitoring of *friskole* ... (the government tries) to make a suffocating ring around Muslims in the country, with state intervention in all parts of their lives, from cradle to grave. Coercion, intellectual property control, and discriminatory laws are the only tools of anti-Islam politicians! The recent niqab-ban was rock bottom, and yet politicians have already dug the hole deeper, trampling the remains of their freedom-values further down into the mud.⁵⁷ (W038)

HuTS and *DKD* are just two of the many diverse groups within the Muslim community taking every opportunity to expose the policies and public statements that appear to contradict Denmark’s presumed traditional *frihedsværdier*. These groups expect, and even demand, a strict consistency, glossing over political complexities, willfully overlooking certain issues. To name some: first, the political construction of *frihed* is far from consistent across parties and governments; second, *frihed* is always a strategic construction, in support of a particular political agenda, and never a statement of matters of fact; third, the idea of individual freedom as a ‘sacred Danish value’ is itself subject to an endless discursive negotiation, and takes shape in dialogue with the very (Muslim) voices that contest it. The demand for consistency and integrity when it comes to a presumably Danish *frihed* is thus sometimes (purposely) conflated with a purely liberal understanding of individual freedoms. From the simultaneous awareness of, and disregard for, these points—as well as their argumentation, and choice of words (*imamlov* rather than *lovforslag L18* or *hadprædikanter*, *niqabforbud* rather than *tildækningsforbud* or *maskeringsforbud*)—it is evident that these groups know the rules of the game.

57 “Christiansborg indfører tvangsekularisering af børn fra etårsalderen,” Pressemeldelse, Hizb ut-Tahrir Skandinavien, May 31, 2018, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.dk/content.php?contentid=862>.

In some cases, the conflation of *frihed*, *frihedsrettinger* (freedom-rights), *frihedsværdier* and the like seems less deliberate, as demands for coherence and integrity are actually fulfilled. In the fall of 2017, several of my interlocutors mentioned a recently aired episode of *Debatten* (The Debate, a popular program on public television). Aaheda recounted the event like this:

There was this Danish man at *Debatten* ... who said: 'it's very stupid to wear burqa, but we have to pay the price when we have a democracy, when we have freedom.' When we ... have these rules, in the *Grundlov* (the constitution), then you have to pay the price. And—it was very funny to me—he said: 'it's so stupid, it's so stupid!' ... He stood there, there's two places to stand in this program, with or against (the proposition), and he stood with against, with the Arab girls, and then he said, 'it's very stupid for me, I don't understand it (the *burqa*), but we have to accept it.' (C032)

Lutfi, a young man from the Danish-Somali community, was also impressed with the participant's stance, praising his integrity (C031). According to him, the man seemed worthy of respect for consistently prioritizing his *frihedsværdier* over his un-sympathetic view of the veil. Both Lutfi and Aaheda were keen to emphasize the man's rebuttal of the actual reasons for wearing religious attire in order to strengthen their point: if (their liberal notion of) individual freedom were truly embraced, it would lead one to tolerate/accept religious practices and beliefs regardless of understanding or agreement. To many, this seems to be the test of fairness and truthfulness. The cry of some Muslim newcomers, "But it's a free country!" Is thus a polysemous expression of incomprehension, confusion, frustration, feigned nescience, strategic critique, and appeal to integrity.

Though disturbing to some, efforts to contrapose a Muslim, spiritual emancipation to a Danish or Western, liberal, 'superficial' understanding of freedom are frequent and visible, especially on social media. On Muslim Facebook groups such as *Religionen Islam, Profetens Budskab* (The Prophet's Message), or the extremely popular *Vejen Til Islam* (The Road to Islam), which, to date, counts more than forty-five thousand members (included a fair amount of scholar lurkers), the faithful occasionally remind each other of the beauty, maturity, and superiority of the Islamic alternatives to secular notions. When it comes to freedom, one common theme in groups like these is that of "women liberation." In a similar vein to Pedersen's aforementioned comments on "real freedom," here Muslim women are keen to warn themselves, fellow Muslims, and society at large of a harmful "false freedom." A female

member of a closed Facebook group which I will call *Den Lige Vej* (The Straight Path) writes:

Freedom is misinterpreted ... not all sisters are deceived or fall for the false sense of freedom in Western countries, but some are, unfortunately. How ironic that sisters arriving in a 'free' country let themselves be changed and live according to their lifestyle, while people from said country find truth in the lifestyle and logic that they have abandoned.⁵⁸ (F009)

The user mentions a *sense* and a *misinterpretation* of freedom, which leads us to think that the basic phenomenon is fundamentally the same, with different tiers of (mis)understanding. Immigrant "sisters" can be misled/tricked into conforming to a lifestyle that is 'free' only by name and fame. This post, in contrast to the view expressed elsewhere that "sexual freedom is forced upon Muslim women," seeks to empty out the notion of freedom, deeming the "Western" interpretation invalid rather than acknowledging and critiquing it (W055).⁵⁹ The author does not specify the right interpretation, but suggests to the (Muslim) reader that it lies in what some deceived (Muslim) sisters have abandoned when moving to so-called "free countries."

The message is subtle exactly because it does not spell out an alternative freedom, nor does it refute a specific definition. Rather, it creates a duality that is hard to undo: there being a false and a real freedom, one has to find out which is which. The gist of these comments is simple, but crucial for the present study—freedom is 'misperceived' by "the West" due to a lack of insight into the human condition. What would this condition be? In another post, seen by tens of thousands, a young woman from Copenhagen states that a Muslim's freedom is the freedom to acknowledge, trust, and follow Allah's commandments. The message opens with a hypophora, followed by the discredited (mis)interpretation:

What is Freedom? The West's understanding of Freedom: ... the 'Right' to live exactly as you please, ... to do exactly what you want. Freedom in the West's eyes must be translated as an 'Enjoyment' of one's lifestyle ... if they are of the opinion Islam does not give you the right to Freedom, then

58 Efav [pseud.], post in closed Facebook group *Den Lige Vej* [pseud.], September 2015.
 59 De Kvindelige Dawahbærere, "Seksuel frihed tvunget over de muslimske unge piger," *De Kvindelige Dawahbærere* (blog), April 17, 2016, accessed August 1, 2019, <http://dekvindelige.db.blogspot.com/2016/04/muslimyouth-seksuel-frihed-tvunget-over.html>.

tell them that your Freedom is: there where Allah swt has forbidden you the ‘wrong’ things is where your Freedom ends (sic). It’s not what others perceive of Your Freedom to be (sic). Because Allah swt wishes only the best for you, and he wants to protect you.⁶⁰ (FO15)

This viewpoint feeds into the idea of freedom being dependent upon limiting regulations: one’s own, society’s, and most of all Allah’s. Again, the post does not present the (general) Muslim conception of freedom as an alternative or a correction to the ‘Western’ understanding, but as the right way to perceive the same phenomenon. The West’s misperception is due to a fundamental difference in viewpoint, a displacement causing a wide range of misunderstandings, including freedom.

2.4 “Too Much Freedom Is Unhealthy”

According to *HuTS*, Muslim families should hold on to Islamic pedagogical values to save their youth from a destructive path. They lament the increasing number of divorces, sexually transmitted diseases, and those prioritizing career over family, claiming that “individualism is the main cause of this family situation, where everyone puts oneself at the center.” It is because of individualism that “children are neglected by parents. The husband is neglected by the wife. The wife is neglected by the husband. Older people are neglected by children.” This trend is closely linked to what the organization calls “the Western freedom-culture (*frihedskultur*),” which “has not created a more idyllic family-bond and family life, but rather has dissolved it beyond recognition” (D033).⁶¹

For the purposes of this study, it is of course interesting that the dissolution of the nuclear family is linked to Denmark’s *frihedskultur*, an idea that also resonates with my more ‘moderate’ interlocutors. Many relay stories of destructive teenage exploration and adult spiritual redemption. The moral, more often than not, is that freedom needs boundaries, preferably from a Divine Ruler. With regard to family-life, in some milder cases, the rejection of *frihed* as a ‘sacred value’ begets a critique of Danish pedagogical strategies. For instance, Aaheda tells me about a converted Muslim man in the language school she frequents, who “wants to be extreme” and says “women are not allowed to teach men.” To him, sexes should not mingle (*ākhtlāt*), which she found excessively

60 Aisha [pseud.], post in closed Facebook group *Den Lige Vej* [pseud.], July 2017.

61 Hizb ut-Tahrir Skandinavien, *Statskontrol af muslimernes familieliv. Virkeligheden bag “bekæmpelse af social kontrol”*, June 1, 2014, https://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.dk/data/books/social_kontroldk.pdf.

strict. She explains that he is a (ethnic, converted) “Dane,” and that his behavior and mindset are the direct result of his experience with freedom:

In his family you are free to do everything, he doesn't have anyone to tell him what is right or what is wrong. ... This a very normal way of teaching your own children about life there (among Danish families): ‘you will find out, you have to try this (go through it).’ And you know, all the freedom you get, *for him*, it has been unhealthy. He got so much freedom that he feels right now he has to (rein it in) So I understand his history, but I don't *accept* the rest of it. (C032)

Unlike Aaheda, Members of *HuTS* uphold strict gender segregation. But even if the two parties disagree on this issue, both see it as symptomatic of unhealthy freedom-culture. *HuTS*'s narratives resonate with many (especially young) Danish Muslims. Their framing of social issues makes it is easy to spot traces of their thinking in statements by lone Muslims on the web. One blogger, for instance, writes: “The individual freedom ‘democratic’ ideologues like to highlight is a slippery slope that led to the dissolution of the nuclear family, mental disorders, and not least to perversions such as for example animal sex, which today is allowed in Denmark (sic, bestiality is illegal)” (W010).⁶² Such statements attest, if not to the influence of *HuTS*, at least to the proliferation of their views; these, packaged in clear reports in an effective writing style, are easily shared online, as some other Danish Muslims lament, such as socialist politician Özlem Cekic (D065).⁶³

Kvaale (2011, 249) draws an interesting parallel between the *duty/resistance/occupation* vocabulary often employed by *HuTS* and that of the *DF*'s chief ideologue, Søren Krarup. In the episode Kvaale describes, the *HuTS* spokesperson was referring to a Muslim's duty to resist the foreign occupation of Afghanistan with more than words, while Krarup referred to Islam in Denmark in terms of the Nazi occupation. For Krarup, “Denmark is the natural habitat for ethnic Danes and their culture. The Danish culture is a naturally grown organic whole, whose state of equilibrium is at present threatened from the outside by non-Danes (i.e. Muslims)” (Kvaale 2011, 235). Kvaale identifies Krarup's formula

62 L. Akaltun and Abû Mûsâ, “Svar på fejlagtige påstande om Islâm—gendrivelse af Sharia .dk,” *Islam Indeks* (blog), December 10, 2007, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://islamindex.eks.wordpress.com/2007/12/10/svar-pa-fejlagtige-pastande-om-islam-gendrivelse-af-shariadk-2/>.

63 Özlem Cekic, *Fra Føtex til Folketinget* (København: Gyldendal, 2009), page 103.

as “territorialization of people + time = naturally grown folk culture,” observing that, when this formula is politicized, “the fields of multiculturalism and indigenusness meet,” leading to “to some sort of naturalized ethnocracy.” Newcomers should not only be law-abiding citizens, but also become like ethnic Danes. And yet, when Danishness is defined as innate rather than ideological—a “condition of existence, a fruit of birth and history” (Krarup 2001, 15)—it becomes inherently exclusive (Kvaale 2011, 236).

While Kvaale does not expand on the *DF/HuTS* parallel, it is a crucial clue for how *HuTS* constructs its efficacious narrative of resistance. In stating “the Afghan people has the right to defend themselves against foreign occupation just like *modstandsbevægelsen* did,” referencing the Danish underground resistance against Nazi occupants, the organization was able to capture signifiers and a subject-position which their opposition saw as their own. Together with their provocative choice of setting for this particular event, the Royal Library in Copenhagen (next to *Christiansborg*), they managed to spark a grandiose media storm. In retrospect, the fury of their opponents—*DF* in particular—testifies to the success of their strategy. *HuTS* engages in ideological warfare, depriving nativist and Muslim-inimical parties of their own charged vocabulary. Regardless of their limited membership, *HuTS* is an important player in the Muslim-talk on freedom because of their deliberate use of these kinds of tactics, their ability to gain a disproportionate presence at events, and catching the attention of the media (see Sinclair 2012).

2.5 “Freedom Is Misused to Oppress Muslims”

It is only natural that the discussions on *liberalt hykleri* and the contradictions of the ‘free country’ lead to social action. Musaddid, an enterprising Muslim physician, argues that the notion of freedom is “misused to oppress” the freedom and rights of Muslim citizens. For him, the battle for the definition of *frihed* and *danskhed* should be fought with fact checking, something he actively engages in with a small organization. Stressing particular words and sentences, he tells me that the main reason why “they did the burqa-ban” was to “free Muslim women.”

In mainstream society we’re saying ‘Muslims don’t have freedom, ... and we’re going to help them with it.’ While what’s actually happening here is: you’re *stripping* Muslims of their freedom and rights. ... And that’s very *evident*, because there has been *no* women with burqa *saying* that. ... There is *no* interview, ... no facts saying that these women feel oppressed So this is a notion of some politicians, few media outlets, and that’s it. ... *The notion of freedom is misused to oppress* Muslims’ freedom. ... That’s what

we ... uncover, so that people understand this, because I think lot of people *buy this narrative*, and if you can just point at it and say ‘Look, this is not true, and look at the facts,’ ... *fact checking*. ... Just presenting the facts about freedom ... and oppression. (C036)

Even though Musaddid would loathe being associated with Salafi or anti-democratic organizations, the impetus behind his argument is common to most Muslim environments. Members of *HuTS* also spend their time raising awareness about the ways in which the political discourse on freedom ends up regulating Muslim citizens (W088), but with an aggressive rhetorical style. The Danish speaking/writing members of *HuTS* portray what they call the “*vestlige frihedspakke*” (Western freedom-package, i.e. individual freedom, freedom of speech, freedom of religion) as a ‘destructive ideology,’ mobilizing Muslim communities towards dethroning freedom as a sacred Danish value. In one essay, *HuTS* denounces, with statistics, the suffering of the youth in “Western society,” mentioning “eating disorders,” “sexual perversions,” and “other abnormalities,” pointing at “certain social ideals” at the root of it all:

The youth’s attempts at self-realization and enjoyment-rush (*nydelsesrus*) have huge shadow-sides, which unfortunately are not mentioned in the big headlines, as it would mean that Western culture and freedom ideals themselves must be the target of criticism. ... There is good reason that Muslims do not regard the Western freedom-package (*frihedspakke*) as ... (giving) the Muslim youth a better future. ... The materialistic enjoyment at the basis of freedom ideals has sadly destroyed an otherwise bright future for many Westerners, so Muslims should protect their youth against Western culture.⁶⁴ (D033)

By drawing connections between freedom, the shortcomings of Western societies, and the suffering of the youth, the organization has proven successful not only in exercising great influence over a diverse Muslim community, but also in attracting many converts seeking viable alternatives to the pursuit of “self-realization and enjoyment-rush.” In their consistently well-timed press releases, the party regularly condemns “attacks on Islam” and the Muslim minority, perpetrated by politicians/the government—mentioning, for in-

64 Hizb ut-Tahrir Skandinavien, *Statskontrol af muslimernes familieliv. Virkeligheden bag “bekæmpelse af social kontrol”*, June 1, 2014, https://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.dk/data/books/social_kontrol.dk.pdf.

stance, “lies about freedom values,” and “the falsity in Western ideals” which, in their view, lead Muslim communities to increasingly cherish their religious principles (C047). To the organization, the efforts of the state to ‘fight social control’ are, in reality, a cover-up for the Danish “assimilation policy” and the “war of values” (*værdikamp*). An example is the so-called family ‘code of honor’ (*æreskodeks*), which is deemed an official ‘aggravating circumstance’ that educators and social workers are required to spot/report. “This makes it easier to legally intervene in the family without the consent of the custodians, in order to ensure the youth’s free expression of absolute individual freedom” (D033).⁶⁵

The debate on radicalization is another battleground for freedom. It has raged across the last two decades, and has been reignited several times in recent years due to the issue of returning Danish *Islamic State* fighters. Freedom here often figures as something that has to be fought for, and defended against, its antithesis: ‘radical’ Islam. *Venstre*’s Søren Pind, who served as Minister of Justice (2015–2016) and self-declared *Frihedminister* (Minister of Freedom), stated that the “War on Terror” has mutated into a “War for Freedom and Democracy.” A war waged against, among other things, the “darkened (*formørkede*) parts of Islamic doctrine” (N005).⁶⁶ As I have shown in the previous section, most political parties embrace this reasoning. The tactic of linking freedom to terrorism and radicalization is something *HuTS* does not fail to critique:

Anti-radicalization (policy) is about making Muslims less Islamic. Western politicians ... are concerned that Muslims living here ... increasingly hold to their Islamic identity But instead of engaging a real debate about values, based on substantial arguments, they attach to some Islamic opinions labels that sound dangerous, which the common citizen ... connects with terror. One is radical if one, like the overwhelming majority in the Muslim world, is in favor of sharia. ... One is radical if one doesn’t advocate Western freedoms and democracy. ... Leaders of Western societies are intellectually bankrupt ... they cannot convince young Muslims ... who have even grown up in these societies to take on Western values, so they try with ... coercion.⁶⁷ (D034)

65 Hizb ut-Tahrir Skandinavien, *Statskontrol af muslimernes familieliv. Virkeligheden bag “bekæmpelse af social kontrol”*, June 1, 2014, https://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.dk/data/books/social_kontrol.dk.pdf.

66 Søren Pind, “Krigen for Frihed Og Demokrati,” *Berlingske*, July 20, 2013.

67 Hizb ut-Tahrir Skandinavien, *Terrorismen: Dens vestlige rødder, dens politiske udnyttelse*

Members of *HuTS* question not only so-called ‘radicalization,’ but the idea of ‘terrorism’ itself. For the purposes of this study, what interests me is not so much the factuality of such claims as the process of negotiation they initiate. *HuTS* argues that, fourteen years into the war on terror, the international community has not agreed on a single definition of terrorism. “One’s terrorists is, as is known, an other’s freedom fighter. We have seen examples where one group figures on a terrorist list, while it is not on others, or they appear on and off the lists depending on which direction the political wind blows” (D034).⁶⁸ Such statements attempt to challenge the political discourse by invalidating the use of key signifiers such as terrorism and radicalization. Whether aggressive or mild, the attempts of certain individuals and groups to deconstruct established notions are not necessarily symptomatic of the inadequacy thereof; above all, these notions are undergoing a process of scrutiny from which they may emerge either consolidated or hollow.

This is certainly not a prerogative of religious minorities. Academia affects the discursive negotiation, if only indirectly, since most parties involved utilize local academic publications. As mentioned earlier, Kühle and Lindekilde (2012) argue that, in conflating some central distinctions, the official discourse on radicalization has narrowed the limits of tolerance, reflecting a general trend towards perfectionist liberalism in the post 9/11 West. Elsewhere, Kühle and Lindekilde (2010, 14) argue that “there is a need to refocus research from the paradigm of explaining ‘radicalization’ among Muslims in terms of ‘Islamism,’ ‘terrorism’ and ‘anti-democracy’ towards the unfolding of actual practices, tendencies, perceptions and categories as used and identified by Muslims themselves.” Radicalization, the argument goes, may allow authorities to identify a gradual process of change in beliefs/behavior and so intervene in a timely manner. But its utility is questionable in social research. A range of studies on radicalization confirm that it is highly contested, more likely to confuse than to yield effective risk management (Sedgwick 2010; Mandel 2010; Kundnani 2012). So, when Danish Muslims question how freedom is contraposed to disturbing alternatives, they are not drawing exclusively from a religious discourse of no interest to society at large.

Related to the discussion on radicalization, another way the usual suspects, primarily *HuTS*, *DKD*, and *Kaldet Til Islam* (Called to Islam), mobilize Dan-

og Islams utvetydige standpunkt, February 16, 2016, <http://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.dk/data/books/terrorismemag.pdf>.

68 Ibid.

ish Muslims against ‘Western freedom and democracy’ is by warning that voting is *shirk* (sin of idolatry). The general idea is that voting for a non-Muslim representative amounts to abdicating one’s authority, a subjugation of the Muslim will, and ‘associating partners with Allah.’ In one essay circulating in a Danish Muslim closed Facebook group, democracy is portrayed as an obstacle to the establishment of a Muslim society and political system, as it involves submission to man-made rather than Divine laws (D032).⁶⁹ It is important to note that many Muslims lament the disproportionate attention given to marginal “radical Salafist” opinions, pushed by a handful of organizations (D065; D067).⁷⁰ Muslim commentator Tarek Ziad Hussein observes that sixteen thousand Jehovah’s Witnesses recently abstained from the vote, citing similar theological grounds, but were not subjected to the same treatment (D068).⁷¹

One could say that the moment we start looking into whether Islam conflicts with democratic values, these ‘anti-democratic’ groups have achieved their goal. However, many (arguably ‘moderate’) Danish Muslims feel the need to counteract this narrative, thereby accepting its premises. Ali, speaking of liberation from worldly authority, spontaneously diverts to the supposed friction between sharia and democracy:

Muslims believe in worldly authority too, we have ... the system of the *khi-lāfah*, people who run the matters of the states. And in the present time Muslim states ... have a democratic system, where you choose your leader, and that’s not contrary to Islam. ... When you become a Muslim, you can’t just exclusively do worship matters. Maybe some extreme groups like the Salafi or other extreme and political groups they believe that ... democracy is against Islam. That’s because, I think, people don’t understand

69 Abdullah [pseud.], *Demokrati og at stemme til et demokratisk valg fra det islamiske perspektiv*, 2016. See also: Lisbeth Pedersen, ed., *Rapport: Antidemokratiske Og Ekstremistiske Miljøer i Danmark: En Kortlægning* (København: SFI—Det National Forskningscenter for Velfærd, 2014), <https://www.sfi.dk/publikationer/antidemokratiske-og-ekstremistiske-miljoer-i-danmark-3094/>. See also: Caroline Tranberg and Andreas Søndergaard, ‘Forbyder Koranen muslimer at stemme til folketingsvalget?’, *Mandag Morgen*, 31 May 2019, sec. Faktatjek, <https://www.mm.dk/tjekdet/artikel/forbyder-koranen-muslimer-at-stemme-til-folketingsvalget>.

70 Özlem Cekic, *Fra Fötex til Folketinget* (København: Gyldendal, 2009). Waseem Hussain, *Imam bag tremmer* (København: Gyldendal, 2017).

71 Tarek Ziad Hussein, *Det sorte skæg: om at være dansk muslim* (København: Gyldendal, 2018), page 44.

what democracy actually is. (It's) not to choose someone to be your God, it's just that you make a system of ... rules and regulations so that humans can live together. Not *everything* is written explicitly in the *Quran* ... In Denmark you have to sit down together and make some rules and regulations ... about the worldly matters. (C052)

Ali, like most Danish Muslims, sees the sharia as a moral law, not limited by state borders, covering affairs that are, as it were, outside the reach of national law. From dowry (*mahr*) to personal hygiene, Islamic law is not imposed, but superimposed upon national law. So, when it comes to advocacy for freedom, Muslims tend to have more interest in the purely liberal side than in the ideological side. Danish Muslims demand the right to individual freedom, not because humans are "good at taking responsibility for ourselves" or that one is "the best judge" over one's life, as *Liberal Alliance* would have it (W044), but because it facilitates a variety of Muslim expressions under the canopy of an overarching Divine law. Furthermore, it follows from Ali's comment that this compatibility depends upon a pure understanding of the democratic model; one devoid of contextual implications, such as the majority rule, which ignores (in the Danish case) democracy's representative character and liberal values. Ultimately, as Asef Bayat (2007a, 143) argues, "the compatibility or incompatibility of a religion, including Islam, with democracy is not a matter of merely philosophical speculations, but of political struggle." It is not as much the question of texts and exegeses as "the balance of power between those who want a democratic religion and those who pursue an authoritarian version. Islamism and post-Islamism tell the story of these two social forces."

These debates demonstrate the power of statements assailing freedom, provoking an apparent need to engage them. This is one of the ways the public discourse on freedom influences Muslim-talk, and vice versa. A handful of anti-democratic Muslim groups manage to captivate Danish media and fellow Muslims alike with their radical critiques, but their narrative is also pregnant with notions foreign to the religious discourse they mean to promote. It should also be noted that there are prominent Muslim public figures who affirm the sacredness of the freedom-package so vehemently rejected by others. Ahmed Akkari, made famous by his (later-regretted) role in the Cartoons Controversy, writes in his *Min Afsked med Islamismen* (My Parting with Islamism):

As a society, we must demand unequivocal loyalty to the constitutional monarchy and to the rights and duties that come with a life as a Danish citizen. And we must not be afraid to point out when fundamentalist

forces exploit this hard-fought freedom-rights in an effort to break down that very same freedom. Denmark is characterized by a high regard for tolerance (*frisind*) and space for individual differences. These values must obviously be defended.⁷² (D070)

Akkari, along with other Danish Muslims playing important roles in the public debate (such as Naser Khader, Abdel Aziz Mahmoud, Özlem Cekic, and many others) differs in his statements regarding freedom because his interventions do not seek to bring about the paradigm shift typical of the discursive challenge. Rather than redefining the hegemonic freedom-discourse, he full-heartedly affirms it as a life-changing insight (D070: D071).⁷³

Looking at all the fragments quoted here, we can see a common thread: all use official pronouncements, or elements from the public debate, and turn them around, exposing inconsistencies and double standards. In short, these are people who are aware of the symptoms, engage the debate, and attempt to disrupt the dominant narrative. Debates on the veil, freedom, and voting, take up a lot of space in the media. This is because they inhabit a sort of common-battlefield, revolving around topics that seem to draw (or force) Muslim voices into the public forum. Yet it also seems Danish Muslims need this kind of engagement in order to bring about a more accommodating society. On the other hand, it is important to notice that Danish society also seems to need the 'Muslim-question' to stimulate cultural self-reflection, or as a scapegoat to avoid talking about inconvenient structural problems.

2.6 *Where There Is Power There Is Resistance*

In their seminal work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) explore the preconditions for bringing about social change. The political theorists expand on Antonio Gramsci's work to develop a post-Marxist strategy where the left must construct its own hegemonic discourse in order to counteract right-wing populism. Aside from their contribution to developing a radical democratic political model, the value of their work lies in demonstrating how social change is not inevitable and does not happen at a

72 Ahmed Akkari, *Min afsked med islamismen: Muhammedkrisen, dobbeltspillet og kampen mod Danmark*, ed. Martin Kjær Jensen (København: Berlingske Media Forlag, 2014), page 451.

73 Ahmed Akkari, *Min afsked med islamismen: Muhammedkrisen, dobbeltspillet og kampen mod Danmark*. See also Ahmed Akkari, *Mod til at tvivle: En fortælling om eksil, humanisme og hvilken forskel et bibliotek kan gøre* (København: Gyldendal, 2018).

determinate point in time; it involves a plurality of actors and requires a discourse that enables activists to frame (and communicate) power inequality as oppression. The nature of unequal power relationships, and whether they constitute legitimate or illegitimate forms of subjugation/oppression/domination is a matter of dispute. What seems by now well-documented is that, due to an increasing social complexity, the crucial problem of politics is the construction of antagonisms. Because of the great diversity of social groups, irreducible to a Marxist binary of class, the challenge for those aspiring to social change is mobilizing multiple social groups under one cause. For a cause to achieve this mobilization, according to Laclau and Mouffe, it must construct the antagonism as an inequality of power (subordination) *and* an unjust/illegitimate inequality (oppression) *and* latch onto an already existing hegemonic discourse.

Let us take the case of the masking-ban. Following Asad's (2003, 16) suggestion that secularism is "best pursued through its shadows," Fernando (2014) produced an insightful analysis of the practice of veiling in France, showing several ways in which secular law and politics can "undo the viability and intelligibility of creating nonsecular subjects and forms of religious life" (Fernando 2010, 21). Fernando (2010, 29) demonstrates how, in France, given the hegemony of a logic according to which religious liberty concerns the right to choose freely, "it became discursively and politically impossible for Muslim French women to defend the wearing of the headscarf as anything but a choice." She recalls a 2003 demonstration against the proposed veiling-ban, where many women wore red-white-blue headscarves, and chanted slogans such as "my beloved France, respect my liberty." An older woman, making a reference to the 'obligation' of the headscarf and to the Quranic verses from which it derives, "was conspicuously shunned by the younger demonstrators."

The demonstrators sought to frame the veil as a free choice, demanding respect for their right to religious freedom, yet having to articulate the veil exclusively as a personal choice undermined their case for religious liberty, because it enabled policy makers to consider veiling as simply a personal preference rather than religious duty. The right to exercise this "choice" was seen as impinging upon the capacity of other Muslim girls to make their own religious choices, and the decision was made to protect the unveiled girls' freedom of religion. Fernando shows that the predominant construction of conscience as choice, as well as pitting autonomy against authority, precludes a discursive negotiation in which a practice such as veiling can be articulated as an uncoerced religious duty. On the one hand, the practice of veiling is turned into a free choice, because it must make sense to a secular majority. On the

other hand, Muslim women lose the possibility to convey “the sense that a restriction on veiling is not simply a limitation on personal preference but, rather, a profound disarticulation of their very selves” (Fernando 2010, 29–30).

It is fair to say that many of the exchanges about the headscarf in Europe point to secular and legal difficulties in dealing with Muslim conceptions of authority, obligation, duty, and self-liberation (see 5.1 and 5.2). Attempts to articulate this come with their own problems. John Bowen (2008, 176) writes that “The multivocality of ‘obligation’ has become a frequent sign of the ‘double-talk’ of Muslims who say, to other Muslims, that wearing hijab is a divine injunction and obligation, and, to non-Muslims, that there is no compulsion in Islam and that it is up to women to decide what to do.” Bowen (*ibid.*) suggests that this is “double-talk” only “if women’s choice is a sham in the light of divine decree,” but it is “the nature of living in any religion if one considers humans to have free will.”

In the introduction I have mentioned Laclau and Mouffe’s point that discourses are never really completely stable, and in the in the Danish debate on the veil we find a clear case of discursive conflict. The 2018 *maskeringsforbud* can be seen as a *hegemonic intervention* aiming to override the conflict in an attempt to pin down the meaning of our floating signifier, freedom. Danish Muslims fear the social consequences to the point that some are willing to leave the country.⁷⁴ Yet there would also be consequences if Danish Muslim voices were to be strong enough to break through the hegemonic narrative. A whole range of current policies and political attitudes would be open for questioning, resulting in paradoxes such as tolerating the spreading of anti-democratic sentiments in school. The phrasing of political actions such as the *frihed og folkestyre-kravet* reveals the role of freedom in the whole ordeal: it is precisely its hegemonic charge that allows for its use in identity politics and policies such as be masking-ban.⁷⁵

Fernando (2014) shows how French Muslims synthesize secular-republican and Islamic traditions to produce new ethical and political imaginaries. While Fernando concentrates on how Muslim political and moral citizenship is ren-

74 Kirsten Nilsson, “Forsidehenviisning: Niqabforbuddet fik Fatima til at forlade Danmark med familien,” *Politiken*, October 12, 2018.

75 “Aftale med styrket tilsyn med de frie grundskoler,” Undervisningsministeriet, Regeringen, November 7, 2017, accessed July 2, 2018, <https://www.regeringen.dk/publikationer-og-aftaletekster/aftale-med-styrket-tilsyn-med-de-frie-grundskoler/>.

dered illegitimate, I want to argue that, for Danish Muslims, drawing on national-hegemonic discourses allows for a relation of subordination to become a relation of oppression. This, in turn, constitutes itself into the site of an antagonism (Laclau and Mouffe 1985, 153). In plain words, in order to argue for the injustice of the antagonisms free/oppressed and Danish/un-Danish, and to resist the structures perpetuating this antagonism, Danish Muslims must connect their story to a broader hegemonic narrative. Conversely, in light of the politically promoted “new freedom struggle” (W046), we can say that the concern with Muslim citizens’ commitment to supposedly un-Danish norms draws on and maintains a conception of autonomy; one which is, at the same time, problematized by the very existence of, and engagement with, a Muslim freedom-discourse.

Gramsci (1988) argued that hegemony is not only dominance, but also a process of negotiating meaning, from which emerges an ever-changing consensus. Hegemony is thus “an unstable equilibrium built upon alliances and the generation of consent from subordinate classes and groups, whose instabilities are the constant focus of struggles” (Fairclough 1992, 58). The existence of competing elements in what the Italian Marxist called “common-sense” includes the seeds of resistance, equipping subaltern groups with the discursive resources necessary for their struggle. For Gramsci, as for Foucault ([1976] 1998, 95), power is inextricable from struggle: “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.” This does not mean that there is no escaping power, but that points of resistance are present everywhere, and dispersed in the power network. As the history of Muslim mobilization in Denmark testifies, resistance is more effective when engaging the established discourse. This has to do precisely with the extent to which one accepts certain discursive terms, especially a majoritarian definition of freedom, and then engages in a Butlerian (1990) subversive iteration. This counts for most instances where Muslims engage the public debate, from newspaper contributions to activism. A banner declaring “yes to a freedom that unites and does not divide” has a completely different charge than “to insult is not freedom.”

3 Redefinition

Two years after his first video-speech on freedom, imam Abdul Wahid Pedersen posted another entry, titled *Friheden til at bestemme, hvad jeg lægger i ordet “frihed.”* This time the video features the Prophet’s Mosque in Medina, with Pedersen speaking for a few minutes in the background.

The message is essentially the same as in the 2016 video. He starts by debunking the “typical understanding” of freedom in “the Western world,” stating “Some people mistakenly think that freedom is the freedom to let go of all inhibitions, to behave completely unbridled.” He discredits the view that this is the kind of freedom humans should strive for. Pedersen mentions that he himself, belonging to “the Western world,” has been a “victim” of this perspective throughout the early part of his life (S031). Next, he revisits the “real” and “true” freedom he mentioned in the previous speech, again citing self-abasement, ego reduction, and submission to Allah: “real” and “true” freedom “starts from within,” it “lies in the spiritual world,” and “a free human being, is a being that doesn’t get controlled by the internal ego.” True freedom “starts on the prayer mat, true freedom starts with putting ones forehead to the ground, and acknowledging one’s smallness, and acknowledging Allah’s greatness.” True freedom “starts with throwing oneself into the dust in front of one’s Creator, acknowledging one is nothing more than a speck of dust on the horizon” (S031).

What changed in the two years separating the two speeches on freedom? Pedersen still contrasts a real/true freedom to an illusory one, and declares it comes with a strikingly physical act of submission. The main difference, beside the flowery language, is the choice of title: “The freedom to decide, what I put in (how I interpret) the word ‘freedom.’” Instead of simply establishing a spiritual understanding, the imam uses one understanding of freedom (autonomy) to debunk a second (unbridledness) and propose a third (submission). This has the decisive effect of potentially engaging an audience who demur cryptic religious narratives, but can make sense of the claim to a kind of hermeneutic freedom.

Another striking element in Pedersen’s speech is his emphasis on the necessity to ‘acknowledge,’ ‘admit,’ ‘realize,’ ‘confess’ and ‘understand’ one’s inferior status and Allah’s greatness. This is a key theme, an inescapable factor in the ‘freedom through submission’ formula. In a way, this move is reminiscent of Foucault’s (2014, 82) history of “tell me who you are,” in which he inquires in the nature and origins of “reflexive truth acts,” where the individual is at once an operator of the truth—a “witness” to the truth—as well as the “object” of it. Pedersen demands that those who “mistakenly” think freedom means “unbridledness” should behave in a way that leads to awareness of themselves and their position, *while* witnessing the truth of their condition.

To all appearances, the production of Muslim subjectivity has strong parallels with the Christian one, and Foucault’s (2014, 226) comments on the latter reminds of the former: “... to obey exhaustively and exhaustively tell what one is, ... to make all the secrets of one’s soul pass through discourse, so that the secrets of one’s soul come to light.” It is through and in the iteration of perfor-

mative utterances such as the *shahādah* (testimony) and ritualistic movements such as the *sujūd* (prostration), that Muslim-talk on freedom is simultaneously generated and maintained, acquiring its fullest sense and experiential coherence. These practices will prove to be reference points for a range of statements (see 3.3 and 4.1).

3.1 *Freedom as Harmony*

One of the ways Danish Muslims construe freedom is as something achieved through a long and arduous process. In line with what Pedersen conveys, it requires trust, surrender, commitment, and acting without full understanding (see 3.3 and 4.3). Part of this process is establishing the discursive conditions by which it can take place. Questioning and discrediting the existing popular conception of freedom is a first and necessary step. There is a point in which sophisticated, synthesized narratives meet the uncompromised religious narrative, i.e. narratives in which Danish Muslims bridge religious language and public vernacular. This section paves the road to the next chapters, where I describe the inner workings of religious discourse, the statements of which fail to ‘make sense’ in the public sphere.

The idea that freedom is being ‘misused to oppress’ the Muslim minority is linked to what the aforementioned Muslim commentator Zainab Nasrati sees as one of the greatest challenges Danish society faces today: “to impose on others one’s own conception and experience of freedom without understanding that, in the process of doings so, one at the same time destroys its meaning” (W004).⁷⁶ She provides a nuanced reflection on freedom in Danish language-use, arguing, in line with popular imams like Nabil (C037) and philosophers like Frank Ruda (2016a), that the vagueness and lack of explanations haunting the term are part of the problem: “Freedom is a big word, owned by everybody and used/abused to such an extent that it is hard to understand what the concept implies. In our society, ‘freedom’ has become a vacuum missing the accompaniment of an explanation; whose freedom it is, what it achieves, and whom it benefits.” This also means that the term is thrown around “without consideration about its delimitation. It is a self-evident thing in our minds, without it necessarily being it in our daily lives” (W004).⁷⁷

Nasrati goes farther than accusing mouthy politicians or ‘fact checking’ their claims; she also goes beyond Pedersen’s assertion that freedom “is about being

76 Zainab Nasrati and Zachø Storm, “Danmarkskanon—Frihed,” *Altivisten*, January 1, 2018, <https://altivisten.dk/danmarkskanon-frihed/>.

77 Ibid.

able to do or say anything.” Rather—similarly to Schanz (2012), also writing about ‘Danish freedom’—she endeavors to shed light on the conflict surrounding a key signifier in the public debate. Most importantly, she does so as a Danish Muslim, with a high stake in the result. Contesting the signifier is a critical act in the context of this discussion, because it facilitates the discursive challenge and the redefinition of freedom in relation to a religious interpretative repertoire. This is perhaps the ultimate tactic of resistance: to bypass specific statements and deconstruct the nodal points which hold them together through subversive repetition (Butler 1990) and new performative utterances (Austin 1962). After her preamble, Nasrati proceeds to nuance what she considers the established conception of freedom in Denmark, emphasizing its legal restrictions:

A man’s absolute freedom implies the limitation of another, if it is not accompanied by an empathetic sense of responsibility for others. Is it freedom? Our freedom stops as soon as it hurts others, because we have developed a system, where we seek to ensure the freedom of the individual at the same time as everyone else’s, even though the two tasks can be contradictory. ... Everyone is born equal, and everyone with the same possibilities. That means everyone must be able to decide, everyone should be able to act⁷⁸ (W004)

Having proposed freedom as polysemous, Zainab can now question the relations between the term and liberalism, going as far as subtly questioning the fundamentals of the neoliberal system, such as Mill’s (1859) harm-principle and social equality. Having somewhat discredited the vague sense of *frihed* she deems pervasive in her country, she proposes that freedom might have more to do with harmony and dependence:

Freedom comes about when the self can manage itself ... without dissonance with the mind. ... When what I am, what I feel, what I believe, is in harmony with what I do. If we lose control of our own actions, we also lose our freedom. When we become dependent to someone or something, ... when we ‘follow’ the flow, it’s hard to not just be foam on the waves of the ocean, that do not have their own thoughts about their own actions, and whether they are consistent with beliefs, thoughts and desires. ... There-

78 Ibid.

fore, freedom is not a collective thing, unless our thoughts and wishes are in harmony with each other.⁷⁹ (W004)

The first two passages in Zainab's story prepare the reader for receiving a notion of freedom which is subtly informed by Muslim narratives. The passage comfortably fits within an Islamic frame, and yet does not contain any religious jargon. Taking a certain conception of freedom as self-evident leads to the imposition of the same on those that might hold a different one. Nasrati addresses a lack of awareness about basic presuppositions and the need for explanations, while at the same time proposing one herself. Unlike other of her public interventions, here she does not mention her Muslim identity, and formulates her opinion in 'liberal' terms. Yet her definition of freedom as emancipation from worldly authority (see 5.1), which brings harmony between self and mind (see 4.2), fits the ordinary theology of freedom. It lays the foundation for one's intention to be pure, increasing one's faith, and earning the reward (see 5.2) of rising in spiritual status (see 4.2 and 5.3), fulfilling one's duties on the Straight Path.

3.2 *A Partial Fixation of Meaning*

In the introduction I mentioned that one way of describing discourse is as a relational ensemble of signifying sequences (Torfing 2003, 85–86). It should be noted, however, that its relationality is not unlimited or unruptured. For, if this were the case, all possible identities would be fixed within it as necessary moments, which would leave no room for the political. Discourse (following Derrida) lacks a fixed centre, the absence of which guarantees the impossibility of complete totalization and closure. For this reason, there is always something escaping what, at face value, seems an endless process of signification within discourse. Again in Torfing's (2003, 92) efficient phrasing, there is a "*partial fixation* of meaning" producing an "irreducible *surplus of meaning* which escapes the differential logic of meaning." This field of irreducible surplus is termed "*the discursive* (or the field of discursivity) in order to indicate that what is not fixed as a differential identity within a concrete discourse is not extra- or non-discursive, but is discursively constructed within a terrain of unfixity" (ibid.).

The notion that the 'field of discursivity' provides at once the conditions of possibility for a partial fixation of meaning, while, at the same time, undermining it, is crucial to understanding why something like an Islamic or liberal-progressive discourse on freedom cannot simply take over and achieve com-

79 Ibid.

plete hegemony. Any fixation of meaning produces its own surplus, requiring closure. Laclau and Mouffe ([1985] 2001, 98) mention that, “inherent in every discursive situation, this ‘surplus’ is the necessary terrain for the constitution of every social practice.” It is the space which simultaneously determines the “necessarily discursive character of any object,” and the “impossibility of any given discourse to implement a final suture.” The field of discursivity is what enables something like the Muslim women’s organization *Kvinder I Dialog* to successfully insert itself into the public debate by lobbying for, among other things, a re-appropriation of the ‘muslim woman’. This is because the openness of the field allows for the articulation of multiple competing discourses. “The impossibility of an ultimate fixity of meaning implies that there have to be partial fixations—otherwise, the flow of differences would be impossible. Even in order to differ, to subvert meaning, there has to be a meaning” (Laclau and Mouffe [1985] 2001, 112).

To conclude, I would like to draw attention to the functional thrust of this chapter’s statements. There is an effort by Danish Muslims to unhinge, contest, and transform freedom as a nodal point in the public discourse. Some skillfully express core values in ways that makes perfect sense in a secular discourse. Yet these efforts also foreshadow the undiluted religious narrative, a space where jargon and theological argumentation are most dense. There is a simultaneous unsettling and arresting of the free flow in the chain of signification. Freedom is unseated as a privileged discursive point ‘fixing’ meaning, Lacan’s (1981) *point de capiton*. But this happens *in relation* to a master-signifier (Islam). According to Jacob Torfing (2003, 98–99), the nodal point “creates and sustains the identity of a certain discourse by constructing a knot of definite meanings.” In light of this mechanism, I suggest that what we see happening in the efforts to ‘redefine’ freedom is exactly the *undoing* of freedom as a floating signifier *in* its relation to its secular master-signifiers, and its consequent partial *fixation* within a ‘Muslim’ chain of equivalence. Once this task is accomplished, the religious narrative can step in; and it immediately refers to the nodal point *per excellence*: Allah.

Allah Named Himself

Ineffable, Willing, Planning

Sharif lives together with his wife in a spacious house in Aarhus, not far from Gellerupparken's housing projects. Both are in their late twenties, college-graduates, active in the neighborhood and its mosques. Sharif, like some of his friends, regularly leads Friday prayers and delivers *khutbah* (sermon), whether in his neighborhood or as a guest-imam in nearby cities. He is somewhat rusty in his English, but very clear and confident in his explanations. After an informative conversation, we discuss whether it would make sense to include 'Absolutely Free' among the Names of Allah. Sharif hesitates, then shakes his head:

"It's an interesting point, which again shows to me, as Muslim, how great Allah is. Because if I say Allah is Free, then I put a limitation onto Him. Because if He is Free then it means that there is something greater than Him, that can regulate Him, but that's not possible, you know?"

"Yes," I counter, "but at the same time He's Free from our logic, not constricted. Beyond good and evil, beyond judgment."

"We cannot judge God!" Sharif exclaims.

"Right. So in that sense, ... He is Free from all this."

After taking a minute to reflect, Sharif nods. "Yes. He is Free from our (pauses). So I can understand what you mean, and where you want to go with it. But I actually thought myself about why it isn't one of his 99 names, why He doesn't do it (name Himself 'Free'), and I realized it is because if He had that name, then it would *be*, and so it would also mean that there is something that limits Him. Because the word ... in order for you to be free, in order for me to have a free will, it must mean that there are some who can set rules for me, and then I do not follow the rules. But for Allah *subhānahu wa-ta'ālā* (may He be praised and exalted) there is nobody ... there is no one that can set rules for Allah, and therefore He cannot be 'free,' because it is Him who (sets the rules) ... do you understand?" (C045).

The introduction of a new element in the conversation, "the Free" as one of Allah's Attributes, motivated Sharif to summon his spiritual knowledge and come up with a creative solution, disrupting the usual pattern of expected answers. The exchange reveals something about the principles regulating Islam's most revered chain of signification: the *'asmā'u allahi al-ḥusnā* (Beauti-

ful/Excellent Names of Allah). What counts as a Divine Attribute is everything but arbitrary, and many Muslims have a fine sense of the underlying rationale. Sharif happens to be able to articulate it better than others. Whereas I found it perfectly reasonable to think of Allah as Free, i.e. not constricted by humanity and human logic, Sharif worried about what the term negates. His preoccupations reveal an order in the Names, a viewpoint from which it does not make sense to speak of Allah as Free, because it disagrees with the cardinal principle: Allah's Uniqueness.

What limits and regulates the list of Divine Attributes? Why is it appropriate to count 'the Independent, Self-Sufficient' (*al-Ghānī*) among His Names, but not 'the Absolutely Free' (*al-Ḥurru*)? This topic comprises section one of this chapter.¹ After providing some examples of how the problematic manifests in Danish Muslim-talk, I rely on Laclau's notion of 'equivalence' to explicate the linguistic maneuvers required to simultaneously thinking unity and difference, *tawḥīd* and *'asmā'u allāhi*. Attempts to expressing the ineffable must not cause the collapse of differences into some sort of undifferentiated identity. In the second section, I deal with the free will and 'predestination' problematic. The subject of Allah's Will and Decree, usually referred to as *al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar*, has sparked many a controversial debate. How should we conceive of Divine Will, Decree, and Foreknowledge in relation to human freedom? How do Danish Muslims speak of the matter? (see 3.1).

Two ulterior themes pertaining to Divine Nature regulate Danish Muslim-talk about human freedom, the subjects of section three: the idea of Allah as both Planning and Attracting. The former specifies the oft-invoked notion of Allah's Plan; the latter, a human 'natural instinct' and primordial state of purity/innocence (*fiṭrah*). I will argue that these are essential building blocks, since, as will become clear in later chapters, the individual is interpellated as Muslim subject with reference to her place in a Divine Scheme and reversion to a 'natural state.'

Overall, this chapter sets the fundamentals for the discussions to come; notions which the coding of my material has revealed as crucial to a wide range of statements on human freedom. I especially want to stress how the attribution of qualities to Allah affects Muslim-talk on freedom. So as not to lose sight of the subject matter, and digress into the technicalities of Islamic

1 To be sure, it is not the case that Islamic tradition has never seen talk of Divine Freedom. Al-Ghazali (d. 1111), following Ibn Sina (Avicenna, d. 1037) and al-Farabi (d. 950), understood causality as consisting of chains of cause and effect, contrary to his own Asharite school, which held that each event is caused directly by Allah (Frank 1992). To al-Ghazali, Allah is the only true Agent/Doer (*al-Fā'il*).

scholastic theology, I will anchor each section to actual statements by Danish Muslims. Moreover, it is important to note that the notions/formulations I relate in these chapters belong to the realm of folk/ordinary rather than systematic theology (Das 1984; Astley 2002). Although several of the imams I mention have received at least some training in Islamic theology and jurisprudence, the majority are ‘ordinary’ prayer leaders rather than sheikhs, mullahs, or muftis. This does not bar my interlocutors from reflective theological talk, which to an extent is untouched by technical arguments and assumptions, enjoying a higher degree of flexibility and creativity.

1 Ineffable and Perfect

Basim is in his fifties, the imam of a small but popular mosque downtown. Some Fridays the faithful are forced to form prayer rows in the entrance hall, or even the adjacent cafeteria (where the muezzin is scarcely audible). The imam is of north-African origin; speaks broken Danish, almost no English; and has a very friendly demeanor—smiling often and always looking the other in the eyes. During our fourth encounter, Basim turns the conversation around, asking me about my personal interest in Islam (C016). Khalil, an Egyptian friend, translates from Arabic. I explain that I am fascinated by the notion of Allah ‘describing’ Himself. Basim explains that in the Quran one can find many ‘Names’ of Allah, and later sends me, via WhatsApp, a colorful brochure in English and Arabic titled “The Beautiful Names of Allah.” It starts out quoting all the *āyāt* (signs, Quranic verses) mentioning the *’asmā’u allāhi*, such as 7:180 (MK): “And (all) the Most Beautiful Names ... belong to Allah, so call on Him by them ...”² The brochure includes some of the Names, in elegant Arabic calligraphy, as well as concise explanations. It particularly insists on two ideas: (1) that “Allah has named Himself,” and (2) that “Knowledge of the Beautiful Names of Allah is the noblest of all sciences” (D008).³

The (99) Beautiful Names of Allah are the chain of equivalences grounding Islamic doctrine. Above all stands *tawhid*, the central concept to Islamic monotheism, synthesizing the notions of Allah as the One, Indivisible (*al-ʾAḥad*) and the Single, Unique, Peerless (*al-Wāḥid*).⁴ To deny the foremost arti-

2 See 7:180; 17:110; 20:8; 35:28; 37:19.

3 Creative Content & Museum, *The Beautiful Names of Allah Exhibition* (Riyadh: Samaya Holding, 2015).

4 See 112:1 and 13:16; 14:48; 38:65; 39:4. The Quran expresses Allah’s Oneness in numerous formu-

cle of Muslim faith is *shirk*, the deification and worship of something less than Allah, and an unpardonable sin (4:48).⁵ The Islamic profession of faith (*shahādah*) expresses the same notion, marking Islam's theology as a strongly theocentric. Even at the level of grammar the sentence includes an absolute negation of anything worthy of divinity and worship (*lā 'ilāha*) except (*'illā*) for God (*Allāh*). Chanted at least five times a day, this formula is, for the Danish Muslim community, central to outward communication, including everything from presentations, to high-school mosque trips, to pamphlets. The standard Islam-pitch often praises the religion's "pure and clear concept of God," repeating that "God is one and unique: God has no partners, no equals, and no rivals" (D027).⁶ For some of the other key Divine Attributes, one need look no further than the very first sura of the Quran (*al-fātiḥah*), where Allah is deemed the Most Gracious (*ar-Raḥīm*), the Most Merciful (*ar-Raḥmān*), the Master (*al-Mālik*), and so on. The *sūrat l-fātiḥah* is recited in every prayer cycle (*rak'ah*) and on many other occasions, making it a veritable cornerstone of Muslim life.

1.1 "Allah Has Named Himself"

In drawing attention to these commonplace notions, and their presence in Danish Muslim life and talk, I want to emphasize their iterative character. The order and meaning of the *'asmā'u allahi* (and any chain of equivalence for that matter), were not fixed at their origin, but must be continuously reproduced and maintained. Repeated interaction with the scriptures is a part of this process, but not sufficient. As with the *al-fātiḥah* (the opening sura) and *shahādah* (the profession of faith), the individual is involved on a personal level; every statement must contribute to this reproduction. There are rules governing what is 'correct,' and thus meaningful, to say about Allah. When these are consistently broken, accidentally or in a subversive repetition (Butler 2007, 44), the discourse is at risk of destabilizing.

Most Muslims would confirm the idea that it is Allah Himself revealing (most of) His Attributes in the Quran, rather than these being impromptu human inventions. This is certainly the case for common Names such as *al-*

lae, as in the key *sūrat l-ikhhlās* (112:1). see 82:133; 5:73; 6:19; 9:31; 13:16; 14:48; 14:52; 29:46; 37:4; 40:12; etc.

5 See 2:96; 3:64; 4:48; 6:19; 6:41; 6:81; 7:173; 10:28; 14:22; 16:35–36; 16:86; 39:65; 52:43; etc.

6 Det Islamiske Trossamfund, *Hvorfor Islam? Skønheden og fordelene ved Islam* (Islamicpamphlets.com, 2006–2019). This is one of the pamphlets in Danish language I collected from mosques in Aarhus and Copenhagen. Many have been translated by the Danish organization Det Islamiske Trossamfund and printed in collaboration with Islamicpamphlets.com, where English versions are freely available.

Khāliq (the Creator, Marker),⁷ and *al-ʿAlīm* (the Knower, Omniscient),⁸ and *ar-Raḥīm* (the Most Merciful),⁹ but harder to substantiate with names such as *ar-Rashīd* (the Good Guide) or *al-ʿAdl* (the Just), which do not appear directly in the sacred text. In actuality, my interlocutors *do* improvise Names; sometimes through divergent translations of the Arabic, and sometimes because it just ‘makes sense’. Mubin, for instance, calls Him “the Grower,” referring to *ar-Rabb* (the Sustainer, Nourisher). Although *ar-Rabb* is used as one of the ‘unofficial’ Names of Allah, Mubin gives it his own spin, laying the emphasis on a temporal development: “the One that makes things grow, raise.” In other words, also due to the polysemous nature of Arabic words, when it comes to Divine Attributes there is space for creativity, but variations must fit the chain of signification, latching onto tangent terms and notions. The variation is not isolated; it must come within a narrative that gives it this meaning/place. In Fadil’s case: “(He is) the Controller ..., because He gives what He wants to whom He wants, and He Takes from the person He wants” (C015).

The critical effect of the *ʿasmāʾu allāhi* is the confirmation of the Muslim’s subjectivity in relation to the Transcendent Other. Each of the Names stresses Allah’s Power and Incomparability, while simultaneously negating these qualities in His subjects. They must feel gratitude for their position as privileged creatures. As the brochure says: “these names point to Allah’s encompassing Mercy that He shows to His slaves by creating them in the first place, showing His kindness to them, making easy their means of sustenance and sending messengers with legislation and guidance based on a religion that is true and easy.” They also point to “His infinite kindness which is apparent in giving great rewards, forgiveness of sins, ... covering up of mistakes, not hastening to punish His sinful slaves, and giving them an opportunity to repent and turn to Him” (D008).¹⁰

This fragment is illustrative of how religious statements can be densely populated by charged terms: every sentence refers to several key notions, there is no ‘empty talk,’ and yet, for someone who lacks exposure to this discourse, little of it will make sense. It is striking how this explanation of Allah’s Names is really about qualifying the position of “His slaves,” and their attitude towards Him (4.1 and 4.2). Nothing in the brochure/exhibition, or in my conversations with Basim, substantiates Allah’s “absolute power over everything, every being

7 See 6:102; 13:16; 36:81; 39:62; 40:62; 59:24; etc.

8 See 2:158, 3:92, 4:35, 24:41, 33:40; etc.

9 See the beginning of almost every sura, 2:37; 2:128; 2:160; 2:199 2:226; 3:31; 6:145; 8:70; 9:104; etc.

10 Creative Content & Museum, *The Beautiful Names of Allah Exhibition*, 2015.

and every action,” “complete control of the universe,” and so on. Such demonstration is unnecessary: “Allah has named Himself,” and his Names are self-confirmatory. It is by reflecting on the meanings of these names and the effect they produce that the believer experiences the “positive effect in the heart and the mind” being prompted “to fear Allah and stand in awe of Him” (D008).¹¹ Any Muslim would be glad to provide ‘evidence’ for Allah’s existence, but the real benefits come from contemplating His Attributes.

The relevance of all this to a discussion of human freedom lies in the results of this acceptance/contemplation. The human is made subject through the recognition of a non-Subject. In other words, Allah’s transcendence is the condition for the individual’s earth-bound existence; the more one meditates upon this transcendence, the deeper is one’s subjection to it. Thinking of the Divine in human terms is blasphemous, because it disrupts this relationship. When I admit to Basim that I have some difficulties imagining Allah as “an Entity outside reality,” Khalil hastens to correct me “you’re imagining God as a person. ... No no! It’s not like a person!” After conferring with Basim, the latter explains:

In the Quran there are some verses regarding who is God. ... He wasn’t born, and He (He begetteth not) And ‘there is nothing similar to Him’ (112:1–4). So you can ... believe and feel His ... influence in this world. ... But there is no doubt that He is something good. ... You’re gonna have a lot of information about Him, but you *shouldn’t* imagine Him as a person or as *anything* that you can imagine. (C016)

Allah must not be anthropomorphized, and yet is somehow living, beyond comprehension, and knowable all at once. Information about Him is limited to what He ‘disclosed’ through Revelation, which, in itself, frames the human perspective. Perceiving Allah indirectly via His influence on the world and His self-descriptions, human beings have no way to ‘subject’ the Divine to their multiple and erratic interpretations. They have no vantage point from which to form their ‘impression’ of the Creator. The ineffability and presence-absence of the Divine allows for human subjection. This subjection, as I will show, it is a key to Muslim statements on freedom.

11 Ibid.

1.2 “*He Is Perfect in Everything He Does*”

In the same conversation with Basim and Khalil, I try to ask how I should “think about” the term ‘God.’ How I should distinguish it, for instance, from ‘reality.’ In response, Basim starts providing what he calls “evidence” and explaining “how you believe that there is God.” He states: “everything that was created on this earth, and in this universe, ... is too perfect to be just created by an explosion of nature, like that, by itself. So there must be someone behind this, who created all this ... perfection, which is God” (Co16). “*God is perfect,*” reads a pamphlet, widely circulating in Danish mosques. It goes on to define this perfection in contrast to Christianity: “God does not have any human limitations, such as resting on the seventh day after the creation of the universe,” for “God always maintains perfect attributes and does nothing to endanger this perfection, for example by ‘becoming a human being’ as claimed by other religions.” God does not “perform actions that are contrary to His attributes. If God became a man and took on human qualities, He would no longer be God” (Do27).¹²

These are just two ways of articulating Allah’s Perfection. While the argument from design is well known, the second is case is also significant, not just because of the reach of the specific publication, but also because of the curious way in which it simultaneously anthropomorphizes and de-anthropomorphizes the Divine. On the one hand, Allah is nothing like His creations, but, on the other hand, His disinclination to “perform actions” that might ‘endanger’ His Perfection does not rhyme with His otherness. Moreover, the fact that in this specific fragment Divine Perfection is shaped in an antagonistic relation to Christian discourse might give us a clue as to why the message works so well in the Danish context. During my fieldwork, particularly in preliminary conversations, the ‘scandalous’ notion that Allah would have ‘made Himself human’ through Jesus Christ came up quite frequently.¹³

It is worth noting that pamphlets like these rarely originate in Denmark. Mosques, organizations, and individual Muslims usually order them in bulk for cheap from suppliers of “*da’wah* materials” with global outreach. In the case of this particular pamphlet, the source is the website ‘*islamicpamphlets.com,*’ founded in 2006, and based in Australia. An analysis of the website reveals

12 Det Islamiske Trossamfund, *Hvorfor Islam? Skønheden og fordelene ved Islam* (Islamicpamphlets.com, 2006–2019). Brochure found in a mosque in Aarhus, January 2018.

13 “And behold! Allah will say: ‘O Jesus the son of Mary! Didst thou say unto men, worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of Allah?’ He will say: ‘Glory to Thee! never could I say what I had no right (to say). Had I said such a thing, thou wouldst indeed have known it. Thou knowest what is in my heart, Thou I know not what is in Thine. For Thou knowest in full all that is hidden’” (Q5:116 YA).

that the majority of its visitors are located in Morocco and Pakistan, just to give an idea of the global networks feeding information to the Danish Muslim community, often involving Saudi organizations and funds.¹⁴ Even though these formulations do not originate within the Danish community, they still give words to Danish Muslims, just like YouTube preachers and online fora. We cannot draw a non-permeable line around Denmark, circumscribing Danish Muslim-talk, but we can notice which formulations are picked up online and turn out to be ‘successful’ in a Danish context.

Allah’s Perfection is of course an uncontroversial notion, and most Muslims affirm it several times a day. For instance through the phrase *subhānallah*, meaning ‘Allah is free from any errors,’ an extremely common *dhikr* (a devotional act involving the repetition of short sentences—also termed *tasbīh*, after the string of 33, 66, or 99 beads used as a counting aid in reciting the 99 titles of Allah). The phrase figures in *salat* (prayer), *du‘ā* (supplication), *khutbah* (sermon), and even the basic expression of wonder/amazement. Interestingly, *subhān* (from *sīn bā hā*) in the Quran means ‘to swim’ or ‘float on the surface,’ and *subhānallah* thus conveys the idea that Allah floats above any imperfection or falsehood. So, many times each day, Muslims praise Divine Perfection, proclaim Allah’s transcendence, and eschew anthropomorphizing associations. The scriptures contain many fitting variations (Q37:159; 52:43).

The formula is not an argument for Allah’s Perfection: it is an acknowledgment thereof. However, most Muslims know exactly where to point the finger when asked to substantiate it. In my first conversation with the Danish-Somali imam Fadil, he invites me to read the aforementioned *sūrat L-‘ikhlāṣ*, which Muslims often repeat in prayer, and which is often cited in the pamphlets/booklets I find or receive in mosques: “Say: He is Allah, the One and Only; Allah, the Eternal, Absolute; He begetteth not, nor is He begotten; And there is none like unto Him” (112:1–4 YA). Fadil then reverently repeats the verses in Arabic, stating, “this is in short the description of God in Islam.”

You don’t have anything *lacking*, He is *One*, in His power, in His description. When we say God is Mercy, His Mercy is not aligned with *our* mercy. It’s a unique description for Him. ... you *can’t imagine anything alike God*, ... yet I can see the traces of God in *everything* on this earth. ... As an example, if you’re in the Sahara, ... you can see if an elephant has taken this path, without seeing the elephant. ... And you’ll be sure, you’ll not have to

14 To name a few I encountered during my fieldwork: *Islamunveiled.com*; *Electronic Dawah Project*; *Abha Cooperative Center for Call & Communities*; *Modern-guide.com*; *guide-muslim.com*, *Islamic Propagation Office in Rabwah*; *Islamhouse.com*, etc.

take that path. ... So we see God in His creation. We see how Merciful He is by seeing a mother, how she takes care of her child, because who put this mercy in her heart? (C015)

Fadil speaks passionately and does not seem encumbered by the arduous task of 'explaining' Allah. Especially the emphasis on Allah "lacking" nothing is important.¹⁵ The message two-fold: Allah is '*subḥān*,' exalted above the things ascribed to Him, but He is also Eternal and Absolute (*aṣ-Ṣamad*) and Self-sufficient (*al-Ghānī*). One separates, as it were, the Divine from the Worldly, and the other is confirmed in its Otherness. Islamically, this manifests in the localization of Allah. On the one hand, Fadil argues that we can "see God in His creation," but, shortly after, he hastens to say, like Basim before, "He is not a human being. He is not *inside* His creation, He is outside of His creation."

Fadil takes care to distance himself from any anthropotheism, because he wants to illustrate a being who transcends, "perfect in everything He does." Some religions, according to Fadil, "reduce His power to status, and say: the Ruler of rain, and the Ruler of life," while in Islam all this power is concentrated in "in one place." This is why, with the *shahādah*, Muslims state Allah is "the only God who deserves to be worshiped" (C015). Here as in previous fragments, the point is again to emphasize a relation of dependency, establishing and consolidating the position of the human, as subject, subordinate, creature, dependent, sinner, forgiven, penitent, worshiper, etc. Human imperfection acquires its meaning in the antagonistic relation with Divine Perfection. Misusing freedom, in this sense, amounts to not partaking in Allah's Perfection. This is not the only use of freedom, which of course also comes up in positive formulations, but most of these are contingent on the notion of 'transcendent divine perfection,' and its continuous re-assertion in speech and action.

1.3 *Expressing the Ineffable*

Ernesto Laclau (2006, 137–138), in his analysis of Meister Eckhart and Pseudo-Dionysus's writings on the ineffable nature of God, argues that, for these mystics, "the only true attribute of God is Oneness, because it is the only attribute that is not determinate." According to Eckhart, saying "God is good" is technically incorrect, because "goodness" is "a determination that implies the nega-

15 In the Danish version of the *Fortress of the Muslims*, a very popular small book of invocations, the expression *subḥānallah* is always translated as "*højt ophøjet (og fri for alle mangler)*," meaning "highly elevated (and free from all deficiency)." This is not the case in the English version: "Glory is to my Lord, the Most High."

tion of what differs from it, whereas God is the negation of the negation." Oneness, "being a nonattribute that involves no difference and, therefore, no negation, is the only thing that we can predicate of Him." Laclau goes on to explain that one might as well replace the negations presented in Pseudo-Dionysus's famous *via negativa* (God is not soul, not intellect, not imagination, etc.) with their positive counterparts, because if one has to look for what these elements have in common, one has to drop "most of the particularized meanings of each of these terms." And if the chain of equivalence is extended enough, "it can become the way of expressing something that exceeds the representational content of all its links," i.e. the "ineffable." The point of enumerating these terms is to show that each is part of a chain, which "*only when it is taken as a totality*," expresses "the nonessence of that Who is the Cause of All Things." Laclau calls *equivalence* the type of relation we find between this peculiar type of enumeration, "whose terms do not simply coexist one beside the other but instead can replace each other, because they all, within the enumerative arrangement, express the same."

The point of Eckhart's ruminations, and Pseudo-Dionysus's enumerations, is to manipulate language in such a way as to express the ineffable. In religious discourses, 'God' is something qualitatively different from any particular attribute the human mind predicates of Him. Now Laclau (2006, 140) goes deeper in his analysis of Christian mystical discourse, stating: "Insofar as the experience of the ineffability of God passes through the equivalence of contents that are less than He, He is both beyond those contents and, at the same time, fully dependent on them for His actualization." Indeed, "the greater his 'beyond,' the more extended the chain of equivalences on which His actualization depends. His very transcendence is contingent upon an increased immanence."

Laclau's analysis can help us understand the problems involved in articulating the ineffability of Allah; he shows how any name can serve as a proper attribute, as long as we do not associate it with determinate content. In order for an utterance about Allah to 'make sense,' it should not break the chain of equivalence. Better yet, if we are not to taint Allah's Oneness with human-like attributes, the term 'Allah' must remain an empty signifier to which no signified can be attached. Because of the naming problem, traditions have sought to maintain the indeterminacy of the transcendent by using a multitude of interchangeable alternatives (the Absolute, Reality, etc.), being consistently atheistic, or advocating a collapse of differences into some sort of undifferentiated identity.

My interlocutors sometimes explain 'Allah' as 'the God,' and at other times explicitly distinguish it from the Danish 'Gud'. A.S. Madsen's *Koranen* ([1967]

2009), states from the outset the reason for using the Arabic ‘Allah’ is not, “as alleged by some orientalists, a contraction of *al-Ilāh* (the god).” Madsen argues the point of maintaining the *proprietary* Arab name is that this form “has never been used for any other being than the Supreme God, the sole proprietor of all perfect features. The word ‘God,’ on the other hand, is compromised by idolatry, and can also—in contrast to Allah—be distorted in speech” (D015).¹⁶ Madsen’s *Koranen* is the oldest of the five Danish interpretations of the Quran, but the name Allah is also left untranslated in the new, popular, and digital *Den Klare Koran* (Majid 2015). It is clear that the term carries with it a series of interpretations that make sense within a certain discursive field, and that ‘Allah’ is already an interpretation of the sublime ineffable fullness it takes as referent.

In short, the problem with simultaneously thinking unity and difference, *tawhīd* and *ʾasmāʾu allahi*, requires some linguistic maneuvers. The use of Divine Names, and the legitimacy thereof, is regulated by the need to maintain the chain of equivalence, and to prevent its universalization. The Islamic naming-logic is characterized exactly by avoiding the collapse of the Divine Attributes into an undifferentiated identity, where the Divine can be named by any term. On the other hand, maintaining the chain of equivalence means maintaining the representation of something transcending it, making it less than universal. Names such as *al-Ghaffār* (the Forgiving), *al-Ghānī* (The Rich), and *al-Malik* (the King), express, and capture, the Divine. The particular meanings of such terms do not dissolve into undifferentiated unity, but are retained (in part) when exchanged.

What constitutes a successful or failed articulation of the nature of Allah is key to the exploration of Muslim-talk on any issue. Mysticism tends to distort language to the point of losing its representative function, thereby indicating something un-representable. Most Muslims attempt the same, at some time or another, with variable success. When one of my interlocutors refers to Allah as the All-Seer (*al-Baṣīr*) in his tale of a sinner told to sin in the place “where Allah can’t see” (see 3.1), ‘All-Seeing’ functions as a determinate Divine quality on which the story pivots. The operation of naming Allah through attributes that are less than Him starts a never-ending process of eliminating their residual particularities: Allah is *al-Ghaffār* (the Forgiving), but also *al-Muntaqim* (the Avenger), etc. Yet in ordinary Muslim-talk, this happens constantly. Allah is “the only One” (C008), “beyond logic” (C045), “present” (C053), “Forgiving” (C010), “looking, not limited by time” (C041), “the Punisher” (C049), etc. In short, it

16 Abdus Salam Madsen, *Koranen, Med Dansk Oversættelse Og Noter* (1967; repr., København: Borgens Forlag, 2009), page 1.

might seem the aforementioned issues belong to the realm of mysticism rather than ordinary theology, but the two are inextricably entangled.

In the first centuries of Islam, the Mu‘tazilite School of theology, flourishing about two centuries after Muhammed, warned against anthropomorphizing the Divine: Allah was without ‘human’ attributes. Other groups retorted that this reduced the Divine to a philosophical abstraction, draining the experience of Allah of all content. The celebrated scholastic theologian al-Ash‘ari (d. 936) appeased both groups, arguing that Allah’s Attributes are unlike human qualities and transcend natural laws. Al-Ash‘ari’s formulations were influential, and successful to this day in part because they were congenial to both the spirit of the sharia and the needs of seekers looking for immediate experience of the Divine.

There is also an ulterior reason for this success. The representation displayed by the *‘asmā’u allahī* is only possible if the chain of “equivalence does not collapse into unity,” for in that case “we would be dealing with a *direct* representation and the dimension of ‘beyond’ would be lost” (Laclau 2006, 144). To achieve true equivalence (in Laclau’s sense), the differential particularity of the ‘Beautiful Names of Allah’ must be weak but not lost. This fits the logic of the Names on the list: *ar-Raḥmān* (the Beneficent), *ar-Raḥīm* (the Merciful), *al-Mālik* (the Lord), etc. The differential meanings of these terms are both a limitation on Divine Nature, and the condition of possibility for equivalence. The Mu‘tazilite arguments had threatened to break the chain of equivalence and collapse it into unity, thereby precluding the possibility of representing the ‘beyond’ in the realm of discourse. The equivalence of the Divine Attributes allows for the proliferation of articulations on the Divine in ordinary theology, but not everything goes. The differential meanings of the terms must be retained, and thus cannot be endlessly expanded. We can say, with Laclau (2006, 145), that “limitation and retention of particularity is the condition of equivalence,” and this condition regulates articulations of the Divine.

2 Willing and Knowing

Some years ago, the Pew Research Center published a report on the “unity and diversity” of Muslims worldwide. One of the questions asked was whether the respondent believed in “predestination or fate (Kismet/Qadar)?” The study concluded that “Predestination ... is widely embraced by Muslims around the globe. In 19 of the 23 countries where the question was asked, at least seven-in-ten Muslims say they believe in fate.” The researchers observed that those who were more “religiously committed” were more likely to “believe in fate,”

but never cared to qualify the terms.¹⁷ Is fatalism the same as predestination? Are these terms synonymous with Kismet and *Qadar*?

PEW's numbers are still cited in articles with headings such as: "Are Muslims Fatalists?" (Pipes 2015). Such an interrogative demands substantiation, and tends to presume an ideal 'Muslim' position. According to some (weak) ahadith, Muhammad severely reproached his Companions for discussing the matter, yet this did not keep the discussions from re-igniting soon after the first generations. Renowned Islamic theologians positioned themselves in the debate on free will and predestination, perhaps in response to early Christian theology, and eventually reached an orthodox guideline.

From a discourse analytical perspective, it is undeniable that 'the Decree and the Destiny' of Allah, often found in Islamic literature as *al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar*, is a key precondition for shaping formulations of human freedom in Muslim-talk. In this section, rather than asking whether Danish Muslims are 'fatalists,' or delving into theological subtleties, I will focus on how the notions of Divine Will, Knowledge, and Destiny manifest in Muslim-talk in Denmark. Like Allah's Names, *Qaḍā'* and *Qadar* are building blocks for making sense of Muslim articulations of human freedom; statements on the latter often presume knowledge of the former.

2.1 *The Decree and the Destiny*

The first part of the renowned construction, *Qaḍā'* (from *qāf ḍād yā*), is multivalent and crops up often in the Quran, denoting Divine Decree, Judgment, Will. *Qadar*, whose root (*qāf dāl rā*) is also quite common, stands for evaluation, measure, fixed limit, restriction, appraisal.¹⁸ On its own, however, *Qadar* refers to Ultimate Destiny, or Divine Predestination, and is occasionally translated as such. A third term common to Muslim-talk is *taqdīr*. This is a verbal form of the same root as *Qadar*, and could be translated as 'evaluating,' 'to think about how to sort things out,' and some use the term in reference to Destiny. The combination of *Qaḍā'* and *Qadar* generally evokes the Destiny of the world resulting from the divine application of Divine Will/Judgment in time (Netton 2016, 200). The *sunna* repeatedly posits *Qadar* as a central tenet of faith, on which much spiritual understanding depends: "A slave (of Allah) shall not believe until he believes in Al-Qadar, its good and its bad, such that he knows that what struck him would not have missed him, and that what missed him would not have struck him" (Jami' at-Tirmīdhī, 32:2294, graded good).

17 The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, *The World's Muslims: Unity and Diversity* (Washington: Pew Research Center, 2012).

18 See 13:26; 17:30; 27:57; 28:82; 29:62; 30:37; 54:12; 56:60; 77:23; 89:16; etc.

When it comes to *Qaḍā* and *Qadar*, meanings overlap, because Allah's Will is at once Destiny, and eternal Decree: whatever Allah Wills *is*, and always has been. The distinction has to do with temporality: *Qaḍā* is usually seen as eternal (although to some it is operating within time), while *Qadar* is usually seen within time (but to some eternal).¹⁹ This is less clear in the scriptures, where *Qadar* can refer to a Decree that is always-already enacted.²⁰ Henceforth, *Qaḍā* alone stands for Allah's Decree/Will in a broad sense, His universal Judgment; and *Qadar* as existential determination, the Fate of the universe, the Destiny of the world (including the individual's personal destiny). Their combination refers to the overlapping of all these notions *sub specie aeternitatis*, a binary technical term designating the absolute Divine Decree and Destiny in the aggregate, including both its eternal and (from a time-bound perspective) contingent actualizations (Gardet 2012; 2019).

Belief in *Qadar* (as implying *Qaḍā*) is an aspect of *'aqīdah* (Islamic creed) and the six articles of faith (*arkān al-īmān*). After Allah's Names, it is perhaps the single most important notion in the discussion on human freedom, dating to the first great debates in Islamic scholastic theology, and extensively discussed in Islamic studies (Watt 1946; 1948; De Cillis 2014).²¹ Some scholars have argued that, in many respects, the debates lingers on in modern times (Schoen 1976). The centrality of *al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar* is why, paradoxically, human beings are, in one sense, completely free (to choose), in another, limited, and, in still another, without any freedom at all. The apparent conflict between freedom and *Qadar* springs from certain theological controversies in the early centuries of Islam, and the tension between Quranic references to both free will and fatalism. On the one hand, a series of verses suggest some form of fatalism;²² on the other, several seem to deny it.²³ Mainstream Islam generally holds both fatalism and unconditional free will as erroneous extremes, especially after the many schisms following the classic debates (Abu

19 The precise meanings of the two terms differ depending on whether we are dealing with Asharite theology or Maturidi interpretations (Gardet 2012).

20 "We saved him and his family, except his wife; her We destined to be of those who lagged behind" (Q27:57 YA). see 54:49.

21 See e.g., Hasan of Basra's celebrated *Epistle to 'Abd al-Malik against the Predestinarians* (Mourad 2017). In Islamic literature, the issue has focused on how to reconcile human freedom with Allah's *jabr*, His commanding power. al-Ash'ari developed a compatibilist model, the 'doctrine of acquisition' (*kasb/aiktasab*), asserting both divine commanding power and human free will.

22 See 2:6; 5:21; 6:125; 7:188; 9:51; 10:44; 11:34; 16:36; 32:13; etc.

23 See 4:110–111; 6:104; 10:31; 10:44; 10:108; 18:28; 41:46; 74:41; 76:3; etc.

Khalil 1994). Technically, this makes Islam a compatibilist system, but perhaps it would be better to do away with the binary freedom-determinism altogether, treating *al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar* as a convergence between different forms of freedom and destiny, coexisting on different levels.

In short, it might be useful to keep in mind that what seem to be references to 'fatalism' are really assertions of Allah's Omniscience and Omnipotence. These are precisely the things that make human freedom (in all its forms) possible. Another way of expressing this involves distinguishing between determinism and fatalism. According the first, every effect has precise causes, and there is no space for human free will; every decision is the result of a complex series of circumstances beyond our control. In fatalism, on the other hand, events are not caused by precedent or natural laws; everything comes to pass due to (in the case of Islam) Divine Decree, which is in a sense the only real natural law. Again, human beings are granted freedom of the will by Divine intervention, together with the moral responsibility this implies.

2.2 "First It's Written, Then It Happens"

As mentioned above, the distinction between *al-Qaḍā'* and *al-Qadar* often involves temporality. Conversing with Danish imams, explanations are not always consistent, but still contain the essential elements. Amir, a young imam and student from Aarhus, summons the two concepts to indicate the moment at which the Will of Allah is realized in human destiny. Reflecting about his happy marriage, he recounts the day he proposed:

The '*Qadar*' is: me and my wife will get together. It's written by Allah, we'll be together. The *Qaḍā'* is when I come and say: 'I want you.' ... When it happens. It's something like that. *Qadar*: Allah He knows me and Aliya (Amir's wife) will be together. *Al-Qaḍā'*: when it happens. (C028)

To Amir, *al-Qaḍā'* refers to the actualizing force and moment in which things come together in time, while *al-Qadar* refers to the whole, timeless Destiny of creation. Amir's view is supported by many Quranic verses where *Qaḍā'* refers to the time when things are brought into existence, and *Qadar* the prior Decree—though some scholars dispute this. The Arabic expression conveys more than the idea that events in the world are pre-destined: it prioritizes Allah's power to create reality through His Will, rather than any effects on human life. Imams such as Fadil (C015), Basim (C016; C030), and Amir (C028), assert that everything a human being wants to accomplish must be sanctioned and facilitated by Allah; everything happens in His creation, under the direct supervision of His Will. The entanglement of Allah's Knowledge, Will, and Destiny are

such that one must understand them as concurrent rather than sequential: the meaning of each is dependent on the others. The difficulty of conveying these different facets at once explains why the use of ‘*Qadar*’ in conversation diverge.

When I ask Amir how he makes sense of the existence of human free choice in relation to the belief that Allah knew and wrote down those choices long before their actualization, he speaks without hesitation.

You can do what you want but ... we know, all of us Muslims, that Allah ... wrote what we’re gonna do. But ... I *choose* whether I’m standing in the night club or the mosque. It’s like this. So you have your free will, but at the same time we don’t know what Allah has written It’s like, I say to you: ‘Make this thing.’ But I know ... there are some steps, (even if) you don’t know it. ... I *know* you will fail. But you take the steps, and you fail. ... (Yet) you still ... can say ‘no I don’t want to do it’. (C028)

Amir, like others, specifies that Allah “has not ‘written’ just for Muslims,” but “for all of humanity.” Muslims are merely aware of it. Basim tells me that the paradoxical relation between freedom and *Qadar* is one of the most common issues mosquegoers ask him to clarify as an imam (C005). Upon learning of my interest in freedom, Basim soon mentions *Qadar*, and seemingly delivers a well-rehearsed speech, stating that a proper understanding of the concept requires insight into four things: Divine Knowledge, the Book of Destiny, Divine Will, and Divine Creation:

Khalil (translating from Arabic): His knowledge is prior to anything that will happen. ... There’s something called ‘the Preserved tablet’ (*al-Lauh al-Mahfūz*). This Tablet was written 50,000 years before the creation of human being. God wrote this book, and in it, it’s written when anyone dies, ... whether you’re gonna be happy or (*unhappy*), ... and even your religion Everything was written. ... Someone might say: ‘I did this, I created this, I had this thought,’ but you can say that God created your brain that had the knowledge (referring to Q37:95–96). (C008)

Whereas Amir equates *Qadar* with Allah’s foreknowledge, Basim sees it as the composite of tangential concepts. Overall, based on my sources, Danish Muslim-talk on the topic consistently involves certain key elements. Divine Decree/Will (*al-Qaḍā* or *Mashīʿat*), i.e. whatever Allah Wills happens, which does not imply Allah loves or forces what happens; Destiny (*al-Qadar*), i.e. the Divine Pre-ordainment; Divine (fore)Knowledge (*al-ʿlm*), i.e. Allah knows

what his creation will do and choose; Divine Writing (*kataba Allahu*), i.e. Allah wrote down the Destiny of all that exists prior to its creation; The Preserved Book/Tablet (*al-Lauh al-Mahfūz*), in which Destiny was recorded; The Creator and creation (*al-Khāliq, khalq*), i.e. Allah is the Creator of all, including human actions.

There are of course differences between the various Muslim milieus in Denmark, and Sunni are more likely to refer to human limitations and the Unseen/Unknown realm (*al-Ghayb*) accessible only to Allah. Some attempt to articulate the relationship between Destiny and freedom, resulting in a somewhat confused exposition. This often ends with frustrated claims that such forces are ultimately inscrutable and contradicting to the ‘spiritually blind’ (*‘aman*), or that only sheikh, muftis, or mullahs can properly explain the matter. The complexity of the argument justifies religious authority and unbalanced power relations, which sometimes has more to do with communication skills than a formal Islamic education. Fadil, for instance, is pointed out at me as being “good at explaining” and “knowledgeable.” He acquired a reputation by learning the Quran by heart (*ḥāfiẓ*), although he admits to have forgotten parts.

Danish Shia Muslims deal with similar preoccupations, but are perhaps more prone to internalize sophisticated arguments and provide technical explanations. In one of his essays, Shia author Iman Kashi warns that certain Quranic verses can mislead one into thinking there is no such thing as free will. At first glance, says Kashi, some verses seem to suggest that God determines all human actions, which would contradict the official Shia position (D072).²⁴ One cannot understand these *āyāt* without a basic understanding of *al-Qaḍā’ wa al-Qadar*. He goes on to cite two verses featuring *Qadar* (54:49; 15:21), and other two with *Qaḍā’* (2:117; 6:2). According to Kashi, *Qadar* means ‘degree’ or ‘part,’ and refers to the necessary boundaries and potential of things, determined by Allah. In other words, before Allah creates something/someone, He knows beforehand its/her not yet manifested range of possibilities and abilities. It is then up to the individual to seize the opportunity to use these abilities and develop this potential. Hussain, a learned Shia in his thirties, qualifies this view by telling me a time-honored didactic story:

Within the Shia school of thought ... we believe to *some extent* of free will. We have this classic example of one holy man answering his disciple (ask-

²⁴ Iman M. Kashi, *Troslære: Rationel guddommelig retfærdighed* (København: Shia.dk, 2017), accessed March 10, 2020. See also Iman M. Kashi, *Shī’isme: Oprindelse, tro & praksis* (Genstofte: Hjelm, 2012).

ing about free will) ...: ‘Try to stand on one leg.’ The disciple did it, and then the holy man said ‘now try to raise the other leg,’ and he couldn’t. And he said ... that’s the extent of free will: you can raise one foot but you can’t go all the way! So, it’s (a mid-way) between free will and Destiny. ... But this brings up some new questions ... if we have free will, how does that compare with the Knowledge of God? ... There is a natural difference between the Necessary Being and all the other beings. There’s the Creator God, and the *creation*. (C049)

The connection of Divine Knowledge and Benevolence (*Lutf* in the case of Shia theology) with *al-Qadā’ wa al-Qadar* is important to all my interlocutors, because it leads them to see human Destiny, and the gamut of events beyond their control, as the work of a benign Divine rationale. Our fate is in good hands, as Lutfi would put it. “Allah does not give you something that you can’t handle. ... Something that the soul can’t take.” You “don’t get a job that you can’t do,” you “have the faith” and all the tools necessary to accomplish everything “by yourself” (C019). In other words, Allah has *already* provided each individual with the means to elevate themselves. His Knowledge of His creatures’ dispositions and will with regard to their opportunities does not amount to coercion.

Many discourage attempts to probe the matter more than necessary. Some, especially in the Shia community, explicitly warn against engaging sophisticated concepts like *al-Qadā’ wa al-Qadar* outside the boundaries of *kalam* (Islamic scholastic theology). Some refer to Ayatollah Ja‘far Sobhani (2001, 54), who writes: “No Muslim can deny the reality of divine predestination. However, an analytical knowledge of all the minute details of this complex question is not necessary.” Those lacking the “conceptual dexterity” to assimilate this “subtle reality” should “avoid entering into discussions and deliberations upon it.” This is to avoid confusion: “For all too many are liable to open themselves up to erroneous doctrines or be thrown into doubt and lose their way” (*ibid.*). These cautionary tales also circulate among Sunni ranks, and might be part of the reason why individual Muslims seem either reticent or unable to provide detailed accounts of the notions. This means the way religious authorities communicate them is regulated by the belief that not everyone has the ability to grasp the conceptual subtleties. Finally, when Danish Muslims contribute to the public debate, *al-Qadā’ wa al-Qadar* remains latent, while nevertheless informing countless claims and stances.

All this is not to say my interlocutors are ignorant about the subject. In fact, circumspection is indicative of a general awareness about the complexity of the matter. There are certain ideas and associations that function as markers

in my interlocutors' schemata of their religion. While freely conversing about various topics with Lutfi, he remembers reading about the early debates on *Qadar*. "There were a lot of discussions about *Qadar*, predestination, ... During 'Umayyiyah (The Umayyad Caliphate) time." Lutfi mentions the Mu'tazila and Qadarite schools of theology, then argues the Umayyad "used it to be on the throne, to be in power, (claiming) God chose them. Al-Baṣrī wrote to them, and they had a fight" (C019). Hasan of Basra's (d. 728) famous letter, while filed by historians as apocryphal (and probably pseudopigraphical), works for Lutfi as an event, an authoritative warning against overemphasizing the notion of predestination.

Among the many notions Lutfi involves, 'opportunity' is perhaps the most salient. This is nothing else than freedom as spiritual privilege (free will); that, which enables status mobility (see 4.2). Besides socioeconomics, the idea of opportunity comes up in relation to the possibilities Allah gives to individuals, and innate potential of each. "God created us and then he gave us all the opportunities to do whatever we want" (C055); "The Quran's characteristic thesis is that its guidance applies to people's general well-being and is based on the possibilities within their reach" (W036).²⁵ There are innumerable ways in which individual Muslims express their understanding/experience of *Qadar* in relation to freedom. The common thread is a sense of opening, the affirmation of human agency within a greater Divine Scheme.

2.3 "Allah Knows What We Are Going to Choose"

Discussing the relation between *al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar* and human freedom has a way of making even the most confident expositors taciturn and wary. Still, even the most cautious among my interlocutors hold that Allah's Foreknowledge and human free choice coexist. Lutfi, continuing the explanation quoted above, soon brings up the issue of Allah's omniscience: "we're free to do what we want, but God knows everything we do, before we do it, and how we do it. This gets complicated: *before we do it*. ... He is the Knower." (C019). The frequency of the expression 'we are free, but ...' is the natural result of the difficulty inherent in explaining an apparent paradox between unqualified terms. When engaging Muslim-talk it becomes clear that neither human freedom nor Divine Knowledge are what they seem, but most lack the words to articulate their subtleties. Unhinging ambiguous terms such as these from their hegemonically determined associations takes a lot of talking/work.

25 "Om Koranen," Profeternesvej.dk, accessed August 1, 2019, http://www.profeternesvej.dk/Koranen/Om_Koranen.pdf.

Things go differently with Musaddid, a well-connected member of the “moderate” and “young” part of the Danish Muslim community, as he calls it. We are sitting in the back seat of his friend’s car, somewhere in Copenhagen. His opinion is similar to Lutfi’s, but he is keen to avoid confusing a complicated discussion, and weighs his words carefully:

I think we *do* have a free will, we have the freedom to choose, but God Knows what we’re gonna choose. ... How it works in detail, is a discussion that has been going on ... since the prophet died. Because he did not ... specify it. ... There were people accusing each other of not being Muslim, depending on what idea they had about Destiny and free will. So it would be stupid of me trying to, you know (explain it). (C036)

Musaddid does not give *dars* (lecture) or *khutbah*, and so does not have to produce answers on a daily basis. He is a highly educated, engaged, and devout Muslim, who thinks that detailed knowledge about these matters is useful, but not essential. His goal is to ameliorate the condition of Muslims in Denmark via statistics, confronting the media and public with their hypocrisy and misconceptions. When it comes to free will, Musaddid claims that there is nothing ‘different’ or uncontroversial about the mainstream Muslim position. Musaddid and Lutfi are of different ages, environments, and cities, but both frame Divine Knowledge as something linked to human freedom and Destiny. They both struggle to explicate their belief. The ones who come up with elaborate answers have usually done their own research, such as the aforementioned Shia author Iman Kashi (2012), who writes and tells me that free will can be inferred from the wealth of Quranic verses speaking of human accountability, and that “if God forced human life to go in a certain way, man’s feeling would be completely different” (D072).²⁶

The alterity established earlier in the Naming of Allah now manifests in a radically disproportionate cognizance. At times, asserting this asymmetry seems more important than affirming omniscience. In fact, many of the countless scriptures referring to Allah’s Knowledge, simultaneously stress the ignorance of His creatures.²⁷ Even speaking of human ignorance does not do justice to the distinction, because Divine Knowledge encompasses time, while human knowledge arises within it. But if the two are ultimately incomparable, why

26 Iman M. Kashi, *Troslære: Rational guddommelig retfærdighed* (København: Shia.dk, 2017), accessed March 10, 2020.

27 See 20:110 and 2:115; 4:166; 5:116; 6:59; 10:36; 11:14; 22:70; 31:34; 40:19; 58:7; 65:12; etc.

insist on bringing them up together? Firstly, there is a need to convey an idea of the former with/within the latter. Most of my sources apply the term ‘knowledge’ indiscriminately, ‘maximizing’ the Divine version. However, this does not always work. The archive of statements shows there are nuances which make certain articulations more precise/appropriate. Secondly, there is a need to distinguish potentiality from actuality. Danish Muslims often refer to the already mentioned ‘Book of Destiny’ (*al-Lauh al-Mahfūz*, Mother of the Book, Preserved Tablet) to denote the incalculable ways in which reality might unfurl. Over-emphasizing this notion, however, risks confirming a problematic fatalism. Mentions of the *al-Lauh al-Mahfūz* must therefore be coupled with a more flexible notion of Divine Knowledge (*al-‘Im*), pointing at the immanent and alterable nature of things.

It is not accidental that the common formula used to end statements on spiritual matters, in both speech and writing, emphasizes Allah’s Attributes rather than the Book containing the Destiny of the world: ‘... And Allah knows best’ (*Allahu ‘a‘lamu*) ‘and is the All-Wise’ (*al-Ḥakīm*).²⁸ If an imam were to end his sermon with e.g. ‘the truth of the matter is written in the Preserved Tablet’ it would not be wrong; but neither would it be satisfactory, for it would stress an aspect of the faith that raises questions, misleading one into thinking that human knowledge coincides with the contents of the Book, or that Destiny works in discernible ways. As a formula, ‘Allah Knows best’ is more appropriate because it emphasizes radical alterity and Divine Agency. It is telling that the Quran refers to the *al-Lauh al-Mahfūz* as being *with* Allah and even praised *by* Him.²⁹

There should, however, be no doubt of the perfection of Divine Knowledge. We find the same distinction in Muslim-talk, for instance in conversations with Hanne and Fadil, who both spontaneously introduce the Book of Destiny. The former: “It was written 50.000 years before Allah *subḥānahu wa-ta‘ālā* started the creation, and we call it *al-Lauh al-Mahfūz* It’s huge. All of it, it’s written in there. We cannot do anything before and after, but we can *hope* and we can make those choices” (C038). Fadil: “*God Knows everything*. ... We (also) believe ... that it is *written*. ... There is a Book, at Allah’s place, called *al-Lauh al-Mahfūz*. In it, you have *everything, every scenario*” (C015). The scale of Allah’s Knowledge Fadil wants to convey does not lead him to conflate it with the “Book” at His “place,” which is, after all, another plausible source. To Fadil, the distinction is clear: the Book contains the full gamut of possibilities, “everything that could

28 In Danish: *Og Allah ved bedst og er den Alvise*.

29 See 43:4 and 13:39; 43:4; 57:78; 85:22; 7:22; 3:145; 154; 6:38; 59; 9:51; 10:61; 20:52; 27:75; 35:11; etc.

happen,” “every scenario.” Allah’s exhaustive Knowledge, on the other hand, goes together with His Wisdom, and awareness of what, among all possibilities, will occur.

The Book of Destiny functions in conversation as a reminder of the timelessness of Divine Knowledge, and the dimension wherein notions such as *al-Qaḍā* and *al-Qadar* can be understood. Lacking awareness of the level in which Allah’s Knowledge functions could mislead one to think that humans have no freedom of will. As a pamphlet found in Danish mosques declares: “If God wanted it, He could guide all mankind to submit to Him, as He has power over everything. However, in his wisdom, He has created us with the ability to deny and make us responsible for our choices” (D025).³⁰ Involving the notion of Divine Knowledge and *al-Lauh al-Mahfūz* carves out space for human agency; an agency characterized by hope, good intentions, and the acknowledgment of human limitations.

Lutfi is adamant in specifying that awareness of Allah’s knowledge does not displace personal responsibility: “He Knows what you will do, but that doesn’t mean He made you do it. ... If I miss the bus today, because I slept in and woke up 10 minutes before the bus, I wanted to eat, and then (I can’t say) ‘Ah! God made me (miss the bus).’ ... He Knows what you have in your heart” (C019). Lutfi comes up with the analogy of him playing FIFA (a soccer video-game), where the virtual players pass the ball and shoot but he, the ‘real player,’ *knows* what is about to happen. Again, he realizes that also in this example he would be the one literally controlling the players, and changes his mind. The difficulty Lutfi and other of my interlocutors have in coming up with adequate analogies is perhaps revealing of the impossibility of likening Divine Powers/Attributes to everyday situations. Fadil perhaps comes closest when he provides another everyday example: “when you came out of the door, God placed a person in front of this door. What you are gonna do to this person, is up to you. That is your freedom.” Immediately after, he hastens to spell out the crucial point: “but *your freedom is not out of God’s control*. You can’t decide anything God doesn’t Will” (C015).

It is through deeds that humans show their will/desire (*ʿirāda*) and obtain their share (*naṣīb*) of reward (*thawāb*) destined for them both in the world (*dunyā*) and hereafter (*ʿākhīrah*). Unsolicited, Fadil reproduces a well-rehearsed explanation of *Qadar*, and then poses the question: “why should I do good deeds if God already Knows I will come in Paradise?” The answer is

30 Det Islamiske Trossamfund, *Ateisme: En Islamisk vinkel* (Islamicpamphlets.com). Brochure found in a mosque in Aarhus, January 2018.

that one should work for it, because Allah smooths the path to one's destination. "If you are supposed to be a good person, then *all* the good things will be easy for you. It's gonna be normal for you, to do good deeds. And if it's Written for you to end in a bad situation, *every bad thing will be easy for you to do*" (C015).

2.4 "You Will Only See Destiny When You Think about It"

Many find it useful to explain the relationship between Divine Knowledge, Destiny, human freedom, and effort, with the metaphor of the classroom. Here, Allah figures as a Teacher with intimate knowledge of His students' development, able to predict their progress. Ali, Hussain, Mamoon, and others, find the story instructive because it showcases, to a degree, the role of human responsibility and reward. In one of my conversations with Mubin and Kareem, two close friends in their early thirties from Aarhus, Mubin comes up with his own version. The teacher is about to grade his students at the end of the school year.

The students have this free will, they can do their homework and they can listen in the class, if they want to get a good grade. They can also choose to ... write tweets, and they can maybe go out and play football. ... But if you, in the middle of the year, ask the teacher what the grades will be for the individual students, he will actually give you a pretty good answer without knowing the future. So what about God, who *knows* the future and what comes after the future? (C025)

Kareem intervenes, saying that the students might complain that they received a bad grade because the teacher said they would, but would mean misunderstanding the situation. Both Mubin and Kareem condemn this apparently widespread habit of young Muslims of assigning blame. The teacher metaphor also appears in discussions on Divine Guidance (*al-Hidāyah*), where the emphasis is on Allah's quality as Guide (*al-Hādī*). The notion of Allah as Teacher is helpful to convey the idea that He establishes the conditions for human learning/development, and that His determination of human potential is in our favor. At the same time, it conveys that, when it comes to those actions involving human responsibility, there is more talk of Divine 'facilitation' or 'assistance' than coercion.

This is only one dimension of *Qadar*, and Mubin says that he knows a more appropriate story, but fears I would find it "too barbaric," and that translation would distort it. After some encouragement, Mubin relates the Quranic story of *Musa* (Moses) and *al-Khidr*, found in the *sūrat l-kaḥf* (18:65–82). Every now and then, Kareem intervenes with some comments and corrections.

Mubin: God tells Moses to go with one called al-Khiḍr, to learn from him. ... The reason why prophet Moses was on this journey, was because prophet Moses was asked ‘who is the most knowing person on the earth?’ And he said: ‘Me!’ And God then told him ‘No. ... There is someone that has more knowledge than you.’ And the prophet Moses asked ‘who is that? I want to learn from him.’ ... al-Khiḍr does three things on this journey. ... And they made a deal, before the journey, that the prophet Moses shouldn’t ask him why he did things, he’d get an explanation later. (C025)

In the first part of the journey, Musa and al-Khiḍr find themselves on a ship, which the latter purposely started damaging. Musa “gets a little bit angry, he couldn’t understand ... ‘we are on a boat, why do you do that?’” al-Khiḍr replies he will explain later. In the second part, al-Khiḍr kills a “10–11 year old boy,” which infuriates his companion. This time, his teacher “also gets angry,” and tells him “I told you, don’t ask about things.” The last episode sees the two travelers in a village, hungry and begging for food. The villagers ignore them. Still, al-Khiḍr straightens one of their walls, which was about to fall. Musa, indignant, complains that they did nothing to deserve his help.

Finally, the reasons behind the actions of the *wali* (saint) are revealed. The reason he damaged the ship, was because “there was a king that was hijacking boats, ... capturing the good ships.” Damaging their own made it a worthless prize. “When you think about it, ah yeah, that was actually a good plan.” Kareem adds that if he had been the ship’s owner, “I’d get very mad about this al-Khiḍr man, because he ruined my ship! But if I had waited for like 2 hours or 2 days or whatever it is, I’d be thankful: ah he did this, *al-ḥamdu lillāh*, that was destiny!”

When Mubin reaches the second episode, he emphasizes that “killing a person is a very big thing, and especially if it is a little boy,” while Kareem adds “and he is innocent.” This is where Mubin fears his translation comes across as “very barbaric” to me. When he has difficulties remembering the reasons, Kareem intervenes: “Because when he grows old, this little guy is gonna be a bad person. He will not be a believer, and he will be a bad even to his parents. So he preferred that God would give them another kid, a kid that would be a better person than this little fellow.” Mubin elaborates, saying that “if you are a good man, your wife good, and you have a kid, he is 10 years old, he grows up to be a leader of a Narco (drugs) cartel or something like that, always get drunk, beat up his mother, disobey his father, and just ruin your life ...” Kareem interjects, chucking: “you will wish he was dead! Perhaps!” Mubin explains that al-Khiḍr knew the boy “would become a very barbaric person when he grows up.” Since his parents were good people, Allah wanted to replace their evil son.

Thirdly, al-Khiḍr straightened up the wall because it was concealing a treasure, which belonged to two orphans. If the villagers had seen the treasure, they would have taken it, “al-Khiḍr just straightened it up again, to hide the treasure until the orphans would grow up, find it, and take what was rightfully theirs.” Mubin concludes

So these are three stories about Destiny, not knowing things, and all that. al-Khiḍr had this knowledge. He didn’t have it from himself. It was a knowledge given by God. So when God uses in the Quran (the term) *awḥá* it means actually it is something given from God to us. (C025)

This story came up several times in other conversations, and in different milieus. Imams occasionally use it to illustrate the ideas of Divine Decree, Destiny, Omniscience, inscrutability, human understanding. Comparing the actual *āyāt* with Mubin’s version, we find some revealing additions and omissions.

First of all, Musa/Moses never boasts that he is the most knowledgeable man alive, he simply approaches al-Khiḍr with the wish to learn the “higher Truth” the mysterious wali received from Allah. Mubin adds a touch of arrogance, probably to make the character more relatable. The point, after all, is to show how each of us can be misled by appearances and overvaluing our insight. Secondly, the “kid” slain by al-Khiḍr is actually a young man, and the justification certainly not as detailed as Mubin and Kareem propose. Interestingly, this is precisely the passage Mubin fears is too barbaric, and his translation ends up being more extreme than necessary—for instance, in mentioning an exact age (10–11). The third change is the most striking: Mubin completely ignores a key motif of the story—patience (*ṣabr*). Al-Khiḍr warns Musa at the beginning of the journey: “Verily thou wilt not be able to have patience with me!” (18:67 YA), and concludes in a similar fashion: “... thou wast unable to hold patience” (18:82 YA). After each event, Musa condemns the holy man’s “horrible acts,” but each time apologizes for his impatience, even telling al-Khiḍr not to forgive him thrice. al-Khiḍr, for his part, never loses his temper. In other words, al-Khiḍr’s lesson is clearly about equanimity and faith in face of incomprehension. Perhaps the reason Mubin makes both characters irascible at every exchange lies with Mubin’s understanding of the narrative as effectively relating to the daily experience of *Qadar*. He himself is known for blowing a fuse when confronted with adversity.

Mubin’s version of the famous Quranic story thus also points to the priority he places on being aware of his cognitive limitations: we cannot access Destiny, merely trust it. Patience takes the backseat, and the anger of both Musa

and al-Khiḍr is both natural and understandable, because the point (to Mubin and Kareem) is belief. This is linked to the very perception of Destiny, which Kareem sees as the result of thinking “very closely about things.” He remembers how, when he had a car accident, he could not stop thinking about its purpose and place in Allah’s Plan. In the same conversation, Kareem comes up with another example about a frustration mitigated by belief rather than patience:

The Destiny, ... why things happen in a certain way ... you will only see it when you think about it. ... Because if Mubin has sinned, and the next day gets a bill that he hasn’t taken into account for this month, then Mubin is gonna think ‘why am I getting this bill? Ah, it’s about the thing I did yesterday.’ But if he doesn’t think those thoughts, he’ll not even experience the link with the things, you know? ... So it’s about believing, about something you’ve heard ..., but it’s also *your* thoughts, ... *you* think very closely about things, and try to figure things out. I think that’s what makes us experience (and) see Destiny. (C025)

One of Marshall McLuhan’s famous aphorisms goes: “I wouldn’t have seen it if I hadn’t believed it.” To him, people who “see” do not walk around saying they are “seeing things”; they simply see the world (Coupland 2010, 62). Kareem, here and elsewhere, emphasizes belief in terms of a distinction between concepts and percepts, not unlike McLuhan. Destiny is ‘alive’ as long as it involves perception, directly engaging the perceiver. Turning it and Allah into a concept is the end of it (for the conceiver). Kareem would agree with McLuhan’s (1999, 82) statement “Concepts are wonderful buffers for preventing people from confronting any form of percept,” something I was told many times during my fieldwork, albeit in different words. The moral of Mubin’s story, and Kareem’s statement, is that belief in Allah’s Destiny is a mode of perception. In a sense, human knowledge, prophetic or not, obscures this belief. In Mubin’s story, Musa’s initial hubris, and his attitude during his journey with al-Khiḍr, tell Muslims that knowledge of Allah’s *Qadar* comes only by His grace, not through reason. Needless to say, the implications of this conviction are far-reaching, and, as I will show later on, this is especially the case for articulations of human freedom.

2.5 “Be Patient. Accept Whatever Happens to You”

When it comes to how *Qadar* effects the lives of my interlocutors, their answers are usually ethical in nature. Nearly all my interlocutors refer to various ways of dealing with or shaping one’s destiny (lowercase) in the sense of personal fate; share in this life (*naṣīb*); and status at the Judgment Day. Supplications (*du‘ā’*), especially during the month of Ramadan, remembering proper manners (*‘adab*), performing good deeds (*ṣāliḥāt*), etc. The experience of personal fate, and insight into Destiny, are hard to disentangle. In theory, acknowledgment of the latter should change one’s attitude towards the former. Contrary to Mubin, both Basim and Lutfi talk a great deal about patience (*ṣabr*) and gratitude (*shukr*). Basim introduces the topic with a narration:

Khalil (translating from Arabic): We have a hadith in which Prophet said: ‘Whatever happens to a Muslim is always good, if something good happens ... he has to thank God, and if something bad happens to him, he has to be patient, in order to get the reward at the end of it.’ He (Basim) said that ... he had an accident, ... (which made him partially) blind He was planning to do a lot of reading and he had a lot of plans ... (but) his destiny changed. Yet he is always thinking positive, ... and he is very happy with his life right now So his choice was (how to react) ... when his injury happened. (C030)

At this point I suggest to Basim that perhaps Destiny was ‘pushing’ him in a certain direction, to get him where he is now. Perhaps, because of this injury, he has become the person that he was supposed to be. But this reasoning seems foreign to Basim, who insists on the proper attitude rather than conceptualization.

He said that you could draw this conclusion about destiny. But whenever you’re thankful and patient with whatever happens to you, ... this is a kind of *purification*, in this life, towards the hereafter. If you have sinned a lot, and then God punished you, ... this is kind of a purification. You have now removed some sins, if you are patient and if you accept that. ... It changed his life, but we don’t have this view like: ‘ok, Destiny pushed me that way.’ ... If you really understand that it’s God’s Will, you’ll have the reward. (C030)

Similarly to Basim, Lutfi is keen to explain *ṣabr* as a cardinal virtue in Islam and an important part of his daily experience. The root of the term (*ṣād bā rā*) occurs many times in the Quran, where it often relates to steadfast belief

in Allah and persistence in righteousness, resulting in closeness to Him and inner peace.³¹ Lutfi likes to repeat that “Allah is with those who patiently persevere” (2:153 YA). He also has done some research of his own on the subject, and explains that there are three kinds of *ṣabr*.

The first is *ṣabr ‘alā al-Ṭā’a*, meaning “you have to have patience with the commands you are given.” For instance, the patience to keep to one’s praying-schedule. “If you’re waking up at 5 in the morning, it’s cold, but you have to go do *wuḍū’* and you have to be patient.” Again, the patient will be rewarded. The second is *ṣabr ‘an ‘il-masīah*: patience with God’s prohibitions. “People enjoy alcohol, and you want to (drink), but you have to be patient And you will have it in Paradise, a better one.” Lutfi also mentions gambling and earning “easy money.” The third is *ṣabr ‘alā qadar Allah*: being patient with Allah’s Destiny/Decree. “If you’re injured ..., you can’t complain but (should) ... accept it.” Whether one has “financial problems” or “lots of kids,” says Lutfi, one has to be patient. “According to Muslims, ... you have to accept whatever happens to you, (even) when calamity strikes.” He hastens to add that this does not mean “being passive.” One has to act, while surrendering to the reality of things effected through Divine Decision (C019). To Lutfi, *ṣabr* is a veritable practice, meant to discipline the will in various instances. Having patience in acts of worship (*ṣabr ‘alā al-Ṭā’a*) means turning the routine hardships of *salat* into pleasure. The patience to restrain from sin (*ṣabr ‘an ‘il-masīah*) likewise requires cultivation, the ability to recognize evil, and to resist its attraction. The third form that is most explicit about the disciplining of the will: not mere endurance of difficulty, but difficulty as Decreed by Allah (see 4.1 and 4.2). While everyone undergoes calamity, the believer should see the difficulty as an opportunity to worship Allah by willful surrender to His Decree.

Mamoon, a stately and candid retired imam from Copenhagen, says that Allah leaves the wrongdoer “in his choice;” He makes him “face his own destiny.” Destiny, concludes the imam, “is not for the silly people” (C041). On the one hand, the concept of *al-Qaḍā’ wa al-Qadar* posits the self as unfree; on the other, it supposes the reality of freedom. The key notion makes it possible to bring out precisely the freedom of the Muslim subject in relationship to events, which is the terrain of ethics. Human freedom is not conceived in terms of liberation from power, but as exercised within a radical relation of power, in a way reminiscent of Foucault’s thought on the matter (Foucault [1984b] 1997, 300).

31 See 2:45; 2:250; 7:126; 12:83; 14:12; 16:127; 18:72; 22:35; 46:35; 47:31; 103:3; etc.

In this sense, human freedom involves the freedom to shape oneself into the moral subject one wishes to become (see 4.2 and 5.2).

As a last note, there is the idea of ‘changing’ fate (as *naṣīb*). Fadil mentions that Muslims have ways to “seek refuge from all the bad things that *should* happen for us” (C015). He tells me about *Laylati al-Qadri* (the Night of Power/Destiny), occurring towards the end of the Ramadan (Q97:1–5). This is the night Muhammad received the first verses, and it is also the time when Allah reveals His annual Decree to the Angels, who descend to earth and spread His Command. This is when Allah’s Mercy and Forgiveness are most abundant.

Every year, in the Ramadan, we have night we call *Laylati al-Qadri*, Allah sends the Decisions for that year down to earth. All the deaths that should happen, all the car accidents, the births, everything! ... We can, with our freedom, change what is coming down, by saying ‘oh God, if you have decided for me, a car accident, ... I seek refuge.’ Then (maybe) it will not happen. (C015)

We can start to see how the kind of freedom Fadil refers to is more than the mere capacity for choice; it displays an aura of privilege resulting from the Covenant between Allah and humankind (*al-Amānata*).

2.6 *Act as If You Were Not Free!*

What is the function of *Qadar* in Islamic discourse? I already mentioned Ruda’s characterization of freedom as a ‘signifier of disorientation’ and oppression. In *Abolishing Freedom*, the philosopher (2016a, 10) shows how “the most (in)famous rationalists in Western philosophy ... were not only defenders of reason and freedom but also defenders of predestination, divine providence, and fate.” Ruda (2016a, 9) finds that fatalism is not only a means of “countering indifference and the identification of freedom with a given capacity,” but also as the very precondition for articulating the proper concept of freedom. Indeed, “divine predestination becomes a conceptual, therapeutic tool to get rid of mythic conceptions of freedom” (Ruda 2016b). To the philosopher (2016a, 71), one ‘fatalistic axiom’ that is useful for the ‘ideological battle’ in a time where ‘freedom’ creates more problems than solutions is: “*Act as if you were not free!*” Paradoxically, “this is a liberating shift because it puts us subjectively in the position we are actually in” (Ruda 2016b). Bottom line, the notion of Destiny can be a preparatory step for a proper endorsement of freedom. Ruda (2016a, 36) argues we need to “embrace the truth that everything is always already lost, that this is our fate.” He recuperates Luther’s exchanges with Erasmus on free

will to point out the former's idea that free choice, for all its accomplishments, is nothing in the sight of God. When we lose sight of this, "we assume human-divine cooperation, a 'division of labor,' which makes faith into a gigantic capitalist enterprise, with God as its charming, moderating boss" (Ruda 2016a, 36).

As I have shown, belief in Destiny does not, for Danish Muslims, imply having no influence over personal fate; while 'salvation' (or safety, see 5.2) is ultimately granted by Allah's grace, humans have a 'power' in freedom. Nevertheless, Ruda's point is not so much to negate freedom, but to affirm a practice of unfreedom. His perspective can help us understand the link between freedom, Destiny, and Allah as a Master "who delivers you to the abyss of your freedom" (Žižek 2018b). A fatalist, to Ruda (2016b), "gives up any myth of the givenness of freedom and assumes that he will never be free unless something happens to him that will force him to be free." This is not a condemnation to passivity, because the very act of undoing this assumption takes great effort. On the ground, belief in Destiny results in everything *but* the immobilizing fatalism some scholars associate with Islam (see Elder 1966). Many scholars of Islam have rebuked Max Weber's speculations on Islamic predestination,³² and showed how, in Muslim communities around the world, belief in individual destiny and *al-Qadā' wa al-Qadar* often spurs believers to action (Eickelman 1976; Hamdy 2009; Gaibazzi 2012; Menin 2015). Alice Elliot (2016, 488), for instance, shows how the precept of predestination compels young Moroccan women "to act in the human world in view of a future that has already been divinely determined." Belief in Destiny becomes a way in which Islam is drawn into the fabric of everyday practice/concern, even with those who seem to transgress the religious domain. For Elliot's interlocutors, this amounts, for example, to the use of makeup; for mine, a car accident (C018) or a household argument (C025).

To conclude, the affirmation of destiny/fatalism/predestination by various religious and philosophical traditions might guard against an understanding of freedom as capacity, with its potential, as a 'signifier of disorientation,' to foster oppression and abuse. The insistence that the 'givenness of freedom' breeds anxiety, and in the Islamic case an emphasis on patience and gratitude, can thus be understood as an effective ethical guideline preventing freedom's destructive dimension.

32 In *The Protestant Ethic*, Weber ([1905] 2001, 185) for instance asserted Islamic predestination fixed ordinary events in a person's life: "the Mohammedan idea was that of predetermination, not predestination, and was applied to fate in this world, not in the next" (see also Weber [1921] 1978, 1:574).

3 Planning and Attracting

Two important themes in Danish Muslim-talk concern Allah's planning the direction of life, and attracting humanity to Him. With regard to 'planning,' one should distinguish between the following: the 'masterplan' written in the aforementioned *al-Lauh al-Mahfūz*, which amounts to *al-Qadar*; the 'cunning' Plot/Scheme (*Makr*) described in the Quran;³³ and the general guile, plan, strategy, plot (*kayd* or *makr*), of either Allah,³⁴ or the Quranic 'villains' (the unbelievers, betrayers, and Iblis).³⁵ While, at least in foundational texts, the term '*makara*' generally denotes plotting/planning, one is consistently reminded that all kinds of human planning happen *within* Allah's Masterplan (Q14:46). Moreover, Allah's Planning sometimes has threatening undertones (Q7:99), while at others it is (tentatively) reassuring (Q7:82–83).³⁶

With regard to the second theme, Allah as 'attracting,' there is a basic notion in Islam that comes up everywhere—from conversations, to sermons, to scriptures: *fiṭrah*. The term has no exact English equivalent, but refers to an untainted primordial human nature. According to Islamic tradition, human beings are born with a series of attributes, including an innate sense of compassion, intelligence, excellence in worship (*ʾihsān*), and, most importantly, an inclination towards the Oneness of Allah (*tawḥīd*). Besides these natural attributes, the notion of *fiṭrah* implies that, from birth, man is free from sin, subjugation, and inherited, ancestral evils. Although across life this 'blank slate' is tainted in many ways, man has always the possibility of embracing Islam and thereby 'reverting' to her original *fiṭrah* (see Q30:30). In short, the term denotes a Divine Design to which humans should conform; breaking the pattern of 'corruption' is possible, and human freedom plays a crucial role.³⁷

3.1 "I Recognized Allah through the Failure of My Plans"

Danish Muslims speak of Allah's Plan as a distinct phenomenon. Ultimately, this Plan is nothing else than the Decree/Destiny (*al-Qadar*), and yet the terms

33 See 7:99; 10:21; 13:42; 27:50.

34 *Makr* Allah is all-encompassing and inscrutable: "They plotted and planned, but We too planned, even while they perceived it not" (Q27:50 YA). see 7:183; 68:45.

35 See 3:120; 4:76; 7:195; 8:18; 12:52; 40:25; 52:42; 77:39; 86:15; etc.

36 See 3:178; 7:183, 22:48, 68:45. Here as elsewhere, Allah gives respite (*āmlā*), in the sense of hope, rest, relief, or simply prolonging time. *Um'li* is also applied once to Iblis, as giving "false hope" (47:25).

37 Furthermore, the human intellectual and spiritual inclination towards Allah and 'the good' is established even before birth, in the Covenant (*al-Amānata*) Allah took with humanity even prior to their existence on earth. See 7:172.

are not used interchangeably. Whenever there is talk of the Divine Plan, there is emphasis on the subordinacy of human planning, and mention of a teleology of misfortune. It is not enough to say Allah has willed/knows one's fortune; there must be a purpose—anticipation of a splendid yet hidden destination. Then there is the idea of 'feeling secure' in the Plan of Allah, which, in one sense, is meant for the damned (Q7:99). The believer can never be sure of her final destination, not even before *Jannah's* gates. Feeling secure means being unaware of one's inferior position vis-à-vis Allah, and thus doomed to spiritual regression. The pious Muslim must put her trust in Allah's Plan (*tawakkul*). Nabil, who has worked as an imam in Danish hospitals, explains in how Muslim patients deal with all this:

Questions on free will, predetermination, fatalism, all these things are very much alive in the discussions and in the world of hospitals. Because here you have the question about meaning: 'why me? I've been a good Muslim all my life, why did I get cancer? If God is good, and if I have a free will, and I've lived my life as a good, healthy, active Muslim, then why did I get this?' And then: 'has God already pre-planned my disease, so can I do something about it or should I just be passive and wait until I die?' ... hospital staff ... sometimes feel Muslim patients are a bit passive during care. ... I tend to link that with the notion of predestination and fatalism in Islam, (which) can be very powerful in some families. (C037)

The questions posed by Muslim patients, and Nabil's efforts to handle and 'translate' them to the staff, speak to the perplexities that come with discerning Allah's mysterious Plan, and the difficulty of trusting in extreme situations. I do not want to probe the social dynamics behind this, nor the ethical questions involved, but merely to show the presence of certain preoccupations.

Allah's Destiny and Plan both function as reference points in relation to which 'disease' must gain meaning—a fitting place in the chain of signification. Muslim patients attempt to make sense of their illness in relation to their interpretative repertoire. Freedom, *Qadar*, and Allah's Plan, are notions that spontaneously emerge in the effort. Nabil, as the available religious authority, receives such questions and helps his interlocutors connect the dots. He then teaches the hospital staff how to make sense of Muslim patients' "passivity" by explaining common Muslim concepts and reference points. These points do not need to be correct (consistent with orthodox theology) and Nabil laments that some families lay too much emphasis on fatalistic interpretations. Nabil's story has a striking resemblance to that of Sherin Khankan, who provides what

she calls an Islamic ‘*sjaelesorg*’ (pastoral/soul care) through the *Exit Circle* and Mariam Mosque.³⁸ She writes about a woman who came for advice about her traumatic past with an abusive husband and the related death of a child:

As I’m addressing a believer, I apply the technique of ‘Islamic spiritual care,’ one of the hallmarks of Mariam Mosque. ... I comfort the woman by telling her ... that in Islam, death is established by fate and is an inescapable fact. Such words ... have the power to comfort those who are grieving.³⁹ (D063)

While nescience about Allah’s Plan can be disconcerting in cases of misfortune, it also ‘proves’ the limits of human will. Fadil likes to stress that, whatever one does, one cannot “come out” of Allah’s Will; all the tools one uses to fulfill one’s choices are created: “(in) *everything* I decide, you will see God’s Will.” This means that one can see Divine Will and His Plan in actualized decisions. Fadil takes his being late for our appointment that night as an example: “We made an appointment for some time ago, ... but just today my friend (went into labor). You get it.” Apparently Allah Willed our meeting to occur half an hour later. “So in life, you can plan for the future, you can plan but ...” only those plans that agree with Allah’s Will and Plan become reality. To illustrate his point further, Fadil comes up with another of his “wise man” stories, in this case probably Muhammad’s cousin and companion Ali (ibn Abi Talib):

A wise man was once asked: ‘how do you know God exists?’ He said: ‘I know God exists because every time I see my plan fail. I plan to do something, and I fail on it. That shows me God’s Will, because I plan to be in a place and He Plans something else for me. I am so limited, I can’t fulfill my plans, I can’t decide what to do tomorrow.’ So every time I see I am in a place I shouldn’t be (I know) it’s God’s Will.⁴⁰ (C015)

38 The *Exit Circle* is an NGO Khankan founded in 2014 that offers self-help groups for women and girls subjected to psychological abuse. In 2016 she founded the Mariam Mosque in Copenhagen, as well as *Femimam*.

39 Sherin Khankan, *Women Are the Future of Islam: A Memoir of Hope* (London: Rider, 2018), page 142.

40 The story is also transmitted by various Shia scholars, for instance al-Ṣaduq (d. 991) in *The Book of Divine Unity*. In it, Imam Ali is asked how he “recognized” God, to which he replies: “I recognized God through revoking the determinations and breaking the intentions” (Mumisa and Dhalla 2013).

There is also a short version of the quote in circulation on social media: “I recognized Allah through the breaking/failure of my plans.” The point is that the thwarting of personal plans can be an instrument of faith, confirming the superiority of the Divine Plan. The inscrutability of Allah’s Plan extends to events appearing unfortunate, or even evil. All these happen in Allah’s creation and under His supervision; humans simply lack the foresight/understanding to grasp the ultimate import of events. To support this view, Kareem comes up with another wise-man story:

The wise man’s son was away and he came back with, like, 10 horses. All the people in the village were like: ‘Ooh! You should be happy! ...’ He said: ‘How do you know that ... it’s a good thing?’ The next day his son was trying to ... tame the horses, then he fell, ... and broke his leg. All the people were like: ‘Ooh, poor son!’ ... The father said: ‘How do you know that it’s a bad thing?’ Then there was war, the next day, the whole village was going out on a war. The son didn’t go because he broke his leg. All the young people ... were killed. Then the father said: ‘Aha! Now you know why it was a good thing that he broke his leg.’ ... It’s rare you can see the meaning of things right away. ... But if you keep things in mind, you will ... will find the link. (C018)

It appears the story actually comes from the Daoist tradition, and is retold in everything from Ted Talks to Hollywood movies. The important thing to notice is that this is not about acts/decisions, which are governed by sharia, but occurrences beyond one’s control, which includes even the possibility of human belief in Allah.⁴¹ Descriptions of *Qadar* definitely echo this idea of uncontrollable circumstance, and involve reminders of human nescience. This limitation in understanding is directly related to the limitations of human freedom. Fadil is very clear about this point: “We only say that this is God’s Will *after it happens*. I can’t use it as an ... excuse or a weapon, ... because you are *not a prophet*.” Everyone has “the freedom to choose what to do. But you don’t, can’t decide the circumstances. ... Your will is *limited*. ... it comes *under God’s Will*” (C015).

The notion of an inscrutable Divine Plan constitutes the condition of possibility for a range of statements on human freedom, in a different way than *Qadar* does. These very mundane examples illustrate the concrete impact of discursive mechanics on one’s life: from cancer to tardiness, every event is an opportunity to recognize Allah’s planning. However, this recognition cannot

41 See 2:7; 6:25; 6:39; 6:111; 18:28; 19:83; etc.

take place without the right knowledge and interpretative repertoire—one has to be ‘primed’ to make sense of the events.

3.2 “Each Person Is Created with a Pure Primordial Nature”

The reason it makes sense to speak of ‘attraction’ is that, whatever faulty decisions they make, humans are always drawn to the untainted, primordial nature designed by Allah. It is the baseline from which all start, and everything eventually returns to Allah as Gatherer/Unifier (*al-Jāmi‘*).⁴² In one of his *khuṭbah* at the *Dansk Islamisk Center* in Copenhagen, Abdul Wahid Pedersen adopts the understanding of *fiṭrah* as nature in order to contrapose the agency of humans to that of angels:

Allah chose to create the angels in such a way that they will always obey Allah. ... They are just like animals that can only act in accordance with their *fiṭrah*. On the other hand, man was created in a different way, and can among other things acquire knowledge. The angels have the knowledge that Allah has encoded into them, like a program on a computer. There is a fixed amount of data with which they can perform some specific tasks, and nothing beyond this. (S002)

Sometimes, *fiṭrah* is understood as an instinct, a kind of intrinsic guidance (*hidāyat at-takwīnī*) that allows one to discern truth in the midst of life’s myriad sensory and mental perceptions. Presupposing the faculty of reason, it is specifically human. The intrinsic rational and spiritual inclinations with which humans are endowed (in contrast to e.g., social or political inclinations) generally manifest in a search for truth. This search is accompanied by a sense of the sacred, the aesthetic, and the moral, thus distinguishing humans from the lower animal world. Lutfi says something to this effect in one of our first conversations:

I feel like the human person has, in him, a search. ... “Who made this world? What is my purpose?” Everybody has it. And in their lives, at some point, they start looking for this. Some try to block it with other things, ... TV shows, everything to just go away from that. Sometimes alcohol, sometimes drugs. Some find it, some don’t. It’s normal. (C019)

Again, there is a reference to some kind of natural drive, in this case a felt need to repair a deep-seated lack. Lutfi interprets destructive behavior as the con-

42 See 3:9 3:25; 3:9; 4:87; 4:140; 34:26; 45:26; 64:9; 75:3; 77:38; etc.

sequence of ignoring the “search.” To him, these questions, and sense of lack, are instruments that Allah uses to draw persons to Himself. All obstacles to this attraction are distractions, temporary attempts to hinder the spiritual journey, i.e. the return to purity.

So, on the one hand, *fiṭrah* involves the idea that humans are born in a pure state, free from subjugation/sin, while, on the other, it points to an attraction—an instinctive movement toward that lost state. When it comes to the Danish Shia community, Hussain quotes (C049) Grand Ayatollah Sobhani (2001, 9) conveying a similar idea: “Each person is created with a pure primordial nature (*fiṭrah*) and with the consciousness of the Divine Oneness, such that were he continuously to develop this intrinsic nature, avoiding all tendencies that militate against it, he would inevitably find his way to the ultimate Truth.” No one, to both Hussain and Sobhani, is born sinful. “All impurity and indecency arise from contingent factors, being the result of extraneous elements combined with the exercise of free will.”

The instinctive/intuitive character of *fiṭrah* is important to stress since it is what keeps one on (or leads one back to) the Straight Path. All this implies that *fiṭrah* is corruptible; maintaining its ‘purity’ requires a continuous voluntary surrender/submission to the Will of Allah. Humans can mute their natural inclination, neglecting to submit to Allah’s Guidance. In a later chapter, I will speak of ‘spiritual combat’ (see 4.2) and the drama of the soul struggling with itself and striving for salvation (4.2 and 5.2). I will argue that *fiṭrah* functions as one of the discursive conditions for statements on this struggle and its attendant articulations of freedom. It allows for metaphors involving a ‘return’ to a primordial state (3.3), and claims about the true nature/origins of the human spirit. It lays, in other words, the groundwork for the cultivated relinquishing of the will (3.2 and 4.2).

3.3 *Dethroning the Human*

The Quran is blatantly unapologetic about the absolute truth it establishes: “Truth stands out clear from Error” (2:256:5–9 YA). Several of my interlocutors hold that this ‘truth’ is not some ineffable mystical experience, but a concrete rationale. Allah does not come alone: In revealing Himself to humanity through His prophets and signs, He brings *al-dīnu al-qayimu*, the correct/straight/right religion of Islam (Q30:30:3–4), as well as a wide range of provisions meant to assist the believer in the spiritual progression towards success/safety (Q91:7–10). Admittedly, this attitude is characteristic of certain neo-orthodox Muslim environments, and is questioned by those that see doubt as a bigger part of their religious life (Suhr 2019, 48, 68).⁴³

43 In using the term ‘neo-orthodox,’ I follow Christian Suhr’s (2019, 7) example of avoiding

Yet if Islam is as explicit as many of the Muslims I worked with say it is, what is there left to elucidate? Surely, what keeps social scientists occupied is not a supposedly straightforward revelation, but the cultivated adherence to its message, its creative application to new circumstances, and all this entails. From this perspective, in speaking the jargon, practicing the rituals, and uttering the *shahādah* each and every day, Muslims are not only acknowledging, and committing themselves to, the Divine and His Prophet Muhammad; they are also consenting to a vast power-knowledge complex, encompassing a determinate framework of meaning, a set of proper articulations, and a range of legitimate techniques of the self. Islam, after all, involves various forms of scientific, professional, and lay knowledge. As Foucault (1975; 1976; 1983) reminds us, power and knowledge reinforce/legitimize each other: power emerges from knowledge, knowledge is reproduced and ordered by power. Relations of power-knowledge, in Islam (as elsewhere), are decentralized, ubiquitous, and dynamic. They are not the monopoly of religious authorities, and their configurations change over time.

In responding to Allah's call, asserting one's subaltern position in relation to Him, recognizing that Truth stands out clear from Error, a process is set in motion by which one's subjectivity becomes absorbed in a colossal meaning-producing apparatus. One takes place, as it were, in a formation which moves quite independently of individual human will and intent, engulfing and producing everything from poetry to architecture. No matter how vague its contours and fast its transmutations, this formation cannot avoid exhibiting a determinate shape in a particular time/place. In other words, when it comes to what an individual, *as Muslim*, can legitimately say about a topic, not everything goes. Certain utterances are demonstrably inaccurate; others are plainly nonsensical. They are nonsensical from a discursive point of view: they are unsuccessful in propagating among the Muslim community, they do not elicit recognition. Conversely, certain 'successful' articulations are lyrical in their capacity to synthesize a vast notion; still others are plainly blasphemous. What are the consequences of this outlook for an ethnography of Muslim-talk?

"any valuation or judgment" as to whether Islam in contemporary 'reformist' or 'revivalist' movements is "literally being 'reformed' or 'revived' or whether it is in fact a matter of Muslims attempting to return to a more original and authentic state of pious practice." Suhr performed his fieldwork in some of the same environments as I did, and his interlocutors, like many of mine, took the latter position. For them, Islam can never be reformed: it is given by Allah as a universal and unchangeable set of directions.

Similarly to Fernando (2014, 26), who, echoing Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003), distinguished between an object of study and one of observation, Muslim citizens are not my main object of study, but they remain a critical site of ethnographic observation. In a way, through commitment individuals can become absorbed by discursive formations; formations which subsequently inform their utterances, actions, and creations. This perspective implies a departure from the kind of humanism which takes the individual as the principal source of knowledge, meaning, and history; a humanism which locks down a series of assumptions about 'human freedom' and 'human nature'.

I believe that such a displacement is necessary, first of all, because the battle for the preservation of the sovereignty of the subject against the decentering operated by Marxism has long been lost (Foucault [1969] 2002, 14). As Foucault (1966) observed more than fifty years ago, studies in psychoanalysis, linguistics, and anthropology have built on this outcome and *decentered* the subject "in relation to the laws of its desire, the forms of its language, the rules of its actions, or the play of its mythical and imaginative discourse" (Culler [1981] 2001, 37). Secondly, this displacement is our best means of reckoning with an Islamic view of human freedom which, in many ways, dethrones the 'human' as a source in itself, as demonstrated in this and the next chapter. Notwithstanding the Marxist decentering, modern academic methodologies and terminology were still forged in an *épistémè* where 'the human' is taken to be the measure of all things. The traces of this humanism are omnipresent, and might hinder an anthropological study of a theocentric religion. Perhaps a cautiously anti-humanist outlook can be more effective in bringing out the religious logic espoused by the Muslim community.

By establishing discourse as the object of study, rather than pre-discursive experience, the relevance of individuals shifts toward the various subject-positions they take, in a bracketing of a perceived coherent identity. Rapport and Overing (2014, 120) formulated this point well when stating that, from this viewpoint, one sees social life as the playing out of impersonal and largely unconscious systems of signification, in which "collective discourses or forms of life are seen to cause to be true or 'real' certain constructions of the world and its components, as well as instituting a set of knowledge-practices with inevitable ties to a mastery of power." In other words, write Rapport and Overing, it is language which "discourses," not individual speakers, and they only speak "to the extent that they respond to (and correspond with) the conventional discursive forms of their language."

Theoretically, one could go a step further: linguistic expression reveals and reproduces power-knowledge, and the subjectivities of its human speakers can

be considered discursive effects. According to Jonathan Culler ([1981] 2001, 37), “as the self is broken down into component systems, deprived of its status as source and master of meaning, it comes to seem more and more like a construct: a result of systems of convention.” To Culler, “even the idea of personal identity emerges through the discourse of a culture: the ‘I’ is not something given but comes to exist as that which is addressed by and relates to others.” The discursive formation’s unifying principle is not the community, the individuals themselves, or even an overarching concept; it is rather the regularity of dispersion exhibited by the articulations, practices, and materiality of which it is composed. A discourse does not ‘belong’ to individuals; individuals belong to a discourse, locating their selfhood in relation to its rules and truths.⁴⁴

On the other hand, these theoretical ruminations should not hinder a pragmatic ethnography of Muslim-talk in which Muslim individuals are, when it is all said and done, the living protagonists. The point is to abandon any expectation of consistency from Muslim interlocutors, and focus on each statement as if coming from a distinct speaker. By tracing each statement as a point in the discursive field we might then get an idea of their dispersion, and possibly start to discern a coherent monologue uttered by a collectivity of thousands of individuals.

Upon seeing the Danish branch of the militant and uncompromising Hizb ut-Tahrir party quoted side by side with reserved Sufi practitioners, anyone familiar with the Danish context would rightly protest that ‘Danish Muslims’ is an extremely heterogeneous category. Even when looking at Aarhus—with its circa 350,000 inhabitants—we find a dozen different mosques, most dedicated to a specific ethnic minority or tradition. Kühle (2006; Kühle and Larsen 2019) has mapped this diversity in her studies of Danish mosques, and others highlighted it in various publications (Simonsen 2006; M.H. Pedersen and Rytter 2011; J.S. Nielsen 2012). I argue that one cannot start from the presupposition that (partial) ethnic segregation is equivalent to discursive distinction. The point of being one *ummah* is that all members can identify with at least one thing: being someone who has willingly surrendered to the Will of Allah. In short, the task is to emphasize some of the shared conceptual conditions of possibility for Muslim statements on freedom.

Clearly, Danish Muslim communities are diverse, and flesh-and-blood individuals participate in several discrete or overlapping ‘speech communities’ just as they participate in a diversity of social settings (Hymes 1972). The individ-

44 In a way, this discursive belonging is inevitable. As Lacan (1981) argued, having certain points of reference is necessary for a ‘normal’ neurotic experience.

ual's strategy of communication will determine the community with which she chooses to engage at any moment; so too the rules she abides by. As ethnographies of communication have repeatedly shown, each member of a given community has a certain "repertoire of social identities," and "each identity in a given context is associated with a number of appropriate verbal and nonverbal forms of expression" (Saville-Trocker 2003, 17). One task is then to identify the various social categories a community recognizes, and to show how these are reflected in linguistic forms—defining and constraining how members interact in their reciprocal communication(s).

3.4 *Allah as the Ultimate Master*

I started this chapter by addressing Allah's 'self-description,' using Laclau's work to argue that, in order to keep the chain of equivalence intact, utterances on Divine Nature must observe the differential peculiarity of each Name while avoiding their collapse into unity. I argued that the *'asmā'u allahī* have the effect of confirming human subjectivity, underpinning the central Muslim ethic of submission (see 3.2). I then proposed the binary *al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar* as a central node in Muslim-talk on freedom. Lastly, I invoked the theme of *fiṭrah* and its role in Allah's Plan. The point of outlining these notions and substantiating them with examples from the field is to prepare the ground for a description of the way that Islam, as ideology, interpellates individuals, transforming them into subjects. They are milestones towards making sense of how Islam calls individuals separately and 'by their name,' eliciting a sort of *recognition*, an acknowledgment that she does, and always did, occupy that 'designated' place (see 3.3).

If we are to grasp why and how Danish Muslims practice a surrendering of the will and speak of freedom in the ways they do, we must first posit the Lacanian 'big Other' (Žižek 1997; [1989] 2008) functioning as silent Witness—recipient of the ethical endeavor. Human will could not be relinquished without the presence of an all-encompassing Will enabling such dissolution. It is not enough for the Islamic discourse to contain the notion of an all-powerful Other; it must qualify this alterity to 'mirror' the ethical work. Of course, any Muslim would argue the inverse: it is precisely because one gains awareness of Allah, and recognizes His qualities, that one spontaneously and willingly 'surrenders' to His Power. This, however, does not really contradict the need for a transcendental signifier, through whose inversion the subject can experience the radical limitation of the categories structuring her perception of reality and sense of confinement to the world.

In terms of discourse theory, we could say that Allah's qualities place Him beyond the limits of the signifying system, beyond which meaning fails. In a

sense, in Muslim discourse Allah functions as the limit allowing for constitution of a signifying system, and at the same time blocking its expansion. As Laclau (1996, 37) put it, albeit in a different context:

We can say, with Hegel, that to think of the limits of something is the same as thinking of what is beyond those limits. But if what we are talking about are the limits of a signifying system, it is clear that those limits cannot be themselves signified, but have to show themselves as the interruption or breakdown of the process of signification. Thus, we are left with the *paradoxical* situation that what constitutes the condition of possibility of a signifying system—its limits—is also what constitutes its condition of impossibility—a blockage of the continuous expansion of the process of signification.

Paradoxically, symbolic authority—the big Other—must remain unknown in order to function. It is actual *only* as Unknown. If it is fully actualized as a real force in the world it would undermine itself, lose its grip on the subject. In Islamic terms, it observes, and draws power from, the unseen (*al-Ghayb*): the ambiguous locus of pure potential, inaccessible and inscrutable, naturally expressed in contradictory ways (see Bubandt, Rytter, and Suhr 2019). From the subject's viewpoint, Allah is discursively 'confined' to 'the dominion of the unseen,' the ideal position for the subjection-inducing gaze. Anthropologists suggesting to "write from a place of *al-ghayb*" (Mittermaier 2019, 30) might, in this sense, unwittingly unleash a new form of ethnographic authority, upsetting the religious rationale and power dynamic.

Human freedom is always-already something gifted, limited, part of a greater Design, employed for self-subjection. This is the effect of what Žižek ([1989] 2008, 113) has called the *logic of transference*: "the illusion that the meaning of a certain element (which was retroactively fixed by the intervention of the master-signifier) was present in it from the very beginning as its immanent essence." Rather than 'illusion,' I prefer to see it as a discursive effect, a necessary outcome by which we can measure the success of the 'quilting' operation. If 'Islam,' as master-signifier, were to fail in quilting the signifier's chain, fixing the meaning of an empty signifier like freedom, and interpellating the Muslim subject, there would not be much to describe. To whom is this an illusion? Certainly not to my interlocutors. As for me, I can only observe the success of Islamic ideology, the efficiency of its discursive mechanisms, and take the meanings it creates as matter of fact, regardless of their truth-value. They exist; they are localizable in a conceptual network; individuals express them on a daily basis.

I hope we can now intuit something about the intricate dialectic of freedom and servitude at the heart of Islam. This dialectic will resurface later, culminating in the discussion of safety/salvation (see 5.2). Allah is the Ultimate Master (*al-Muhayminu*) the individual needs to become who she is. There is a sense in which this Ultimate Master shows the believer the way out of Plato's cave: "The exit from the cave begins when one of the prisoners is not only freed from his chains (as Heidegger shows this is not at all enough to liberate him from the libidinal attachment to the shadows), but when he is forced out." Allah the Master "who does neither tell me precisely what to do nor one whose instrument I could become," but one who just "gives me back to myself," a master who "affirms or makes it possible for me to affirm that 'I can do this,' without telling me what this is and thus without telling me (too much of) who I am" (Ruda in Žižek 2019, 260–261). As Žižek (2018b) put it in an interview:

A master is a vanishing mediator who gives you back to yourself, who delivers you to the abyss of your freedom. When we listen to a true leader, we discover what we want (or, rather, what we "always-already" wanted without knowing it). The more we live as "free individuals with no master," the more we are effectively non-free, caught within the existing frame of possibilities. We have to be pushed or disturbed into freedom by a master.

To my interlocutors, *Al-Muhayminu* is, of course, more than the "vanishing mediator" Žižek envisions. Still, the parallel is striking. In a way, according to the Muslim narrative, Allah does deliver humankind to the abyss of their freedom, giving "real freedom" as opposed to the superficial ability "to do or say anything," without limitations and virtually without responsibility (W031). Most of all, His presence allows each to discover what one "always-already" is: Muslim, willingly submitted.

Willing Submission

Surrounded, Surrendered, Already Muslim

My regular presence in the mosque and participation in the rituals has led Hatim, a well-connected and enterprising young Muslim from Aarhus, to believe my interest in his religion is more than academic. My questions have also convinced him that I need “expert answers,” which is why he has arranged a meeting with Fadil, a respected and knowledgeable member of the community. On a windy winter evening, in the backroom of a mosque on the outskirts of town, I have a long, intense conversation with the Danish-Somali imam, while Hatim witnesses the exchange. We have just finished the *ṣalāh al-‘ishā’* (night prayer), and Fadil is talking at length about human dependency on Allah. The imam explains that, as a Muslim, he knows he is always acting within Allah’s domain:

“I can’t get free from God. Because if I could get free from God, I could decide whether I live or not. ... If I can’t stop death, I’m not free of God’s Will, because I can’t ...” He pauses. “One of the verses in the Quran says: ‘... every human being wants to live longer.’ But it’s not your decision. ... God makes us come in this world as children, weak, then we become stronger, and then we go back to weakness again and die. If you see the cycle of life, you see that you are not (in control). You don’t have the freedom (you think you have).” Speaking of marriage, Fadil notes that people often meet their partner “in a place one shouldn’t be,” meaning a place unforeseen. “It’s not like you knew each other before you came to this world. There are many people that live in loneliness, ... and others that meet each other, she is from China and he is from India, and they met in the airport.” All this stands to show, the imam insists, “there is many things in life you can’t control.”

Having named all sorts of human limitations and inexplicable coincidences, Fadil seems to have found the formulation he was looking for: “*So I am*, whether I want it or not, *surrounded by God’s Will*. Believers or non-believers, they are all in this world, surrounded by God’s Will, ... it’s like, *all* the situations you come to in life, are created by God. And you can say, as a person, ‘Ok, this is true ..., I am not my own creator, I don’t have my own will. As in totally free will.’ And then, when you acknowledge it, then you say: ‘Ok, there must be a higher power.’ And there is where God comes in the picture” (C015).

The imam's explanations and *khutbah* are filled with catchy figures of speech and other literary devices, which coupled with his fervor make him an effective speaker. He masters the ethos, pathos, and logos necessary to convince an audience: the first comes from his studies (he is both *ḥāfiẓ* and physician), the second from his ability to empathize and leverage his interlocutor's experience and emotion, the third from his constant use of examples and exhortations to see the logic of his reasoning. Moreover, his points always sound familiar to someone who has been exposed to Islamic thought.

The Andalusian mystic Ibn Arabi (d. 1240) famously states in *The Meccan Revelations* that humans are "compelled in their free choice." In the hereafter, wherever one ends up, humans will "lose their freedom of choice and return to worship through their essences" (in Chittick 2012, 224). The aphorisms of the revered Sufi master still resonate with many today. Human beings are free vis-à-vis other creatures, but not in relation to the Creator: like all else, they live to serve. Fadil is not a Sufi practitioner, but he formulates his thoughts on the matter in a way that would likely meet Ibn Arabi's approval. This idea of being "surrounded" is revealing in its discursive accuracy. When I repeated Fadil's expression to other Muslim acquaintances, it produced immediate flashes of recognition. Seeing how the statement strongly resonates with Muslims from other environments is not only indicative of the imam's effectiveness as culture broker (Antoun 1989; Gaffney 1994, 52), but also of how fast the articulatory practice of establishing relations between elements in the discourse can be. "This expands my knowledge," stated Lutfi, after hearing of Fadil's phrasing (C023); in the next conversation, he would start using it himself (C031).

The notion that human agency operates within Allah's Domain is not just an ontological claim—i.e. that His will is all, being *de facto* the only Reality—but also a metaphysical one, for it dictates the rules governing this Reality and stresses their binding nature. Yet, through the privilege/burden of freedom, human beings play a role in the actualization of alternate ontological possibilities: *Yawm ad-Dīn* (Day of Judgment), *Jannah* (paradise), *Jahannam* (hell), etc. By issuing commands, Allah introduces factors that require humans to take responsibility for the shaping of their own moral/spiritual destiny. The ubiquity of Divine Will also has direct implications for what constitutes a wrongful act: 'wrongfulness' becomes a misperception of the natural order of things, a misunderstanding of one's place in the Divine Scheme. Humans are prone to forget the inscrutable forces that buffer their choices, and 'sin' manifests in moments of heedlessness, effecting a sort of dissonance with reality. This is of course only the case of sin in the sense of mistake or moral lapse (*khaṭī'ah*), and not in that of *dhanb*, *jurm*, *junāḥ*, *ḥaraj*, or *'ithm*, heinous and intentional sins/crimes warranting punishment (Izutsu 2002, 241–249).

Maria De Cillis (2014, 227) argues that, almost paradoxically, the aporia of the secret of *al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar*, “despite being destined to be known by God alone,” is plainly manifest in the Quran: “the truth, disclosed for all believers, is encompassed in the totality of the verses which support both ideas of God’s predestination and of humans’ responsibility for their actions.” So Divine Decree/Destiny and human choice/freedom, far from being mutually exclusive, appear complementary. They are, as De Cillis puts it, “embedded in the Islamic credo,” and “expressive of the necessary multiplicity which divides divine and human parameters, the metaphysical, the religious and the mystical outlooks.”

In the previous chapter, I focused on Allah’s self-description as Perfect, Willing, Knowing, Planning, and Attracting—emphasizing His Decree and Destiny as the central notion informing statements on human freedom. Here, I want to relate the ‘proper’ human response to these notions: (a) the acknowledgment of human agency as located within the domain of Divine Will; (b) the imperative to join those who ‘willingly surrender;’ (c) the recognition that one’s will is always-already in ‘submission’ to Allah. In short, this chapter is dedicated to what my interlocutors consider the most natural reaction to the realization aptly formulated by Fadil, and discovery that one was always destined to be among those who submitted to Allah’s Will. In the last section, I will discuss what it means to be always-already Muslim involving Althusser’s notion of *interpellation*, the mechanism by which ideology transforms individuals into subjects.

1 Always Surrounded

There is plenty of contextual evidence for the existence of human agency in the foundational texts.¹ While couched in different terms, we find a basic notion of choice (*aikhtiyār*) and a more ambiguous freedom of the will: a spiritual privilege gifted to humankind (*hurriyyah al-irāda*). At the same time, there is a long list of verses suggesting fatalism,² an apparent paradox which has led to a historically long and divisive discussion on the Quranic tension between free will and determinism (Watt 1946; 1948; De Cillis 2014). Already in late medieval times, a relatively stable consensus had emerged from the age-old theological debate, yet contemporary Danish Muslim-talk exhibits the persistence of its most basic tension. Especially when confronted with articulations of freedom

1 See 4:110–111; 6:104; 10:31; 10:44; 10:108; 13:11; 18:28–29; 25:55; 41:46; 74:38; 76:3, etc.

2 See 2:6–7; 5:21; 6:15; 6:111; 6:125; 7:188; 9:51; 11:34; 16:36; 32:13.

in the public debate, Muslims mine traditional ideas, seeking discursive harmony with their creed. Whenever this gifted/innate form of freedom comes up in speech or writing, it is immediately qualified as *relative* to Allah's Decree—His Will contains all, human choice included—and *restricted* by a range of divine, self-imposed, social boundaries. Notwithstanding these qualifications, free choice is seen as crucial to 'the decision' to submit to Allah's Will, elicited by His presence.

While so prevalent that it is often taken for granted, the notion of *al-Qadā'* requires 'maintenance.' In Danish Muslim-talk, most glide over subtle distinctions between Allah's fore-ordainment, eternal Decree/Power, Destiny, and their temporal operations. After all, Allah's Decree *is* the Destiny of the world. In conversation, Danish Muslims often use the notion of Allah's Desire/Want—in the sense of something He loves/likes and *could* actualize—to stress the sense of Allah as volitional Agent.³ The binary term *al-Qadā' wa al-Qadar*, while crucial, perhaps fails to convey the concretion and intimacy of Allah's everyday interventions. In this section, I want to discuss few of the many ways of articulating the all-encompassing nature of Divine Will and Desire.

1.1 "Allah Has Created You and Your Handwork"

We are two hours into our conversation, and Hatim has just brought some soda cans. Fadil does not need much questioning and often breaks out in passionate monologues, making me feel as if I am witnessing a personalized *khutbah*. At one point, he recounts an instructive story, which clarifies the relationship between Allah's Decree and human will even further:

A person once came to a wise man and said: '... I make many sins, I want to stop sinning! Can you help me?' The wise man said: 'When you sin, then you do something God has forbidden. ... Next time you sin, do it in a place that God did not create. Create your own place, ... go to another place, outside of God's creation.' He said: 'That's impossible! Wherever I stand, is created by God.' He said: ... 'Then I will advise you, while you are doing this thing, ... use God's supplies. Use your own supplies.' He said: 'I can't, because the rain, the food, everything comes from God.' So he said: 'Do it in a place God can't see.' 'I can't ...,' and so on. So it's like, *I can't come out of God's creation*. I am one of God's creations. God created every tool I use. (C015)

3 See 2:185; 5:6; 6:125; 9:85; 10:107; 11:107; 16:40; 17:16; 22:14; 33:17; 39:4; 48:11; 85:16; etc.

Fadil repeats this phrasing—one cannot ‘come out of creation’—throughout our conversation. It is a common trope in Islamic theology, and the main reason why human freedom can only function within boundaries set by Allah. The imam posits that human freedom is limited to how one reacts to different situations; God will reward or punish accordingly. He adds that “God will never ask” the question “why were you there?” Because one could reply “you placed me there!” The question is always “why did you do it?” i.e., a call to responsibility (C015).

Whenever a passage in the Quran nears support of independent agency, a reminder soon follows that Allah Oversees and Evaluates the process of decision, reversion, and reformation. In combination with *al-Muḥayminu* (the Overseer, the Witness), the title of *al-Wālī* (the Protecting Friend) establishes the benevolent character of Allah as Watchful Guardian. Together with His function as ‘Guide,’ this portrays Divine Will as sympathetic to the human plight. The Compassionate and Merciful nature of Allah is relevant to consider if we think of all the times Divine Will seems to trump human freedom. For instance, the common Quranic formula “and not you will, except that wills Allah” continuously reminds the faithful that they cannot will anything Allah does not admit.⁴ In a way, the notion of Allah as Overseer justifies freedom of choice, since it is conceived as an opportunity to elevate oneself and rise in spiritual status.

All these qualities boost the widespread Islamic notion that Divine Will should be understood as encompassing (not negating) human will. In Danish Muslim-talk, this takes the form of statements such as this, by Kareem: “God created you and He gave you the free will, but your free will is not beyond His Will” (C025). Fadil, for his part, states that Allah “didn’t make the decision for you, but He knows what you are gonna decide. ... So *your freedom is not out of God’s control*. You can’t decide anything God doesn’t Want” (C015). When Fadil states that human freedom operates within Allah’s Domain, he sees this as a blessing. For him, the relative quality of freedom is only a problem for those ignorant of Divine Benevolence (*al-Barr*). For his part, Kareem stresses free will as gift, which makes the Gifter (*al-Wahhāb*) the ultimate Owner (*Māliku l-Mulk*).

The quoted statements/verses may lead one to suspect that Allah is not just the Overseer and Controller of human choices, but also their Creator (*al-Khāliq*). Quranic references to Allah as “the Creator of all things” are frequent,⁵

4 See 74:30; 81:29; 74:56; 76:29–30; 87:7; 10:100, etc.

5 See 6:103; 13:16; 25:2; 28:68; 37:96; 39:62; 40:62; 57:22; 59:24; 76:2–3; etc.

but that this does not merely count for all creatures but also the products thereof is debated. This can be perplexing when we read, in some verses, how Allah seems to have designed man to act in certain ways, thereby creating her associated benefits and damages and their due punishments and rewards.⁶ Part of the debate concerns passages confirming or negating the Prophet's will, said to be in perfect harmony with Allah: "It is not ye who slew them; it was Allah: when thou threwest (a handful of dust), it was not thy act, but Allah's ..." (Q8:17 YA). This particular verse appears in the discussion on free will as supporting the idea that the end goal for a Muslim is to adjust their will to the Divine Plan.

Another *āyah*, which I often encountered in discussions on freedom, conveys the idea that Allah created the conditions for man to produce anything in this world, making Him responsible for all human products: "He said: Worship ye that which ye have (yourselves) carved? But Allah has created you and your handwork!" (Q37:95–96 YA).⁷ This verse is the basis for the so-called doctrine of acquisition developed by the Sunni theologian al-Ash'ari (d. 936). Whenever it came up, the verse functioned as a point of reference in arguments concerning the human status as 'mere' creature. "Allah created everyone and their sub-creations," says Basim (C008). Fadil, for his part, explaining how a Muslim can alter their (personal) destiny, argues that in order for the *du'ā'* to work, it must be in line with Allah's Will:

That's also part of free will. That's why we ask God 'can you give us this.' Because with my free will I can. ... But it has to be in harmony with God's Will. Because I am not a master on my own, I don't *own* this earth. This body is given to me, and everything in my hands There is nothing of which I can say: 'this is made by Fadil.' (C015)

Fadil then addresses the "big discussion" around Q37:95, and whether 'handwork' includes actions. On social media, the popular closed group *Den Lige Vej* again reveals how this discussion plays out in partisan conversations among Danish Muslims. Umar remarks in thread about the Mu'tazila that these theologians maintained humans can "create their own actions." According to him, this does not correspond to what Allah says in the Quran: He is the Creator of everything, including humans' voluntary and involuntary actions. This leads to a long debate, with due references to 37:96. Jalal argues "your handwork"

⁶ See 7:179; 17:4; 28:67–68; 30:40; 37:95–96; etc.

⁷ The formula *wamā ta'malūna* is also translated as 'that which you do' (Sahih International), 'what you make' (Pickthall, Shakir, Mohsin Khan, Arberry).

refers primarily to the idols which Ibrahim's people had forged and worshiped. This is countered by Abu Salim with a verse stating, "Allah is the Creator of all things, and He is the Guardian and Disposer of all affairs" (39:62 YA), with emphasis on *kulli shayin* (39:62:3-4), *all things* rather than *things*. If actions exist, they must be created. This does not convince those who hold that the *āyah* does not apply to the products of human agency. To them, the problem is not whether or not acts are created, but rather which acts we are accountable for, and which are under our control. At this point Umar calls upon *'ulamā'* such as Abu Hanifa (d. 767) and Muhammad al-Bukhari (d. 870). The former is cited as writing: "And all the slaves' actions, including movement and stillness, are indeed acquired, and Allah, may He be exalted, is their Creator." The latter confirms the view: "Their movements, voices/sounds, acquisitions (of actions) and writing are created" (F007).⁸

These discussions illustrate the perplexities and controversies Muslims deal with, but also the liveliness of Danish Islam as a discursive tradition, in which everyday situations are held up to scrutiny with the help of Quranic wisdom and classical scholarship. Lutfi, for instance, unsatisfied with his previous explanations, comes back to me with sayings by the medieval scholar al-Tahawi (d. 933): "Whatever a person has missed, he would have never received. Whatever he received, he would have never missed," and "The actions of the servants are creations of Allah and are earned by the servant." Yet some of the more philosophical questions, like the creation of human actions, seem to lack a straightforward answer, or are deemed inappropriate. For instance, another member of *Den Lige Vej* states that the Mu'tazila, and some people today, discuss many things that "we as Muslims" are not supposed to discuss, such as: Where is Allah? Has he hands or legs? What did He Create first, the Pen or the Quran? (F007).⁹ Still, as many of my interlocutors are keen to point out, Muslims have the obligation to seek knowledge and expand their understanding of Allah's Law and Creation. This is the duty of *ijtihād* (independent reasoning): an effort to master things central to the faith, such as the Arabic language, the revealed texts, and Islamic theology and jurisprudence.

1.2 "You Have Free Will Because You Don't Know His Will"

Allah must put His stamp of approval on every event and action before it can be realized. As mentioned earlier, this does not mean that He loves everything that happens, nor that He wills human wrongdoings. When I ask him to clarify

⁸ Umar, Jalal, and Abu Salim [pseud.], discussion in closed Facebook group *Den Lige Vej* [pseud.], January 2018.

⁹ Ibid.

this point, Lutfi explains that Allah creates the conditions for human choice and action, while also allowing for their realization:

If I want to move this (pointing at a pen on the table), it moves because of the Will of Allah. I make it move, but it would not move if God would not *tillade det* (allow it) So God made it *acceptable* for it to happen. It *moves* by the Will of God, but it's me who is making it move *Everything* in the world is caused by the Will of God. Even me, what I choose to do, it's the Will of God. ... And if He doesn't want it, you can't do it. ... There's *inshallah*, 'by the Will of God,' right? Muslims say: 'inshallah I will see you tomorrow.' You don't know if you'll be alive, but *if God Wills* ... It's not like *you* choose to wake up. (Co23)

Unlike other parts of this and other interviews, Lutfi speaks in general terms when it comes to "if I want to move" and "you can't do it," but specifies "like Muslims say" when it comes to the Quranic phrase. To him, the idea that Allah's Will causes everything is a truism, and 'inshallah' is merely a Muslim way of recognizing/expressing it. As I mentioned in the introduction, the habitual ways of speaking as situated in specific social environments tell us something about how the objects and ways of life they merely seem to describe are actually being formed, and 'inshallah' is perhaps the clearest example.

The expressions 'God willing,' and 'if God wills,' are obvious examples of articulations placing 'will' in a religious, and specifically Islamic, discursive formation. The practice repeatedly establishes the unbalanced relationship between Divine and human will, thereby altering the identity of the various elements involved, or else congealing them. Several of my interlocutors trace the phrase back to one particular *āyah*: "Nor say of anything, 'I shall be sure to do so and so tomorrow' without adding, 'So please Allah!' ..." (18:23–24 YA).¹⁰ The use of the phrase demonstrates how common it is to find references to the absolute nature of Allah's Decree in foundational texts, securing its central place in Muslim-talk. Aside from establishing an unbalanced relationship with the Divine, discursive repetition of 'inshallah' regulates conduct and expresses crucial knowledge: the Will, Decree, and Destiny of Allah are deemed inscrutable. In effect, desired outcomes are softened into educated guesses or timid hopes, expendable if Allah appears to have decided otherwise.

¹⁰ In the Quran, the verb *shāa* usually refers to Divine Will rather than that of any of His creatures: "Allah selects for His mercy whom He Wills"; In verses 2:105; 3:74; 76:31. "He guides whom He Wills to a straight path"; In verses 2:142; 21:3; 39:23; 74:31.

As discussed in a previous chapter, Danish Muslims often relate human freedom to *al-Lauh al-Mahfūz* (the Preserved Tablet) and *al-Qadar*, usually stressing man's ignorance of this Knowledge (see 2.2). Among the many Quranic occurrences of the root associated with the Arabic for knowledge/known, the vast majority name it as a Divine prerogative. As the oft-repeated formula goes: "Allah Knows, while you know not."¹¹ By encountering, reciting, and memorizing this expression, Muslims are continuously reminded of the intellect's limitations. Ignorance is not a permanent human condition, but each individual is at constant risk of becoming one of 'the ignorant ones' (*al-jāhīlūna*).¹²

Here we get another insight into the phrasing of certain statements on human will. As I noted, most of my interlocutors hold that whatever Allah Will happens, and whatever He does not Will does not happen. This means that it is perfectly permissible to say: 'I swear by Allah I shall do this, inshallah.' Should one fail to do the thing, this formulation keeps the oath intact: apparently, it was not Allah's Will that it would come to pass. However, one would *break* the oath if it were formulated as 'I shall do this, if Allah likes me to do it,' and the thing was obligatory or recommended. The logic here involves a distinction between Allah's universal Decree and Destiny, and His Law for His servants. The latter comes to pass only when overlapping with the former. More than a Will/Decree, the sharia is thus a Divine Desire, something Allah loves and wishes for humankind (see Q33:33). In other words, Allah Wills that sin and disobedience should exist, but does not condone them. This is easily misunderstood/misused, which a fixed phrase such as inshallah is meant to prevent. We could say formulae such as these are discursive fail-safes: they mitigate the potential of misinterpretations to disband the discursive machinery through an accrual of inconsistency.

Fadil, in the same conversation reported above, while discussing knowledge of *Qadar*, asks me to read the *āyah* containing the notion of inshallah (Q18:24). He stresses one should always take into account that one cannot promise something which is in Allah's hands:

You can't for sure say 'I will 100% ... meet you at 6 tomorrow' ... Because you don't even know if you're alive tomorrow, or if the other person is alive tomorrow, or ... where you will be tomorrow. ... Some of the youth

11 See 2:216; 3:66; 16:74; 24:19; etc.

12 For the ability to gain knowledge, see 4:17; 6:54; 6:111; 7:138; 11:29; 16:119; 27:55; 46:23; 19:6; etc. With regard to the dangers of ignorance, see 2:67; 2:273; 6:35; 7:199; 11:46; 12:33; 12:89; 25:63; 28:55; 39:64. Not to be confused with 'the age of ignorance' (*Jāhīlīyyat*) prior to the advent of Islam.

use it as an excuse The thing is, and I say it again and again, *you don't know about God's Will*. So you can't *claim* that it's God's Will, because you *don't know until it happens*. ... You make the plan and then you say: 'If it's God's Will ... God will provide for me the last thing I need to do this plan'. (C015)

In this fragment, we find human choice as an intentional effort advancing the fulfillment of Divine Will, and this notion of fulfilling/completing is an important link between intention (*nīyyah*), human effort (*saʿī*), will (*ʿirāda*), and Destiny (*Qadar*). At best, humans can make a small effort towards a desired goal, leaving the rest to Divine Will; this, because of their ignorance of its workings and the Knowledge informing it. This reasoning leads some to suggest that, if one knew Allah's Will, one would not have any freedom of choice. Amir, for instance, vehemently argues that human ignorance is the very reason we experience a will at all:

You have your free will, ... *you have your choices because you don't know what God has Written*. ... I cannot say: 'I cannot drink alcohol,' I say: 'Ok I'm drinking.' 'Why are you drinking alcohol Amir?' 'If Allah hadn't Written it, I wouldn't have been drinking.' It's like that. 'No, no, Amir, you have your free choice! Because you *don't know* what Allah has written!' Maybe Allah has written: 'Amir has been thinking about drinking alcohol but he will choose not to do it because it's haram.' ... Maybe, *ḥamdu lillāh*, I will never drink alcohol. ... So I have my free will, it's fine, ... you cannot *use* this to not choose. (C028)

Neither Amir nor Fadil use the common premise 'as Muslims we believe ...' in their explanation—weakness and ignorance of Allah's Decree are generic human characteristics. In the context of the conversation, this does not seem an arbitrary choice; both imams know this ignorance amounts to a factual inability to predict the future, something to which anyone can relate. This seemingly self-evident fact is transformed into a meaningful and significant notion through its positioning in a network of religious jargon. Both interlocutors claim a special understanding of what non-believers might simply consider an effect of the brain's perception of time. This specialized knowledge makes all the difference when we see it as a manifestation of Muslim-talk on freedom, because something about it makes it sensible for my interlocutors.

As I already mentioned, in their role of imam, both Fadil and Amir function as discourse/culture brokers: interpreting the sacred texts in step with rapid

social changes, and correcting their fellow Muslims on behavior and expression on the basis of specialized knowledge of Islamic tradition.¹³ Statements regarding the vernacular adage ‘Allah willing’ do not necessarily reveal something about the boundaries of discourse, because both interlocutors admit that those who misunderstand its logic are still Muslims, for whom the improper use is still meaningful. They do, however, reveal something about power relations: Amir and Fadil constantly find themselves in the position of having to ‘correct’ fellow Muslims with regard to the ‘legitimate’ ways to refer to Divine Will.

There is a moment where power *as* knowledge comes to regulate behavior to the point of eliciting a willing and obedient devotion to Allah’s Desire, culminating in the *shahādah*. In order to make sense of the ultimate Islamic performative utterance we must be clear about the function of the terms ‘Islam’ and ‘muslim’ in Muslim-talk (3.2 and 3.3). Before getting to the relevant statements by Danish Muslims, I will briefly sketch the development of the two notions as categories of analysis in social anthropology. With this overview, I aim to identify some of the milestones in the disciplinary trajectory leading up to my approach.

1.3 *Islam and Muslim as Categories of Analysis*

Islam, for the 1940s anthropologist, was part of the context rather than a specific object of inquiry (see Evans-Pritchard 1949; Greenberg 1947). This began to change in the following decade, when anthropologists like Eric Wolf (1951, 329) criticized the framing of Islam “in terms of diffusion,” as was the case in Alfred Kroeber’s influential *Anthropology* (1923, 455), where he only refers to Islam in conjunction with Christianity. Wolf himself went on to write a functional/historical account of Islam. With his frequent Quranic citations and minimal focus on patterns of diffusion, the anthropologist fostered the emancipation of Islam as a distinct analytical category. Almost two decades later Clifford Geertz published his comparative study *Islam Observed* (1968). While Geertz tried to grasp the specificities of Islam, in this seminal work it emerged not as a bounded essence, but a set of processes through which Muslims in a given time and place draw from a shared tradition in ways they deem meaningful. Geertz (1968, v–vi) wrote of Islam as “a supposedly single creed,” whose dogmas are in fact always interpreted and experienced through local culture.¹⁴

13 In the previous case, this would be with reference to e.g., Q6:148 YA. In the verse, the *mushrikūn* (polytheists) are in the wrong, because they do not know Allah’s Plan nor whether their deed had been pre-ordained. In other words, one cannot use the notion of Divine Decree and Predestination as an excuse to sin.

14 Around the same time, Ernest Gellner (1969) advanced his conceptual critiques of the

In the seventies, Abdul Hamid el-Zein, beside his work on East African Islam, forwarded a critique of the anthropology of religion in *Beyond Ideology and Theology* (1977). To el-Zein, Islamic beliefs, practices, and institutions are so diverse that fixing the bounds of 'Islam' is effectively impossible. He proposed a departure from the monolithic conception in favor of a more focused approach on multiple local 'islams.' Some years later, Dale Eickelman (1976; 1985), again publishing on Moroccan Islam, argued that the main challenge for the study of Islam in local contexts was "to describe and analyze how the universalistic principles of Islam have been realized in various social and historical contexts without representing Islam as a seamless essence on the one hand or as a plastic congeries of beliefs and practices on the other" (1982, 1–2).

Also in the seventies, Talal Asad (1973; 1979), drawing from Foucault's Nietzschean genealogical methods, had urged anthropologists to focus less on how cultural structures create a particular brand of Islam, and more on how the power of religious figures legitimizes certain interpretations of the tradition, while eschewing others. But it was only in his lecture *The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam* that Asad (1986, 14) introduced the influential notion of Islam as a "discursive tradition," i.e. "a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present." Asad critiqued el-Zein's 'many islams' approach as well as Gilsenan's suggestion that anthropologists should focus on how Muslims see Islamic life.¹⁵ In Asad's (Asad 1986, 2) view, it is problematic to say that 'Islam is what Muslims say it is,' because one can find Muslims in all parts of the world who say that what other people take to be Islam is not really Islam at all. This paradox could not be resolved by positing that the claim as to

scholarly analysis of the Muslim world. In sum, throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and mid-1970s, anthropologists mainly worked in Muslim-majority societies, paying special attention to classic topics in modernist anthropology (e.g., patterns of authority and kinship). These accounts were everything but comprehensive, favoring Islamic mysticism rather than Islam at large. In this way they shared the division of labor with Orientalists, while gradually nuancing and critiquing the dichotomies set forth by Geertz and Gellner (see Geertz 1968; Crapanzano 1973; Gilsenan 1973; Lewis 1984).

- 15 Another milestone in the field, Michael Gilsenan's (1982) *Recognizing Islam* exemplifies a still-employed conceptualization of the subject. Seeking to theorize religion from a holistic perspective, Gilsenan highlighted the social-political factors and historical processes shaping the sometimes contradictory ways of practicing and conceiving Islam. In a way, both Gellner and Gilsenan confirmed Geertz's proposed dichotomy between a version of Islam grounded in textual knowledge and mystical forms of faith informed by local beliefs. Yet Gilsenan's (2008, 5) reflective writing-style led him to skirt obvious subjects and refrain from providing some definitive blueprint of Islam, preferring to "examine the practices and everyday lives of persons describing themselves as Muslims."

‘what is Islam’ will be admitted by the anthropologist “only where it applies to the informant’s own beliefs and practices.” It is impossible to define beliefs and practices in terms of an isolated subject.

Regarding the efforts to distinguish local expressions of Islam, Asad observed that, while practices and ideas vary, they still *aspire* to cohere with a shared canon of founding texts. The role of these texts in shaping ‘Islamic’ practices should not be underestimated. As a discursive tradition, Islam is a collection of “discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history” (Asad 1986, 14). The focus should be on the efforts by Muslim individuals to maintain consistency with their tradition, not the obvious plurality of Islam. Tradition, to Asad, is an authoritative past, grounding the believer by providing a wealth of concerns and values to be cultivated in the present and aspired toward as future achievements. According to Asad, the task of the anthropologist is to draw out the power dynamics establishing legitimacy and orthodoxy, the mechanisms by which one is able to claim a certain interpretation as ‘true.’

In the nineties, Asad’s calls to attend to power dynamics began to bear its first fruits, with increased talk of authority and politics (Starrett 1998; Ham-moudi 1997) and more engagement with Foucault’s oeuvre (Abu-Lughod 1986; 1993). Charles Hirschkind (1996, 475) distinguished between “Islam as a long-standing tradition and the various expedient uses to which the term is being put,” effectively excluding heretical declamations from the tradition. This distinction did not attribute an unchanging essence to Islam, but emphasized the need to disentangle disparate ideas and historical forms subsumed under the term Islam.¹⁶

16 In Islamic studies, Shahab Ahmed (2016, 6) contributed to this discussion, lamenting the inadequacy of current renditions of Islam as object/category, and arguing that a meaningful conceptualization of ‘Islam’ as “*theoretical object* and *analytical category*” must be *coherent* with “the capaciousness, complexity, and, often, *outright contradiction*” of the phenomenon. Ahmed proposed to treat Islam as the collected hermeneutical engagements found from its inception unto present day; the totality of responses to Muhammad’s transcription of Allah’s will. In this way, according to Ahmed (2016, 405), we are able to account for, accommodate, and understand the relationship between the variety and unity in personal and historical Islam, thereby conceptualizing Islam in terms of “*coherent contradiction*”. This broad conceptualization ends up encompassing everything from Persian poems about wine to politically-charged Islamophobic stereotypes and the Muslim response thereto. To Ahmed (2016, 405), something “*is Islamic*” to the extent that it is “*made meaningful*” in terms of hermeneutical engagement with Revelation.

In the 2000s, the anthropological conversation on Islam was still informed by postmodern critiques of anthropological authority and representation. Most notably, Daniel Varisco's (2005) *Islam Obscured*, blasted the seminal works of four powerhouses in the anthropology of Islam: Gellner (1981), Geertz (1968), Mernissi (1975), and Ahmed (1988). Besides questioning the rhetoric of self-presentation and intellectual authority employed by these authors, Varisco (2005, 125) exposed the fundamental flaw (supposedly) shared by their seminal works: "The Islam represented is idealized as an essence rather than analyzed as an evolving culture bound dynamic of belief and behavior." For Varisco, to 'observe Islam' is oxymoronic: "studying what Muslims believe or fail to believe may say something about human nature, but it offers no window into the truth of revelation. The anthropologist observes Muslims in order to represent their representations; only Muslims can observe Islam" (Varisco 2005, 162). Moreover, some of the great and facile binary oppositions made in this work (such as Gellner's doctor-saint), were symptomatic of ethnographic thinness.¹⁷

El-Zein (1977) was now praised for his efforts to contextualize the observable behavior of "real Muslims" in a definable social structure (Varisco 2005, 17). Texts are of little use for ethnographers, and better left to historians and linguists. Naturally, the boundaries are not always clear-cut, but the point is that, for scholars like Varisco, what happens "in the field" (presumably the 'real') is always different from what is said in the text (the ideal). Ethnographic accounts of Islam, the argument goes, are a counterargument to any formulation of Islam as a homogeneous category and stable historical unit (Houston 2009, 211). Anthropologists should be concerned to sketch out Muslims' own representations of Islam, including their ways of producing heretical and genuine Muslims.

Gabriele Marranci (2008, 49–50) was among those pushing anthropology of Islam away from theology: "beyond the question of Islam or Islams, and observing the dynamics of Muslim lives expressed through their ideological and rhetorical understanding of their surrounding (social, natural, virtual) environment." Echoing Gilsenan's argument from the 1980s, Marranci (2008, 88) states that one should not start with plural Islams, or Islam qua tradition, but from

17 Varisco and others expressed a common to turn-of-the-century skepticism with returns to classic approaches, attempts to produce an abstracted model of society, and reductionist civilizational comparisons (Marranci 2008; Houston 2009; Dupret et al. 2012). As some influential methodological volumes of the decade declared: data should not conform to theory, but theory to data, which is a matter of fieldwork (Borneman and Hammoudi 2009; Kottak 2000). To his critics, the fact that Geertz spoke little of the Moroccan dialect, had few or no informants (Lizzio 2009), is exemplary of this problem.

Muslims and the ways they communicate, act, and interact as human beings: Islam is to be seen as “a *map* of discourses on how to ‘feel Muslim.’” Marranci (2008, 6–8) insists on the importance of treating Muslims as human beings, rather than cultural agents; a kind of fieldwork “central to an anthropology which aims to understand Muslims beyond stereotypes and Orientalist, freak-show representations of their lives and beliefs” (2008, 84).¹⁸ With fieldwork as “the antidote to essentialism,” anthropologists should highlight the complexity existing beyond mass-media and populist simplifications (Marranci 2008, 6).

Fieldwork changed with the rise of mass global movements, transnational networks, and revolutionary technologies, and many in this decade were keen to stress that, in the new millennium, the anthropology of Islam must be global. In this scheme, Islam still functions as an analytical category, admitting more or less comprehensive descriptions/analyses, without excluding the tension between global religion, and local, historical iteration (Makris 2007, 1). The view of Islam as a flexible discursive tradition seemed to run parallel to Gilseman’s agenda, intersecting in various points, especially when it came to global dynamics.

In the last decades, it became clear that various approaches to a global anthropology of Islam come with their own thorny ethical issues. Fadil and Fernando (2015a, 82) have observed that, in a time where Islam is dramatically problematized, “accounts that underscore Muslim alterity in order to defamiliarize dominant secular-liberal assumptions can sometimes be recuperated as evidence of a clash of civilizations.” Conversely, some scholars see themselves as working against the “unrelenting de-humanization of Muslims,” by highlighting similarity rather than radical difference and “offering an account of the ordinariness of Muslims the world over.” Yet the attempts to bring out this sameness in order to counteract the ‘clash of civilizations’ argument end up portraying Muslims as aberrational and inconsistent. Emphasizing sameness comes with the normalization and universalization of particular values, as well as the creation of “implicit ‘others,’ who supposedly live outside the ordinary, the everyday” (Highmore 2002, 1). Fadil and Fernando (2015a, 82) see this this dynamic as an academic deadlock in which “Muslims only serve as evidence in a conversation between Western interlocutors about the unity or diversity of humankind.”

18 In line with what some termed the 1990s “affective turn” in contemporary cultural analysis (Knudsen and Stage 2015), Marranci (2008, 86) successful fieldwork is not just based “knowledge of Islam as religion,” but also “the capacity of the fieldworker to develop emotional empathy with his or her studied community.”

Fadil (2019, 119; see also Fadil and Fernando 2015a) argued that the anthropological scholarship on Islam in Europe has been troubled by a “double epistemological impasse”: the first concerning the historical making of Islam as Europe’s Other, the second involving the discipline’s discomfort with religious claim-making. The academic production of knowledge on Islam in Europe, in short, has been halted in its progress because of seemingly irreconcilable differences and secular commitments (Marshall 2014), involving the orientalist demarcation of Islam and Muslims as Europe’s Other, and a kind of disciplinary confusion with regard to religious claims and experiences (Willerslev and Suhr 2018). As Fadil (2019, 121) observes, accounting for the potential ambitions of European Muslims became a challenge “in part because of the researchers’ own (secular) discomforts but also because doing so risks validating daunting conservative views.” Nativist camps are always on the outlook for data to substantiate the so-called “Islamization of Europe”.¹⁹

This brief outline of the development ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’ have undergone as categories of anthropological analysis, shows how convoluted the conversation gets when words and language are taken to represent facts about the world. These issues, I submit, are to a great extent methodological. This is why I proposed a blend of ethnographic fieldwork, discourse theory/analysis, and critique of ideology as a model that does not reproduce the sameness/difference paradigm endemic to anthropology, and possibly relaxes the epistemological deadlock. With it, came a certain rethinking of all the problematic categories mentioned by Fernando and Fadil: human agency, creativity, power, resistance, sense-making, claim-making, and so forth. Undeniably, the model implies that the appropriate place for the social scientist is one of a certain methodical distance. While I did not dismiss anthropology’s natural inclination to develop empathy with the studied community, or to embrace the “ontological turn” to

19 One of the proposed solutions to this impasse involves a focus on hermeneutics. In his programmatic *A New Anthropology of Islam*, John Bowen (2012, 3) observes that the new approaches to Islam “start by taking seriously the idea that Islam is best seen as a set of interpretative resources and practices.” The sense that Muslims participate in a long-term and worldwide tradition is grounded in certain resources viz. scriptures, ideas, and methods. The practices of worshipping, judging, and struggling that stem therefrom, result in a capacity to adapt, challenge, and diversify. Studies of Islam should begin with the various ways individuals relate with, and give shape, to those resources/practices to produce meaning. To Bowen (2012, 4), anthropologists “focus inward” by “deepening our understanding of intentions, understandings, and emotions surrounding specific practices,” and then “open outward” by looking at “the social significance of, and conditions for, these religious practices.”

let oneself be “grasped” the “native’s point of view” (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017, 1–7), I suggested focusing the ethnographer’s gaze on statements rather than fixating on those who utter them. This does not mean discounting the speakers altogether. Flesh-and-blood Danish Muslims still figure prominently in these chapters, but my model leads me to prioritize what they *say* rather than what they *are*. As the statements discussed in the following two sections will demonstrate how key terms such as Islam and Muslim are object of debate even within the Muslim community, and that the notions need to be ambiguous to function as nodal points.

2 Willingly Surrendered

A problem that vexed theologians of old was whether humans must ‘consent’ to Allah’s Decree (Gardet 2012). For most of my interlocutors, the issue is quite simple: once one knows of/believes in *al-Qaḍā’ wa al-Qadar*, there is nothing left to do but to willingly and fully submit. This, many claim, is the essence of Islam, i.e. the conscious *decision* to surrender to Allah’s Decree and *willingly* conform to His Plan. Rather than ‘consent,’ in Danish Muslim-talk one is more likely to find ‘recognition,’ ‘understanding,’ ‘belief,’ and, subsequently, ‘commitment,’ ‘obedience.’ Both the elements of choice and of subjugation have to be emphasized, and when it comes to freedom, this affirmation of both agency and Destiny is naturally one of the most recurrent themes, one that has been explored in local contexts by many anthropologists in recent decades (Hamdy 2009; Gaibazzi 2012; Menin 2015).

In the Quran, the trilateral root *sīn lām mīm* forms the verb *aslama* (to submit), the nominal *salām* (peace), the verbal noun *islām*, and the active participle *muslim* (those who submit). Time and again, the Quran affirms subservience to the Divine, and upholds total devotion as the only appropriate way to worship Allah.²⁰ In short, following the proper creed/religion (*dīn*) involves active submission (*aslama*) to Allah’s Decree (*al-Qaḍā’*) in response to the acknowledgment of His signs/revelation. The result is *islām*, naming the act of submission and the wholeness/safeness/peace that come from it. ‘Islam’ is the master-signifier which, intersecting the signifier’s chain, ‘quilts’ the subject to the signifiers, holding together a symbolic field, creating meaning. It is useful to distinguish between Islam-as-submission as a master-signifier

20 “The Religion before Allah is Islam (submission to His Will) ...” (Q3:19 YA). See 3:19; 3:85; 5:3; 6:125; 22:78; 39:2; 39:11; etc.

(*islām*);²¹ the act/verb of submitting (*aslama*);²² the state of being submissive or having submitted (*muslim*);²³ the witnessing, profession of faith, testimonial affirming this state (*shahādah*);²⁴ and the willingness, voluntariness, spontaneity associated with it (*ṭawʿan*).²⁵ In the following section, I will discuss these notions in terms of their manifestation in Danish Muslim-talk, and their relation to human freedom.

2.1 “Islam Is Peace and It Is Submission”

Introductory pamphlets, found in mosques and other Muslim gathering points across the country, often associate the invitation to submit with the acquisition of “life purpose.” For instance in the following: “The timeless and beautiful message of Islam is the same as all the prophets came with. ... Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad ... all invited their people to ‘submit to the One True God,’ ... which means that you are a Muslim.” As one submits to God, reads the pamphlet, one can “fulfill one’s true purpose in life, by acknowledging one’s Creator and sincerely worshipping Him alone.” In this way, “one will achieve the countless benefits mentioned above that Islam brings with it” (D027).²⁶ Introductory texts also associate Islam-as-submission to the closely related term *salām*, meaning peace/security. One pamphlet for instance reads: “the word *Islam* is linguistically formed with the root s-l-m, which also forms Arabic words as peace, submission, and security. By submitting to God, man gains inner peace and security in this life and beyond” (D028).²⁷ The simplicity of the form should not deceive—both pamphlets engage in the crucial operation of redefining signifiers. Key terms like ‘Islam’ and ‘Muslim’ are stripped of their aggregate connotations by reducing them to their linguistic roots, and then ‘filled in’ with the ‘right’ associations. Surely readers have already attributed some meaning to the words, but this is just the problem such introductory texts attempt to solve. This is achieved by undoing existing meanings and generating the possibility of new ones by entrenching the master-signifier.

21 See 3:19; 3:85; 5:3; 6:125; 39:22; 49:17; 61:7; etc.

22 See 2:112; 2:131; 3:20; 3:83; 27:44; 39:54; 48:16; 49:14; 72:14; etc.

23 See 2:132; 3:52; 3:80; 3:102; 5:111; 6:163; 7:126; 10:84; 15:2; 27:81; 28:53; 43:69; etc.

24 See 3:18; 3:52; 3:64; 3:81; 6:19; 7:172; 63:1; 83:21; etc.

25 See 2:158; 3:83; 5:7; 9:53; 13:15; 24:53; 41:11; 47:21; etc.

26 Det Islamiske Trossamfund, *Hvorfor Islam? Skønheden og fordelene ved Islam* (Islamic pamphlets.com, 2006–2019).

27 Profeternesvej.dk, *Hvad er Islam?* (Odense: Profeternesvej, 2014). Brochure found in a mosque in Aarhus, January 2018.

Prioritizing ‘peace’ over ‘submission,’ the latter of which is arguably more common in the strictly Muslim literature (such as authoritative translations of the Quran, *tafsīr*, and hadith) is not an arbitrary choice. For instance, a group of young Aarhus Muslims with Somali background (C010), perhaps trying to counteract what they called the “bad reputation” their religion has acquired in Denmark due to “the distortions by the media,” were eager to correct my understanding of the term. I have just reiterated one respondent’s mention of Islam as submission, when Axmed interrupts with a decisive “no.” He explains that ‘Islam’ is primarily “peace,” and can also mean “submission.” His friend Lutfi seems to disagree, and tells him “Muslim? It means submission ... submission to Allah!” An animated discussion between four of the participants ensues, in mixed Arabic, Danish, and Somali. Voices overlap and intensify. Ibrahim seems undecided, and while he previously had rooted for ‘peace,’ he now admits ‘submission’ is more accurate.

Danish Muslims more experienced with interviews know how to position themselves from the outset, and do not even mention submission. “When I hear the call to prayer, then I know why I am Muslim,” says imamah Sherin Khankan. “I feel a peace, balance, and peace, and a feeling of being home.” Usually, the only times she uses ‘submission’ is in relation to “oppressive patriarchal structures” (N169).²⁸ In her recent book, after asserting “Islam is, at its core, a religion of peace,” Khankan adds that “Islam is an active movement of people who practice peace by submitting to something greater than themselves.” She then immediately specifies that “this isn’t ‘submission’ in the negative sense of the word;” rather, “Muslims simply admit that human beings are not the centre of everything” (D063).²⁹

Apart from such cases of strategic speech presentation, peace also comes up as an *effect* of submission/surrender. A long-time convert from Copenhagen, Helene Larsen, when asked during an interview with TV2 if there is any part of Islam she renounces, says: “No, not any part of Islam. Islam means ‘peace in surrender.’ Islam means that you get peace in surrendering to the plan of the Creator. And not my plan, for example. There is a greater plan, and it has a very beautiful meaning.” She then adds that she rather has objections to how some people interpret Islam, as detached from the notion of peace and safety (W091).³⁰ Even when peace is not directly associated with submission, there is

28 Anette Lilleøre, “Sherin Khankan: Tro er en blanding af inderlighed og aktivisme,” *Religion.dk* (*Kristeligt Dagblad*), November 26, 2018.

29 Sherin Khankan, *Women Are the Future of Islam: A Memoir of Hope* (London: Rider, 2018), page 184.

30 *Menneskebiblioteket*, “Konvertit,” hosted by John Rahbek, featuring Helene Larsen, aired

a clear resistance to this last term. In one interview with Hanne, when I use the term to refer to complete obedience, she seems hesitant:

I don't, when you say submission ... (I hasten to add I don't mean it in a negative sense) I know, but I don't recognize that word in my world. I would say more, 'admire.' Yeah, it's more about that. It's more about recognizing. Understanding or seeing something, it's like this, we see a wave, it's coming, okay, I will move. It's very concrete, actually. (C038)

Hanne here conveys the common notion that submitting to the Will of Allah is not done out of compulsion, nor as a simple preference. There is a fear the term 'submission' will mislead one into thinking Allah asks us to blindly bow to His Will. Yet in the Muslim rationale, once a person acknowledges His presence, and recognizes His Might, surrendering to His Will is a natural next step. "When you believe," Lutfi says, "then you *have* to submit. Because you *know*" (C019). For Lutfi, submission is connected to knowing/believing, both preceded and deepened by an intellectual process of questioning, thinking, and experiencing.

Strategic formulations and audience design aside, when I suggested to some of my interlocutors to replace the charged 'submission' with the milder 'commitment' to Allah's Will, several found that the latter failed to convey the sense of urgency characteristic of their credo. While it is true that many will nuance or moderate their word choice according to the situation, there is also a limit to what alternatives are appropriate. I have never heard a Danish Muslim state that they just have a 'preference for' or tentatively 'comply with' Allah's Will. Whether they practice what they speak, is another matter: the ambition for consistency and coherence is there, and this ambition is revealing of ideological commitment.

For Hanne, surrendering to Allah is akin to seeing a wave and moving away; for Lutfi, it follows from knowing/believing. Sharif (C045), for his part, has no issues with emphasizing submission: "That is *exactly* the definition of being Muslims, that I submit my will to Allah's Will ... and the more you are submitted to Allah's Will, the closer you are to Him." Neither does Fadil (C015): "Surrender, submission, it's the same word. ... As Muslims we say: ok, I surrender to God's Will" (C015). Fadil also stresses that humans are dependent on Allah's support. Becoming a Muslim, and thereby freely surrendering to Allah's Will, is

on May 29, 2017, on TV2 Lorry, <https://www.tv2lorry.dk/menneskebiblioteket/menneskebiblioteket-konvertit>.

an acknowledgment of what He does—a way to fulfill one's destiny in a conscious manner:

I know that I'm weak in being human. ... One day I'm healthy, one day I'm sick, I'm rich, and then I'm poor, and so on and so on. So that's like, *I need God in my life*. In Islam, we surrender to God not only because He created us, but He also *supplies* us. ... We are in constant need of God's support. ... Yeah, dependent. (C015)

Fadil's explanation also implies the notion of Allah as *ar-Razzāq* (the Sustainer), one of the Names. Allah provides *rizq* (sustenance) to all his creatures, another way in which the possibility of human freedom depends on Allah's good Will. Furthermore, as Lutfi states, the quality and quantity of this sustenance is predetermined for each human being, written in the *al-Lauh al-Mahfūz* (see 2.2).

Like, a lot of people worry about *rizq*. *Rizq* is ... all the money you get in your whole life, ... all the things you get in life, ... the worldly possessions It is already written for you. So if you want it to be more, you can do certain religious things. If you don't ..., you can work as much as you can work in your life, but you will not get ... (more than) is planned for you. ... You don't know what you're gonna get, but you will get it at the right time. (C019)

Fadil goes further, relating this surrendering and fulfillment of destiny to human happiness/bliss. Just like everything else, this 'real happiness' is dependent on one's relationship with the Divine rather than a series of worldly conditions and materialistic concerns:

My happiness, as Muslim, is not dependent on whether I am rich or poor, healthy or sick. ... My happiness is dependent on my relationship to God. So if I'm *near Him*, by reading the Quran, praying my prayers, ... I can have a happy life. For some people, we see it also in Denmark ..., happiness is whether they have money or not, whether they are healthy or not. ... So it's like, *I am not dependent on anything else than God*. I put my dependence in the highest level, ... because He is bigger and He is the Almighty. So *everyone is in need of God*. By having a bond to Him, I release all the bonds to the (worldly things). That's what it means to surrender to God's will. (C015)

As it says in the Quran (83:22 S): “Most surely the righteous shall be in bliss [*naʿīmin*].” The happiness Fadil speaks of is the result of righteous behavior and the enjoyment of the bounties given by Allah, a common notion in the scriptures.³¹

2.2 “Submit, and You Will Be Saved!”

Considering all of the above, I can now give an inchoate impression of the process of submission—the subject positioning, how the individual latches onto Islamic discourse and becomes a node in its network of meaning. One could say that Allah demands/elicits submission/surrender. It would, however, be imprecise to say that Allah Himself demands this submission, which would negate His Independence and Self-Sufficiency (*al-Ghānī*). Allah is the Sustainer (*al-Razzāq*), never the sustained (Q11:6). The Creator does not require anything from His creatures: “Allah *wa-taʿālā* does not need anything, *we* need Him!” (C038). Yet it would be hard to claim the call to submit is a mere suggestion. It is clear that Allah’s Self-Sufficiency implies the subservience of the created (Q51:56–57), and this relationship of dependence is precisely what makes it possible to interpellate the individual as Muslim subject. There is a reason why we cannot find a trace of a ‘sensible’ Muslim statement mentioning Divine need: Allah cannot be anything less than Perfect and Complete. In short, while ‘Allah’ is certainly at the center of Islamic discourse as Ultimate Concern, it cannot be His prerogative to demand subjection. As Seal of the Prophets, Muhammad resolves this problem by mediating the imperative: Submit! (In the *name* of Allah).

Besides Divine Perfection, Islamic sense-making of the demand/elicitation to submit requires the continuous qualification of Allah as the only One worthy of such devotion. Repetition is of the essence, which is why the idea is omnipresent in introductory texts, pamphlets, educational websites, sermons, social media memes, etc. Of course, these statements must be more than unfounded human assertions. They are ‘true’ because “Allah says of Himself in the Quran” that “He is Allah, (the) One. ... there is none co-equal or comparable unto Him” (D028).³² At the same time, these sources must *continuously* remind the faithful of the things one might be tempted to confuse as worthy of surrender: “God forbids us to worship anything else besides Him (e.g., statues,

31 See 9:21; 52:17; 56:89; 82:13; 83:22; 88:8; 102:8; etc.

32 Profeternesvej.dk, *Hvad er Islam?* (Odense: Profeternesvej, 2014). Brochure found in a mosque in Aarhus, January 2018.

the sun, ... priests or prophets). He has no use for any partners or intermediaries" (D026).³³

Once the individual acknowledges, or even slightly senses, Allah's Perfection and Worth, all that interpellation requires is the act of hailing. The natural, hardwired human predisposition to 'return' to the Creator is met with a three-fold call: Muhammad and the prophets *urge* the individual to surrender (*'aslim taslam!*); Islam as ideology and the ummah as community *demand* members to submit and become Muslim; Allah *commands/induces* humanity to acknowledge Him through Revelation. Technically, some would prefer to say Allah *elicits* the believer's surrender simply by being the All-Powerful Supreme Being. Nevertheless, at times the call seems less passive.³⁴ Besides composing the Quran, Allah's Words/Speech reach the chosen ones directly, as was the case with the prophet Musa (Q4:164); with common people, the interaction is indirect; by inspiration, or from behind a veil (Q42:51). The point is, one could argue that Allah hails humanity through Revelation (*wahy*) and even direct speech, although this idea cannot be pressed too far. Articulations concerning the Divine Voice are understandably cautious, because they risk portraying Allah as requiring something from His creatures. A mediated hailing seems more appropriate.

The famous phrase contained in the letters Muhammad, and allegedly sent to the various rulers of his time, contains the same imperative as the Quranic verses mentioned above: *'aslim taslam*, submit (to Allah) and you will be saved/safe (sometimes with the implied 'from/with Muslims'). While the authenticity of the letters sent to Emperor Heraclitus and other rulers is disputed (El-Cheikh 1999), this is irrelevant to their traditional function and impact on contemporary Muslims. It is worth noting that translators take care to add "by accepting Islam" or "by becoming a Muslim," since the Arabic terms are overly ambiguous on their own. Simply recognizing an all-encompassing Divine Power is not enough—Islamic discourse and ethical practices must inform the individual's relationship thereto.

The historical success of the 'call' has secured its durability, but while its essence might have endured, its formulations have adapted. These imperative forms may have worked for Muhammad, but today they are counteracted by those that understand their effect. When a Pakistani religious leader in Gaza used the formula "*'aslim taslam*" on Pope Benedict XVI (2006) as a response to

33 Det Islamiske Trossamfund, *Hvad er formålet med livet?* (Islamicpamphlets.com). Brochure found in a mosque in Aarhus, January 2018.

34 See 2:130–133 YA: "... When his Lord said to him, 'Submit' [*'aslim*], he said 'I have submitted [in Islam] [*aslamtu*] to the Lord of the worlds.' ..."

a (misinterpreted) comment he made on Islam,³⁵ it was (reportedly) seen as an empty provocation.³⁶ Some downplayed the challenge by noting a second interpretation: ‘give peace and receive peace.’ That the formula can function as both an imperative to surrender and as an invitation to peace is perhaps part of its power. Author Michelle Malkin, in turn, astutely hijacked the expression for her own campaign, re-popularizing the rejoinder “*lan astaslem*” (I will not surrender).³⁷

Even when it comes to Muslims themselves, few want to express their subservience as sheer obedience; it seems more palatable to attribute it to spiritual knowledge. It is no surprise, then, that many are keen to emphasize the spontaneity of submission. Allah, the argument goes, elicits surrender simply by being recognized for what He is. Lutfi for instance says: “People have to understand by themselves; seek, and research.” Then adds “those who can. So *submit* is when you *believe*, when you have this faith, you have this belief in it, then you have to ... submit. Because you *know*” (C019) Submission, for Lutfi, is a necessary consequence of belief. Knowledge of Allah’s Power all but coincides with subjection. Hanne prefers to speak of a deep “admiration,” but also admits a sense of necessity by way of acknowledgment. “It’s more about recognizing. Understanding or seeing something. It’s like this, we see a wave, it’s coming, okay, I will move. It’s very concrete, actually.” She agrees that this recognition/admiration is a kind of “need” (C038). Certain Quranic verses confirm the irresistible force of the interpellation (Q13:15), and one could argue that there is a sense in which the call to surrender extends to Muhammad’s own example and teachings (not the man himself) (Q4:65).

2.3 “I Will Not Serve!”

As mentioned in a previous chapter, all creatures are understood to have a natural predisposition to seek and submit to Allah (*fiṭrah*), and a need to trust (*tawakkul*) in Allah’s Plan (see 2.3). In the Quran, the term *ṭaw‘an* (willingly/obediently) adds to this a demand for willing obedience/submission.³⁸

35 Benedict XVI, “Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections,” lecture held at the Aula Magna of the University of Regensburg, September 12, 2006, http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html.

36 Khaled Abu Tomeh, “Gazans Warn Pope to Accept Islam,” *Jerusalem Post*, September 18, 2006.

37 Michelle Malkin, “9/11 Pledge: I Will Not Submit,” *Michelle Malkin* (blog), September 11, 2006, accessed August 1, 2019, <http://michellemalkin.com/2006/09/11/911-pledge-i-will-not-submit/>.

38 See 3:83; 3:131–132; 4:81; 5:92; 9:53; 13:15; 24:53; 41:11; etc.

Several passages in the book urge humans to meet this demand during their lifetime (Q2:130–133), while others predict that, in due time, all creation will submit to Allah (Q13:15).³⁹ It is important to lay down this basic idea of *ṭawʿan*, and the demand for willing obedience, in order to make sense of common statements such as ‘I surrender to God’s Will.’ The idea adds nuance to the notion that being a Muslim and surrendering to Allah’s Will is simply a matter of personal preference, reflection, or faith. While all these elements play their role, Allah (indirectly) demands, and elicits, the submission of all creatures to His Will. As Basim is keen to stress (C008; C016; C030), He does so not because He ‘needs’ it, but because of His irresistible, universal attraction, which, if resisted, leads to destruction. So, yielding to Allah’s Will requires both willpower and the acknowledgment of dependence.

Beyond acknowledging Allah as the one, true God, all so-called ‘People of the Book’ are also, in a sense, ‘submitters.’ Likewise, the status of Muslim applies to the patriarchs and prophets of the Abrahamic religions (Q3:84). At first glance, there seems to be a contradiction between the idea of Muhammad as first Muslim, and the prior history of Muslim messengers/believers, from Adam down.⁴⁰ Technically, Adam was the first to submit to Allah, but Muhammad is differentiated in his doing so consciously and by his own volition (Q6:162–163). Adam, whenever mentioned in the Quran, seems to lack the agency displayed by Muhammad, and is said to have “forgotten the covenant” which the Prophet decisively reinstates (Q20:114–117). It should be remembered that, in Islamic tradition, Adam was not put on earth as a punishment, but as part of Allah’s (inscrutable) Plan (Q2:30) although Iblis/Satan did play a role by driving him out of *Jannah* (the Garden of Eden, see Q7:19–25). Distinctively, in making a new covenant with Allah, Muhammad uses his freedom (as volition) to willingly acknowledge/submit to Allah, thus setting the example for all future Muslims. The freedom that comes with willingness and obedience plays a key role, especially after Muhammad.

At this point, it would be hard to ignore a crucial antagonism in the trope of surrender—that posed by the rebel par excellence: *Iblis, al-Shaitan*. As the story goes, following sources (tentatively) accepted by Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike, Satan infamously spoke the following words: ‘*non serviam*’ (I will not serve, ʾIrmyā/Jeremiah 2:20). By uttering this phrase, he rejected service to Allah in Heaven and became Iblis, ‘the desperate’ fallen angel (or jinn,

39 See also 3:83; 9:53. The theme of inevitable submission also comes up in an eschatological sense, with reference to the Day of Judgment (Q37:22–25).

40 Cf. 6:14; 6:163; 39:12; and 2:30; 3:52; 3:67; 4:163; 6:84.

according to many contemporary Muslim commentators),⁴¹ dragging a third of the angelic host (jinn) to *Jahannam*.⁴² The significance of al-Shaitan/Iblis as a subject-position in Muslim life cannot be overstated. Practicing Muslims remember his presence on a daily basis, reciting the formula ‘I seek refuge in Allah from al-Shaitan the accursed’ before each reading of the Quran, *wuḍū’* (ablution) (D019; D031),⁴³ and thrice in the morning and evening for protection from evil jinn (F006).⁴⁴ Many emphasize the limitations of the Demonic influence: “al-Shaitan does not possess you” (C052); the index finger during prayer “keeps the Devil away” (C008); “you cannot say: ‘al-Shaitan is guiding me.’ *You* have chosen to make this mistake” (C041); etc. As Hanne explains:

We, as Muslims, *know* there’s a third player in the game (al-Shaitan), you can’t see him, but we know how he works ..., we know what he wants. And that’s why we he attacks others. ... Not me, because I know where to jump! ... *We* (Muslims) know *why* we get attacked. For example some people feel really bad, and (you) try to talk to them ‘but when is the last time you washed (purified) yourself?’ (*wuḍū’*) is not just for when you have to do your prayer, the best thing if you can be *wuḍū’* clean all the time. ... Some people cover their ears, ... the eyes, the body parts, so al-Shaitan cannot come in, he cannot whisper, because it’s covered. Like we cover food, we cover ourselves, so that *something* doesn’t enter. (C038)

Hanne recounts how, days earlier, she called a (Muslim) friend, who was wallowing in self-loathing. She urged her to “wake up” and utter a protective prayer. Her friend then recognized that it was al-Shaitan who “loves when I cry and feel sorry about myself,” and was “having a party in front of me.” Hanne argues that, without spiritual knowledge, a human being will despair, never knowing why he is doing wrong. A Muslim, says Hanne, would realize what she has done, repenting because she “knows the price of her actions.” In her case, spiritual knowledge of bad consequences leads her to “fix what I have damaged” (C038).

41 These commentators usually rely on Q18:50 (YA): “Behold! We said to the angels, ‘Bow down to Adam’: They bowed down except Iblis. He was one of the Jinns, and he broke the Command of his Lord. Will ye then take him and his progeny as protectors rather than Me? And they are enemies to you! Evil would be the exchange for the wrong-doers”.

42 See 2:34; 7:11; 15:31; 17:61; 18:50; 20:116; 26:95; 34:20; 38:74; etc.

43 Sa’id bin ‘Ali bin Wahf al-Qahthani, ed., *Fortress of the Muslim: Invocations from the Qur’an & Sunnah*, 7th ed (London: Darussalam, 2009). “Muslimernes Bøn,” Muslimernesvej.dk, April 6, 2017, http://muslimernesvej.dk/Boennen/Muslimernes__Boen.pdf.

44 Hao [pseud.], post in closed Facebook group *Den Lige Vej* [pseud.], February 2018.

We can start to see the important role played by concrete knowledge of spiritual matters. This is especially evident in the function of al-Shaitan as an icon of extreme rebellion against Allah, disrespect for the privileged role of humanity, and challenge to loyalty and faith. The notion of social antagonism mentioned in earlier chapters is apt to describe how the Devil (as subject-position) and Hell (as discursive location) are key to identity construction. Social antagonism emphasizes the “constitutive role of friend-foe divisions” (Torfinn 2003, 82); this also means that, by refusing to serve Allah, al-Shaitan himself becomes a rival recipient of servitude. In some Quranic verses, the term for worship of al-Shaitan is the same as that usually applied to Allah, *‘ibādah* (Q36:60). Moreover, he issues commands just like a (false) deity (Q2:169). In a sense, al-Shaitan makes Muhammad’s attitude possible by being his polar opposite. He was the first who did *not* bow to Allah’s Will, becoming a timeless reference point for the price of failure to submit; the antithesis of all that is worth striving for; and the embodiment of localizable perdition. For my interlocutors, it is crucial to keep this reference point constantly in mind, in order to orientate themselves away from damnation, and towards salvation.

The *‘non serviam’* is not some grand declaration uttered in primordial times, it is something humans have to take care to not mimic on a daily basis. Al-Shaitan’s fatal mistake is often linked to the common human defects of pride/arrogance. To stay with Hanne:

Some people are not brave enough to open the Quran and read it. It’s true!
 ... Because the people of Hell will recognize themselves when they read it. ... The liars, ... the hypocrites. ... What do you do when evidence is presented in front of you? Do you arrogantly throw it away, or do you say ‘I need to, maybe, improve myself’ This thought of being arrogant and discard everything, it’s what we say this is Satanic skill. ... There’s a battle going on because al-Shaitan is envious, he thinks he’s better than Adam.
 ... so when you see people who are arrogant we (Muslims) don’t like it.
 (C038)

In both ordinary Danish Muslim theology and the Quran, al-Shaitan’s and his human imitators’ refusal to acknowledge the “evidence” and submit to Allah’s Decree is an act of arrogance.⁴⁵ Again, this amounts to a dismissal of that crucial spiritual knowledge which is both the starting point and result of the process (see 4.3).

45 See 2:34; 7:76; 7:206; 39:59; 40:6; etc.

3 Already Muslim

In chapter three, I outlined the Islamic logic according to which Allah is the Ultimate Master the individual needs to become who she is. I evoked the metaphor of Plato's cave to illustrate the process: the prisoner does not exit the cave when she is freed from the chains, but when the master forces her out. To Muslims, Allah could function, through Muhammad, as the vanishing mediator who delivers humankind to the abyss of their freedom, allowing each to discover what one 'always-already' is: Muslim.

While the first section did away with the idea that one can contradict Allah's Will, the previous section might have created the impression that the act of willingly surrender implies optionality. That one can either become Muslim or take another path, without repercussions. Yet this is, from my interlocutors' viewpoint, a mere appearance caused by spiritual blindness.

First, I will discuss the *shahādah* (testimony) the well-known Islamic profession of faith in *tawhīd* (the Oneness of Allah) and Muhammad's prophethood: *lā ʾilāha ʾillā llāh* and *Muhammadun rasūlu llāh* (There is no God but Allah, Muhammad is the messenger of Allah).⁴⁶ Even though the *shahādah* has come to be seen as the central Islamic *rite de passage* by Muslims and non-Muslims alike, the historical contingencies that shaped the development of this specific creed are complex.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, today the profession of faith has a key function in Danish and global Muslim-talk. Freedom, in this case, figures as a kind of spiritual highpoint. Second, I will address the substantial difference between the decision to willingly surrender and the discovery of being surrendered. As I will argue, the mechanism by which one becomes a Muslim *subject* (i.e., interpellation) has more to do with a recognition than a decision. Third, I will substantiate this further by relating some of the criteria associated with conversion. There are mentions of both freedom and a spontaneous recognition, and one can distinguish Muslim-talk on conversion between that of converts themselves and those raised in Muslim families. I conclude with a question anticipated by some Muslim educational platforms: "do we really have a choice?" Hopefully, this chapter will by then have dispelled the need for a determinate answer, and clarified why humans would always have a choice, if they hadn't already made one.

46 First: 3:144; 12:38; 20:14; 33:40; 37:35; 47:2; 47:19; 48:29; 49:3–7; etc. Second: 2:143; 2:285; 4:42; 4:61; 4:64; 33:40; 48:29; 58:13; 61:9; etc.

47 According to James Lindsay (2005, 140–141), the Quran does not treat this formulation as the most defining statement of what it means to be a Muslim; it had not been established as the official ritual statement of faith until a century later.

3.1 *“Becoming a Muslim Is the Highest Expression of Freedom”*

The act of ‘taking the *shahādah*’ marks a personal and social decision—a milestone in one’s spiritual development. This widely circulating pamphlet titled “What is the purpose of life?,” after having established the main terms and beliefs, answers the question “What should I do now?” by suggesting that one should believe and utter the *shahādah* to become Muslim: “The test of one’s faith lies in using one’s intellect to ... and acknowledge God’s existence and live according to His guidance.” By “submitting to God’s commandments,” the pamphlet reads, “everyone can become Muslim by believing and proclaiming the following creed (the *shahādah*) Is it not time that you fulfill your life’s purpose, submit to the truth, and acknowledge your Creator?” (D026).⁴⁸

In this fragment, ‘submitting to the truth’ is just another way in which ‘willing surrender’ manifests as a logical consequence of sufficient knowledge rather than a free, arbitrary decision. The quote also shows that the utterance of this special formula has become the normative way of testing one’s belonging to the community, which is not self-evident.⁴⁹ Embedded in this fragment is one of the main procedures of proselytization. First, the potential convert is presented with some very basic tenets of faith, including the Oneness of Allah. Second, there is a question: if they sound meaningful and acceptable, then why not testify? ‘Becoming’ Muslim is seemingly the result of ‘being’ in agreement with a few semantically ambiguous phrases. Again, ‘Islam’ is proposed as the master-signifier that pierces a certain chain of signifiers, making them instantaneously meaningful.

Ali, as a member of *Center for Danske Konvertitter* (Center for Danish Converts), an organization working to assist new Danish converts to Islam, is somewhat of an expert on taking the *shahādah* for the first time. He tells me that choosing to become a Muslim is the greatest expressions of freedom:

When you choose to be Muslim, that’s a specific expression of freedom, because no one can force you to become a Muslim, you can only become a Muslim ... if *you* choose to become a Muslim. I think that this is the biggest example of expression of freedom that you *choose* your religion you have, and that you ... say the *shahādah* to become a Muslim, that’s your own choice, and that’s your freedom of the choice. (C052)

48 Det Islamiske Trossamfund, *Hvad er formålet med livet?* (Islamicpamphlets.com). Brochure found in a mosque in Aarhus, January 2018.

49 If the *shahādah* were not taken as the criterion for calling oneself Muslim, Christians could

Taking the *shahādah* is not merely one of the many decisions a human being can make, but as the fulfillment of one's life purpose and indeed the *raison d'être* of free will: Allah created humankind but to worship Him (Q51:56–58). Mamoon nuances this notion by specifying that beyond worship there is *shukūr* (gratitude). According to him, worship is not an end in itself; the end is a state of gratitude expressed and reached through worship. Moreover, we should not forget that there can be no compulsion in religion (*lā ikrāha fī l-dīni*), and that individuals are ultimately 'free to respond' to the Divine Call to believe.

These nuances build on the basic premise that human purpose is related to the acknowledgment of the Divine, a notion appearing in most basic informative pamphlets: "As one submits to God, it becomes possible to fulfill one's true purpose in life, by acknowledging one's Creator and sincerely worshiping Him alone. By doing so, one will achieve the countless benefits mentioned above that Islam brings with it" (D027).⁵⁰ Another pamphlet states "everything in the universe serves a purpose," and humans "have the higher purpose to recognize and worship God alone, so that we follow our creator's guidance" (D026).⁵¹

The notion of acknowledging, recognizing, and confessing the Truth and Allah's favors, has come up several times now. It is a common theme in Danish Muslim-talk, and appears several times in the Quran.⁵² One could say that, from the part of the recipient of the Divine revelation via the prophetic message, *'arafa* is what sets in motion the process of transformation, enabling the ability/choice to 'testify' (Q5:83). The witnessing/testimonial (*shahādah*) is a result of the "recognition" of the "truth" in the "revelation" which "descended on" the Prophet. While the act of paying attention or listening is important, but, as both my interlocutors and the foundational texts repeatedly state, it does not guarantee recognition (Q10:42).⁵³

Danish Muslims primarily use the notion of recognition when citing knowledge of the following: one's place vis-à-vis the Divine; one's purpose; and one's attendant obligations. Fadil directly connects recognition of (and submission to) Allah to knowledge of personal purpose and destiny. Most importantly, he stresses that he is "perfectly free" in surrendering to Allah. So, in the ritual pro-

be called Muslims as well, since, according to the Quran, they too submit to Allah's Will (see Q3:52).

50 Det Islamiske Trossamfund, *Hvorfor Islam? Skønheden og fordelene ved Islam* (Islamicpamphlets.com). Brochure found in a mosque in Aarhus, January 2018.

51 Det Islamiske Trossamfund, *Hvad er formålet med livet?* (Islamicpamphlets.com). Brochure found in a mosque in Aarhus, January 2018.

52 "... thou wilt see their eyes overflowing with tears, for they recognize [*'arafū*] the truth ..." (Q5:83 YA). See 2:89; 2:146; 5:83; 16:83; etc.

53 See 10:42 and 6:25; 7:204; 10:42; 22:73; 30:52; 35:22; 52:38; etc.

fession of faith, there is a sense of positive freedom to act upon one's knowledge of destiny, purpose, and Divine presence. "I acknowledge what He does for me. ... And I am perfectly free in surrendering to God. Because I am fulfilling my destiny. I know why I am here. I know the purpose of my life. Why am I created, what is waiting for me, what God wants from me" (C015). Fadil here connects many of the themes, including Allah as a Willing/Desiring Agent, destiny (as *naṣīb*, personal fate), and the ideas of purpose and recognition.

In his story about al-Shaitan, Lutfi states that humans are created to follow Allah's Path and ward off temptation. This world is a testing ground. For him, freedom lies in the choice of either (a) accepting and following one's purpose, thus 'passing the test,' or (b) succumbing to *Shayṭān's* whispers, and failing. He tells me that the Devil made a pact with Allah, saying that "he would lead them all astray, except those who believe. ... So we have been created for a purpose. ... It's like we're being tested" (C019). It is common to hear warnings about failing this test. Besides missing the point of one's existence, the ancillary lack of knowledge is said to cause suffering. Basim, for instance, argues that refraining from worshiping Allah results in a meaningless life and possibly suicide:

Khalil (Translating from Arabic): He created us to worship Him. Since then we are worshiping God, we are feeling free because this is His world. Except when it comes to something that He prohibits us to do. ... He said, because we have a purpose in our life, anyone who is not worshiping, ... he feels like he's lost, and he's unhappy. ... Blind, but not in the physical sense It could be proved with the high rate of suicides by people who have no purpose in life and, you can say, have no religion to follow There is a high suicide rate because they feel like life is worthless, meaningless. (C030)

In sum, we can say that the most important function of human freedom lies in grasping the opportunity to act upon one's recognition of the revealed Truth. Herein lies a key paradox: understanding human purpose (submission and worship) requires recognition/acknowledgment of Allah's Power and Works, but the latter also seems to require the former. In a sense, the 'freedom to surrender' amounts to a Kirkegaardian 'qualitative leap' of faith, ambiguously characterized by both willpower and grace, active and passive at once, a 'qualitative transition' to religiousness and (in his case Christian) faith (Ferreira 1998). It is a leap *to* faith, a faith which is "not a knowledge but an act of freedom, an expression of will" (Kierkegaard in Ferreira 1998, 211). This is what Ali refers to when he states that choosing to become Muslim is "the highest expression of freedom," involving recognition and acceptance of one's position.

3.2 *Interpellation*

The imperative to surrender/submit is how the ideological core of Islam reaches out to the individuals that approach it. Clearly, it is not a mechanism exclusive to Islam, or even religion in general, and its many forms and shapes have been described in disparate disciplines. Louis Althusser has probably produced one of the most successful analyses of the phenomenon, albeit not the most detailed. The Marxist philosopher used ‘interpellation’ to describe the way ideology transforms individuals into subjects. In his work, “ideological state apparatuses” (i.e., family, media, religion, education) and the various discourses they propagate, continuously call upon, or ‘hail,’ persons in their social interactions, thereby constituting identity. One can imagine the operation, says Althusser ([1970] 2008, 48), along the lines of a policeman calling out in the street: “hey, you there!” As soon as he hears the call, the hailed individual will turn around. “By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a *subject*. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was ‘really’ addressed to him, and that ‘it was *really him* who was hailed’ (and not someone else).” Experience shows, according to Althusser, that the effect of these hailings is such that they rarely miss their target: a whistle is enough for the individual to recognize herself as being ‘really’ the one hailed. By responding to the call, the individual is constituted as subject: a responsible, self-conscious agent.

The process of interpellation does not occur in chronological succession: “the existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing.” Even more so, “ideology has always-already interpellated individuals as subjects” and “individuals are always-already subjects. Hence individuals are ‘abstract’ with respect to the subjects which they always-already are” (Althusser [1970] 2008, 49). The question, apropos Islam, is how it (as ideology) interpellates individuals, and what exactly makes this operation successful. What is it about Allah’s Call that makes the Muslim subject turn around and identify?

Following the lines of Althusser’s ([1970] 2008, 51) account of (Christian) ideology, Islam says: ‘I address myself to you, a human individual named Khaled, in order to tell you that there is only One God and that you are answerable to Him. Allah addresses himself to you through me (the *Quran*, *sunna*, *khutbah*, *Islam.dk*, etc.). This is who you are, Khaled! This is your origin, this is your *fiṭrah*. Allah created you for all eternity, your destiny and share is written in His Book, your destination is set. This is your place in the world, this is what you must do! If you observe the sharia and follow the *aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*, you will be safe and find success in the afterlife. You will have a place in the gardens of *Jannah* and avoid the fire of *Jahannam*. You ... etc.’

The crucial point of this oversimplification is that, in calling individuals separately and 'by their name,' Islam elicits a sort of recognition, an acknowledgment that one does, and always did, occupy that 'designated' place. The one who answers the Call, recognizing herself as subjected to Allah, is "*a subject through the Subject and subjected to the Subject*" (Althusser [1970] 2008, 53). As Judith Butler (1993, 121) puts it, the hailing does not merely repress or control the subject, but forms a crucial part of the spiritual and social formation thereof. "The call is formative, if not performative, precisely because it initiates the individual into the subjected status of the subject." The discovery, at the moment of recognition, of being *always-already* subject feeds straight into the notion of Primordial Nature, confirming a whole range of tangent relations in the discursive network. The very identity of the 'revert' falls, as it were, into place within the formation right at the *point de capiton*, in a temporary closure and fixing of meaning: "the point through which the subject is 'sewn' to the signifier, and at the same time the point which interpellates individual into subject by addressing it with the call of a certain master-signifier ... in a word, it is the point of the subjectivation of the signifier's chain" (Žižek [1989] 2008, 112).

The 'procedure' of subjectivation, for Althusser ([1970] 2008, 52), is dominated by a strange phenomenon: "the fact that there can only be such a multitude of possible religious subjects on the absolute condition that there is a Unique, Absolute, *Other Subject*, i.e. God." Religious ideology can only interpellate individuals as subject on such a massive scale by presupposing the existence of Allah as the Subject *par excellence*. As I argued earlier, the power and success of the operation is dependent on certain Divine characteristics, primarily that the Ultimate Other is not subject to anything else, and cannot itself be interpellated (or *properly* named, as in Laclau). As we have seen, the Quran naturally goes to great lengths to establish this specific point: "Allah is the Self-sufficient" (60:6 S); "there is nothing whatever like unto Him" (42:11 YA); etc.

Outlining his reading of Lacanian psychology with regard to the upper level of the 'graph of desire,' Žižek ([1989] 2008, 123) tackles the 'leftover' of interpellation, which he describes as the "circular movement between symbolic and imaginary identification." The problem is that "after every 'quilting' of the signifier's chain which retroactively fixes its meaning, there always remains a certain ... opening," which is rendered in the third form of the graph by the famous '*Che vuoi?*' (what do you want?). The question rising out of the quilting operation indicates "the persistence of a gap between utterance and its enunciation." It asks: 'you're saying/telling me this, but what do you want with it? What is your aim, your desire?' This question is essential, because it is exactly the one we can

read in Allah's 'Call,' the interpellation of the individual as Muslim. We could say that Allah (as big Other) addresses the individual as if she herself already knows why she is being 'hailed.' But the question is unanswerable. The subject *cannot* know why she finds herself in exactly this spot of the symbolic network. The only answer is the "hysterical question ... *Why am I what you [the big Other] are saying I am?*" (Žižek [1989] 2008, 126). The hysterical condition is the effect of a failed/incomplete interpellation, the incapacity/unwillingness of the subject to fulfill the symbolic identification. It finds its resolution by abandoning the question, and accepting the fact that the 'big Other' does not justify one's being.

Althusser recognizes Lacan's idea that a certain misrecognition between the Other and the subject it forms might persist. However, as Butler (1993, 122) argues, while he mentions 'bad subjects,' Althusser "does not consider the range of disobedience that such an interpellating law might produce." The 'call' might not only be refused (I will not serve!), but might also be "ruptured, forced into a rearticulation that calls into question the monotheistic force of its own unilateral operation." To Butler (1993, 122), this happens through *subversive repetition*: "the parodic inhabiting of conformity that subtly calls into question the legitimacy of the command, a repetition of the law into hyperbole, a rearticulation of the law against the authority of the one who delivers it" (see also Butler 1990, 185–186). In a way, Islam's worst enemies are those who answer its call, conform to its rules, and corrupt them from within, as, some would argue, was happening with the *Islamic State*.

For Lacan, the answer to this '*Che vuoi?*,' the desire of the big Other, is 'fantasy.' Fantasy "functions as ... an imaginary scenario filling out the void, the opening of the *desire of the Other*." By giving us a definite answer "it enables us to evade the unbearable deadlock in which the Other wants something from us, but we are at the same time incapable of translating this desire of the Other into a positive interpellation, into a mandate with which to identify" (Žižek [1989] 2008, 128). Islam tenably includes the anxiety and love Žižek sees as key elements in the Jewish and Christian traditions. Moreover, there is the same occlusion of the Divine dimension—the Unseen. If Christianity defines itself in terms of loving sacrifice, initiated by Christ and pursued by his followers, then Islam is nothing less than what it means: peace in submission. Yet, unlike Christianity, Islam rejects the paternal logic (Q112:3)—Allah is not a (symbolic or not) father—as well as the sacrificial logic, denying Christianity's supreme moment (Q4:157) (Žižek and Gunjević 2012). Islam also severely critiques the Christian doctrine of the *imago dei*, with Sufism as an occasional exception (Michot 2005), and the notion of God making Himself man via Christ. Therefore, the extent to which arguments regarding the mirror-structure of ideology

work in this context is questionable, and Althusser's thoughts about the mutuality of the subject-Subject recognition must be reserved for Christianity.

All hinges on the supposition that subjects recognize 'what they are' and behave accordingly. This is crucial, because it involves the fact that subjects themselves must maintain their 'stable' position vis-à-vis the Divine—they must work *on* and *by* themselves. Having acknowledged their place and purpose, they incessantly strive to enact that recognition. To a self-recognized Muslim, 'Islam' does not speak merely through external agents, but acts from within: "their concrete, material behavior is simply the inscription in life of the admirable words of the prayer: *Amen—So be it*" (Althusser [1970] 2008, 55).

3.3 "Allah Will Not Accept a Brainwashed Convert"

As the literature on European conversion to Islam shows, motives, though diverse, do exhibit regularities—'spiritual,' 'political,' 'social,' and 'cultural' (Köse 1996; Allievi 1998; Mánnsson 2002; Roald 2004). I think it is useful to distinguish between the articulations of actual converts, and those of persons from Muslim families who consciously committed, but were always surrounded by the community. In my data, the first often involve several recurring themes: (a) a long-term abstract form of faith, often in a benevolent higher power, which is 'discovered' to be Allah after a process of spiritual searching/seeking; (b) reference to the purpose of life, finding meaning, personal fate and destiny; (c) a sense of security, confidence, and strengthened identity that comes with accepting Islam as authoritative, and joining Muslim communities. I will provide some brief examples.

In her interview with public television, Helene Larsen traces her decision to convert to her childhood, stating that, even then, she was 'a believer.' She recounts how she was often alone, and gradually became aware of an inescapable presence. "There is someone holding a hand over you, there is someone looking out for you, someone keeping an eye on you. You are simply not alone. And that feeling has always been with me" (W091).⁵⁴ Tina Gudrun Jensen (2006, 648) confirms this theme in her work with Danish converts to Islam, noting that the "spiritual search" is often expressed as "a quest for truth and proof," which "involves having experimented with several religious movements," reflecting a series of what she calls "conversion careers."

Zandra Berthelsen, who became known as the victim of an infamous sexual child-abuse case (*Tøndersagen*), converted to Islam some years ago. In an

54 *Menneskebiblioteket*, "Konvertit," hosted by John Rahbek, featuring Helene Larsen, aired on May 29, 2017, on TV2 Lorry, <https://www.tv2lorry.dk/menneskebiblioteket/menneskebiblioteket-konvertit>.

interview with TV2, she explains why she chose this religion, involving elements from the second and third conversion themes:

I feel it suits me very well, that it's right for me. Islam gives my life a meaning, in many ways. There is no place (in my life) where it does not make sense. ... (Interviewer: How do you think it is related to sexual abuse you were exposed to as a child?). With the life I have lived, I need a life with structure, and this I get with Islam. Here I also get something to look out to and something to live for. ... It strengthens my identity. I feel more confident about myself. ... I hope it can ... make me live in tranquility and peace of mind.⁵⁵ (N111)

The expression “there is no place (in my life) where it does not make sense,” perfectly synthesizes the core of the present study. This is a case of successful ‘quilting’ of the signifier’s chain with ‘Islam’ as master-signifier. It attributes meaning, not just to ‘spiritual’ questions, but to every aspect of one’s life. This is the religious discourse-machine at its best, and exactly why some Danish Muslims find it such a moving and beautiful example to share. In expressing that ‘Islam gives life a meaning,’ Zandra uses almost the exact wording as imam Basim (C008), becoming, as it were, living proof of his claim. Ali, who introduced me to the *Tøndersagen*, finds it a “fascinating case” exactly for these reasons: “She wanted to commit suicide, she didn’t have any structure in life And then she became a Muslim and found this light in her life, found structure. Now she knows the purpose of her life” (C052).

As Jensen (2006, 648) observes, the various ways of “searching” seem related to “the meaning of life, a desire for something beyond oneself for transcendence. This yearning for transcendence appears to be highly related to a ‘return to God,’ one of the main religious motivations for converting.” Her interlocutors speak of coming from “atheist families,” of having had to “learn to believe,” and undergoing a process of re-socialization to religious belief in general. Moreover, according to Jensen, “part of the reason for converting also consists of a fascination with the God-made as trans-boundary, for submitting oneself to God,” for example, in the prayer (*salat*), is to express being “*a slave of Allah*.” The anthropologist argues this goes together with “a search for rules, for what is *haram* and *halal*.” In this respect, “God and religion constitute a boundary for the existence of rules that become guidelines for living. These are experienced as fixed, yet

55 Anders Lomholt, “Zandra fra Tøndersagen: Sådan har jeg det i dag.” TV2, November 17, 2016.

also emancipatory in a world where modern individualism dooms one to be one's own creator."

When it comes to long-time Muslims, and their stories *about* 'Danish converts,' the salient themes are quite different. To name a few: (a) freedom and sincerity are key to a successful and proper decision; (b) conversion is an expression of freedom of religion; (c) the ethos of new converts is tainted by their upbringing with an unhealthy amount of personal freedom; (d) converts might interpret Islamic law as restrictions, while those 'born muslim' never really knew anything else.

Ousman, a chairman of a conservative mosque, has been the target of Danish media for years because of his conservatism and blunt statements. In one conversation, he assures me that Islam is "not like any other religion." Some religions try to "take your heart" by manipulating "psychological problems and weaknesses" functioning "as a therapy." In Islam, on the other hand, one *must* think for oneself, *willingly* accepting and choosing to worship Allah: "In Islam, everybody has the freedom to decide. *You* have a free will. I cannot pressure you. ... Convincing people by taking advantage of their problems is forbidden: Allah will not accept a brainwashed convert" (C039). Ousman states that his role as Muslim is just to show the availability of knowing "the right and the wrong," and to "invite all those interested to Islam." There is thus a sense in which making the crucial step toward becoming a Muslim is contingent on a certain freedom of will and sincerity.

Being able to 'choose for Islam' also depends on social conditions, particularly the presence of freedom of religion. When living in Denmark, according to Ali, "you have the freedom of religion, and you express that by converting to whatever religion you want to; so you're not forced to do anything" (C052). This seemingly straightforward statement contains a peculiar notion: conversion is an 'expression' of freedom of religion, rather than freedom of religion merely safeguarding citizens from forced conversion. Danish Muslims often seem to link the notion of *religionsfrihed* to Islam, ignoring the complex history involved, especially in Denmark, where freedom of religion is subordinate to the (remnants of a) state-church.⁵⁶

The topic of converts and conversion also raises some frustrations. Aaheda, for instance, laments that "converted Danes" tend to be very opinionated and extreme in their beliefs: "I have so many *fordomme* (prejudices) ... about

56 The Danish debate on *religionsfrihed* is long and thorny, with many maintaining that the freedom of religion granted by the constitution does not imply equality of religions (*religionslighed*). See Brian Patrick McGuire, "Religionsfrihed Og Religionslighed—En Blandet Arv," *Kristeligt Dagblad*, September 8, 2010.

(ethnic) Danish people who become Muslim I learn about them, I see them, how they feel that they are more Muslim than Arabs, and I just hate it" (C032). It is very common to hear those who grew up in Muslim families saying that 'ethnic Danish converts' tend to be quite radical and presume to be more pious than so-called those from Muslim families. There even used to be a running joke among Muslims that new converts can suffer from an illness named "convertitis" (Roald 2004, 283), an allusion to the fanaticism exhibited by some converts. This manifests in extremely ritualized behavior, rigidity in dress codes and rules on 'mixing' genders (*ākhtlāt*), and a heightened preoccupation with the haram and halal, leading to repudiations of 'born' Muslims who do not live up to these standards, in a need to demarcate one's new identity in relation to themselves and to others (Taussig 1993).

It is useful to take a mental note of the occurrence of terms such as '*etnisk dansk*' (ethnic Danish), '*født muslim*' (born Muslim), '*kulturmuslim*' (cultural Muslim), and the like, but it should not distract from the subject at hand. 'Born-Muslim' is a literal translation of '*født muslim*' which, together with 'born in Islam,' is a phrase some use when specifying their lifelong attachment to the *ummah*. Amir makes the argument that, for a convert, becoming Muslim is akin to stepping into a 'box,' and restricting oneself to a set of rules. For him, having been raised in a Muslim family, the perspective is different, because the 'box' is all he knows:

The first thing, is to choose the religion. When you are inside the religion, you have some choices ... (and) rules. ... In *any rule*, you have the choice: want to do it, or not to do it. But there are consequences. ... The free will, means (choosing) stepping inside the box. You cannot do *whatever* you want, because ..., as Muslim, you might 'come out' of Islam. ... (If you do,) do what you want. ... I am born Muslim, it's not like a converted. The converted comes from another religion, and when he comes he knows 'I have this box.' But me, I am born Muslim, all I know is this box. ... It is the only thing I can see. ... It's difficult for me to come *outside* the box, because the only thing I am guided to is this. (C028)

In Danish Muslim-talk, '*født muslim*' differentiates between subject-positions—the 'originals' and the newcomers. Fadil, for instance, says: "... and God sent the Prophet Muhammad to describe to us—even us Muslims, born Muslim—what God's Will is, in the Quran ..." (C015); Ali: "I am Muslim; I am born Muslim in a Muslim home" (C052). Jensen (2006, 646), who also encountered this expression, relates that "Many converts feel excluded by 'born' Muslims and accused of not being 'genuine' Muslims." But being *født muslim* does

not preclude a period of ‘searching.’ As Kareem says, most “Muslims at some point in their life *choose* to be Muslim or not. Because I was born as a Muslim, but I’ve not always been practicing Islam (seriously)” (C048). The point is that Amir is making a distinction between the converted and the Muslim-born experience of Islam: neither restrictions nor freedom have the same meaning. Similarly, Amir states in our conversation that, to him, what some see as restrictive is just a habit, one that is occasionally liberating; while, what some see as personal freedom, he deems oppressive.

From the perspective of my ‘Muslim-born’ interlocutors, the order of the surrendering/submission dynamic is difficult to discern, due to the fact that most of them speak in retrospect, or try to step into the shoes of someone new to their religion. Most of those brought up as Muslims experienced a gradual intensification in their religiosity, but all of them had open access/exposure to the Islamic discourse through family and friends. It is more correct to say that spiritual freedom, belief, knowledge, submission, and all the notions I am discussing, happen simultaneously, while some stories and perspectives might highlight one rather than another. Knowledge of Allah both precedes, follows, and is embodied in, the act of submission—a submission that is not a one-time thing but continuously maintained and renewed in practice, and epitomized in the *sujūd* (prostration).

3.4 “Do We Really Have Choice?”

I began this chapter with a key theme in Danish Muslim-talk: the ways in which the individual is always ‘surrounded’ by Divine Will. I discussed statements on the pervasiveness of Allah’s Decree, reaffirming the notions outlined earlier on (see 2.2), but now with extra emphasis on the ways human freedom is located within His Domain. I concluded the section with a Lacanian reflection on Allah’s ‘Call’ and the Islamic response to the ‘desire of the Other’. I then proceeded to the pull-mechanism of Islamic ideology: the hailing of the Muslim subject and the voluntary surrender of both the self and the will to Allah. I involved Althusser’s views on religious ideology to frame this process of continuous transformation, addressing some of the ways that individuals are called to recognize their place within the Divine Scheme. In short, ‘willing submission’ involves the recognition of how humans are always-already in submission to Allah. I also discussed how my interlocutors are quite aware of how this articulation might be read within a liberal-secular view on freedom, and how some seek to counteract it through the use of different words (peace over submission, servants over slaves).

Considering these statements on freedom in relation to being surrounded, surrendered, and knowing-believing Divine Will, can we still say humans have

free choice? I hope by now it is clear the question is ill conceived. When we concentrate on Muslim statements on freedom (in this case as volition), it appears that they ultimately refer to the all-pervasive Divine Decree; the all-encompassing Divine Knowledge; the imperative of submission and cultivated surrender; the necessity of Divine Grace and Guidance. Yet Muslim statements on ‘acknowledging surroundedness’ and ‘choosing surrender’ point at the idea that ‘reversion’ is the only temporal event which can, in a sense, change eternity itself. Žižek (2000), in his argument for why “the Christian legacy is worth fighting for,” glosses perhaps too easily over the parallels with Islam. The philosopher observes that “without the Divine act of Grace, our destiny would remain immovable, forever fixed by this eternal act of choice; the ‘good news’ of Christianity, however, is that, in a genuine Conversion, one can ‘re-create’ oneself, that is, *repeat* this act, and thus *change (undo the effects of) eternity itself*” (Žižek 2000, 89). This is precisely why the *shahādah* plays such a central role in Muslim discourse, and why it is entangled with a specific notion of freedom as the choice to either embrace or refuse submission: reversion to the primordial nature, together with grace, is the only path to redemption and safety (see 5.2).

The idea of choice, in other words, must be understood in its proper discursive network, and related to the basic idea of being completely ‘surrounded’ by Allah’s Will and the impossibility of eluding the decision to accepting this condition. The brochure circulating in Danish mosques, mentioned in a previous chapter, answers the question “do we really have choice?” in just one paragraph:

The fact that God knows our choices does not make our choices less voluntary. Even though God wants humanity to believe in Him, He does not force anyone. If God wanted it, He could guide all humankind to submit to Him, as He has power over everything. However, in his wisdom, He has created us with the ability to refuse, and made us responsible for our choices. Just because God allows something does not mean that He likes it.⁵⁷ (D025)

The explanation dispels an improper question, one posed from outside Muslim-talk, by rerouting the narrative toward Divine Knowledge. The question might as well have been ‘how does freedom of choice relate to Allah’s Knowl-

57 Det Islamiske Trossamfund, *Ateisme: En Islamisk vinkel* (Islamicpamphlets.com). Brochure found in a mosque in Aarhus, January 2018.

edge?’ The answer implies a framework in which belief and trust in *al-Qadā’ wa al-Qadar* is essential, and for good reason. For Danish Muslims, ‘sensible’ inquiries concern the relationship between freedom and Destiny, as opposed to the existence of human freedom in isolation. In conversation, my interlocutors almost never leave ‘freedom’ alone—a reminder of “the bigger picture” soon follows any phrase concerning it, and, again, everything has to ‘make sense’ in terms of ‘Islam.’ As Lutfi puts it, “you can walk where you want,” but “while you make your own ways, God is Aware of it” (C023). Like the verses he is referring to, Lutfi wants to emphasize that one cannot understand the ‘gift’ of choice apart from the greater scheme of which it is part. Allah has both the first and final word, serving as the context for all human life and experience (Q67:15).

This is not exclusive to Islamic tradition. Mahmood (2005, 11–12) notes, for instance, the liberalist concern with autonomy: “Liberalism’s unique contribution is to link the notion of self-realization with individual autonomy, wherein the process of realizing oneself is equated with the ability to realize the desires of one’s “true will (Gray 1991).” Freedom, in this model, “consists in the ability to autonomously ‘choose’ one’s desires no matter how illiberal they may be.” She then proceeded to contrast this with the Islamic piety movement, arguing “agentival capacity is entailed not only in those acts that resist norms but also in the multiple ways in which one inhabits norms” (Mahmood 2005, 15). However, as Laidlaw (2014, 156) rightly observes, the so-called secular-liberal position on autonomy is not as narrow as Mahmood construes it (see Berlin 2002, 186).

Highlighting oppositions between Islamic piety and liberal autonomy obscures the commonalities between two systems that simultaneously restrict and affirm free agency. In a sense, the concept of an Ultimate Authority *necessitates* the recognition of freedom. Much like Foucault’s later work, freedom should be conceived not as liberation from power, but rather as always operating within relations of power. When it comes to something like governmentality, the concept “makes it possible to bring out the freedom of the subject and its relationship to others—which constitutes the very stuff [*matière*] of ethics” (Foucault [1984b] 1997, 300). In my view, Foucauldian ethics have been successfully applied in social studies of Islam precisely because of their ability to draw out this dimension. Islamic piety and freedom even surface in the context of prison, where it appears as though, yet again, structures of dominance target agents whose freedom is presumed, which “includes the freedom to shape oneself into the kind of person that one wishes to become” (Williams 2017, 734). In the next chapter, I will address precisely the ‘ethical work’ from a Foucauldian perspective, tracking the ways in which Danish Muslims, *exercising* freedom, transform themselves through the cultivated relinquishing of

the self and will. I will show how worship and spiritual combat paradoxically involve self-abandonment and subjection.

To conclude: Humans do have a choice, but when it comes to submission, this choice has in a sense already been made. As Hanne says, the “people of Hell” will “recognize themselves” as such when they read the Quran, and so will those destined for heaven (C038). Much like Althusser’s policeman hailing someone in the street (hey, you there!), Allah hails each and every individual throughout life: Muslims are those who hear and respond to the call. When I asked my interlocutors if they experienced a choice in their faith, some were dumbfounded. How could anyone, with knowledge of Allah’s presence and power, still choose to resist Him? Now that they had shared their knowledge, some supposed the same counted for me. This did not turn out to be the case, but made the fieldwork rife with tense moments of proselytization. Kareem for instance observed that “for those who never heard about Islam, we believe that God’s mercy will ... you know, get them to paradise, because they didn’t know any of it.” Then, looking at me, he exclaimed: “But you, you *know*, my friend, you *know*! So if you don’t obey, you’re going to be fucked!” (Renders 2018, 73).

Everything Is for Allah

Worship-Subjection, Spiritual Combat, Knowing-Belief

Lutfi is a gentle and devout young Muslim of Somali descent, always willing to engage in conversation. After twenty minutes of hanging out in a university lounge, he glances at his smartphone, then suddenly jumps up, excuses himself, and hastens into an empty room. Several minutes later, he explains he almost forgot his afternoon prayer (*ʿaṣr*). Luckily, he has an app reminding him of his duties. The event sparks a discussion about prayer.

“Five prayers daily, provide a *breath* from daily life. A breath from work, everything. And the outcome can be feeling relaxed and re-charged, like a phone charges itself.” Lutfi waves his old and worn phone, chuckling.

“Sometimes I feel like I have a very ... how to say, a day with a lot of issues, future concerns, ... then you pray and you realize ... it reminds you: ‘ok, this is a small thing, be happy with what you have!’ I have used it many times.” He pauses to think of an example. “I remember last Friday, I had an exam ... in Arabic, and I wanted to have 10 or 12 (highest grades) ... then I got a 4. I was very disappointed. Like, *very* disappointed. Then I went to the masjid for Friday prayers, and this made me feel like ... happy with what I have. ‘How can I be sad over a 4? Like, (at first) I was angry (but then) ‘how can I be angry?’ And it (praying) made me ... *happy to be alive*, happy to have family, so ... in this way it can help you.”

As always, the point is not complete without a reference. “It says in the Quran: ‘O you believers! Use prayer and patience to help you.’ So you can use ... prayer to help you, give patience to you. A lot of verses are about patience, like: ‘God loves those who are patient’ and ‘when a calamity happens, then they are the ones who say: Everything is owned by Allah, and to home it will go with Him.’” Equanimity in the face of adversity is a virtue Lutfi talks about often, which he sees as taking a step back from everyday petty concerns.

“Like, if I lose the car, the house, it’s owned by Him, and it will return to Him. So it gives you a reminder of the *bigger picture*.” He searches for a verse in my Yusuf Ali interpretation of the Quran, then reads a passage from *sūrat l-baqarah* (The Cow). “Here it says: ‘O ye who believe! Seek help with patient Perseverance and Prayer: for God is with those ...’ (Q2:153) And then it says here: ‘We shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods ...’ (Q2:155). Then

here: ‘... when afflicted with calamity: To Allah we belong, and to Him is our return’ (Q2:156)” (C019).

Lutfi came to cherish his daily prayers, the opportunity to leave behind worldly anxieties, redirecting his attention towards his notion of the transcendental, merciful, and benevolent deity. His first comment is quite pragmatic: prayer provides relaxation, it fulfills his need to cope with the stress and hardship of daily life. Prayer can be a soothing cure for the anxious self/soul. The spot-on figure of speech reveals his talent as a young cultural broker, able to articulate Muslim discourse in ways that prove successful among his peers: prayer gives “a breath from daily life.” The second comment adds a rationale: his relaxation and happiness are due to a change in perspective. Directing attention to Allah makes him realize he has been self-involved, ungrateful for all he has received. Others might fall back into dejection; not so Lutfi, who reaps all the benefits salat has to offer. It is worth noticing, that the young Muslim already possessed the ‘spiritual knowledge’ about the functions and effects prayer is supposed to have, as his quotations in the third comment show. The practice is more than just a chance to unwind; it also develops key virtues such as patience (*ṣabr*).

A second explanatory level involves two ulterior cardinal notions: Allah as Planner and Owner. For Lutfi, any given calamity can remind us of a greater scheme/force beyond our control. Reacting with patience is a chance to accept our limitations, indicating spiritual maturity. Here and elsewhere, he states that patience is both the result of understanding and an important tonic against ignorance. Being aware of the “bigger picture,” and the Divine Attributes, reassures the believer, while, at the same time, guarding against the inscrutable drama of life.

Lutfi’s example is an entry-point into a Muslim ethics that takes willing submission to the Divine Will as its polestar. His comments provide insight into what happens when words become action. I am thinking not so much in the line of Austin’s performative utterances, or Searle’s speech-acts, but Foucauldian ethics. In *The Use of Pleasure*, Foucault (1984) distinguishes three general dimensions within the ambiguous domain of ‘morality.’ First of all, the set of values and rules of action recommended to individuals through the mediation of prescriptive agencies (the family, religious and educational institutions, etc). Secondly, morality includes an interpretative task; the study of it must include the real behaviors/reactions of individuals in relation to the recommended rules/values. The late Foucault was interested in a third dimension; namely, how one ought to ‘conduct oneself,’ i.e. “the manner in which one ought to form oneself as an ethical subject acting in refer-

ence to the prescriptive elements that make up the code” (Foucault [1984] 1990, 25–26).

Throughout this chapter, it will become apparent that ethics is intimately entwined with both thinking on discourse and human freedom. Yet the main reason I find the subject indispensable is that, across my data, statements on freedom are consistently paired with discussions about what a Muslim *ought* to do, be, become. If, in the previous chapter, freedom emerged as the main notion coupled with the imperative to willingly relinquish personal will/desire to Allah’s Will, here we find the ‘conscious practice of freedom’ as something *exercised* in this surrender. Relinquishing does not equal abandonment; one’s will ‘comes back’ to oneself, now charged with a mission and beneficiary: “all we say and do is for Allah.” In short, this chapter deals with willing submission as reflected in ethical practice.

The discussion on specifically Foucauldian ethics is relevant because, as Mahmood (2012, 224) notes, it does not treat subjectivity as a “private space of self-cultivation,” but as “an effect of power operationalized through a set of moral codes that summon a subject to constitute herself in accordance with its precepts.” Ethics, in Foucault ([1982] 1997, 225), is a modality of power involving transformative techniques making the self a *willing subject* of a discourse. In other words, we could say ethics, in this case, is nothing else than one of the ways in which individuals as ideological subjects consciously latch themselves to religious discourse.

While exploring this process, I will point out a few examples of the tangible modes of Danish Muslim-talk on freedom, how it figures in ethical self-fashioning, and the technologies of the self it sustains. Space allows me to tackle only two salient themes: (1) worship (*‘ibādah*) as a continuous cultivation of willing-submission, wherein the *sujūd* (prostration) plays a key role; and (2) spiritual combat, the struggle for ego-liberation, purification, and the pursuit of knowledge. In the third section, I discuss the function of spiritual knowledge in Danish Muslim-talk, how it appears inextricably tied to belief. Faith (*‘īmān*), to many of my interlocutors, precedes understanding, and the very meaning and value of one’s actions depend on belief.

1 Worship-Subjection

The constant imparting of knowledge, the lines on the pavement, the subtle gestures and comments detectable in any Danish mosque; all point to the moral problematization of worship and the precise bodily instruction it expects. As examples will show, it is impossible to ‘properly’ worship without internalizing

a great number of rules. Another, more general, indication of the centrality of worship is the fact that the greatest sin in Islam is exactly ‘associating partners with’ and worshiping of others than Allah (*shirk* and *ṭāġūt*).¹

The notion of worship-subjection is perfectly encapsulated in the common term *‘ibādah*.² In many schools of Islamic theology and jurisprudence, the term means complete submission, service, servitude, worship, humility, and obedience to Allah. It is not limited to ritualistic worship, but includes all expressions of servitude, neighborliness, alms-giving, piety, and even the pursuit of spiritual knowledge. The notion is often associated with several other concepts/requirements for proper, obedient submission: *‘ikhlāṣ* (sincerity), *khushū‘* (humility), *ḥubb* (love of Allah), *khashyat* (fear of Allah), among others. The use of the verb *‘abada* in the Quran names worship as servitude, involving obedient submission of the will.³

There is no human worship without will, a will that is ethically neutral—not irrevocably evil, and anything but incorruptibly good. It is both the principal cause of perdition and the instrument of salvation. It is the ‘ethical substance,’ object at once of “conscious consideration and of those labors required to realize a systematic ethical end” (Faubion 2012, 72). In other words, it needs work. From *sujūd*, the ‘highpoint’ of each prayer, to a prayer’s conclusion, *‘āmīn*, volition is the object symbolically ‘prostrating,’ or affirming intention. In worship, human beings can measure their will against that of the Divine and ‘recognize’ themselves subordinate. As some of my interlocutors argue, *‘Īsā* (Jesus) declared himself Muslim when he proclaimed: “not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42; John 5:30).

In this section, I will provide examples of worship-subjection from my data, to show how these notions translate into practice. Even if we admit that will/desire, as prime material of moral conduct, is closely linked to submission, worship, prostration, obedience, is this also the case in Danish Muslim-talk? How does freedom figure in all this? Before delving into the Muslim statements, I will briefly survey the so-called ethical turn in the anthropology of Islam, in order to situate the academic concern with moral conduct.

1.1 *The Ethical Turn in the Anthropology of Islam*

Expanding on the studies of the 1990s, Hirschkind (2001; 2003; 2010; 2011) wrote on matters of authority and secularism relevant to Islam. With others, he set out to substantiate how modernization processes facilitated the cultivation of what

1 See 2:96; 3:64; 4:48; 6:19; 6:81; 6:148; 7:173; 10:28; 14:22; 16:35–36; 16:86; 39:65; 52:43; etc.

2 See 9:31; 11:123; 16:36; 20:14; 37:22; 40:66; 51:56; 72:14; etc.

3 See 9:31; 11:123; 16:36; 20:14; 37:22; 40:66; 51:56; etc. In particular Q72:13–19.

had previously been conceived as “traditional” ethical imaginaries and authoritative practices (Hirschkind 2006; Salvatore 2007; Deeb 2006; Agrama 2012; Mahmood 2001; 2005; 2006). Building on Asad, these authors helped make secularism and secularity an object of anthropological observation, showing how liberalism and secularism operate as moral fields continuously enacted through everyday practices (Fadil and Fernando 2015a).

Saba Mahmood’s (2001; 2005; 2006) work, and especially her *Politics of Piety* (2005), launched a wave of fresh studies along the same lines (Deeb 2009; C. Jones 2010; Haniffa 2008). Together with Abu-Lughod, Mahmood made the anthropology of Islam famous outside of the discipline with her insights on ethical self-cultivation, analyzing the various techniques by which Egyptian Muslims work to increase the moral/religious self. This self-cultivation paradigm brings out the relationship between religious experience and the active choice of the disciplined (or undisciplined) subject. Asad, Abu-Lughod, Mahmood, and Hirschkind together are credited for shaping what Filippo Osella and Benjamin Soares (2010) call the ‘piety’ or ‘ethical turn’ in anthropology.

Osella’s and Soares’s critique of the piety turn spread among the anthropologists of religion, and was shared by those claiming there had been an over-engagement with topics such as Islamic revivalism and ethical self-cultivation. The success of the ‘ethicists’ and their methods had come at the cost of attention to the political and economic structures wherein these practices appear, and whereupon they are dependent. Many wanted to draw attention to the study of so-called “everyday religiosity” and “everyday Islam” (Osella and Soares 2010; George 2009; N.A. Khan 2006; Rouse and Hoskins 2004; Al-Mohammad 2012; Schielke and Debevec 2012). This call for an investment in “ordinary” Islam was also an attempt to highlight the ambiguities and contradictions within the discourses and practices of Muslims. It should be noted that scholars citing ‘everyday Islam’ often build on the same work as those emphasizing ‘piety,’ most of all Asad and Abu-Lughod, a fact that has not gone unchallenged (Lambek 2010; Lempert 2013).

Osella and Soares (2010, 10) admit that studies of ethical self-fashioning illustrate the utility of focusing on individual experiences, which helps considerably to “de-exoticize the Muslim Other,” and that “this is anthropology at its best.” However, with attention on ethical self-fashioning, “politics, especially in Mahmood’s work, gets reduced to micropolitics” (see Bayat 2007b, 158 ff.). To Osella and Soares, a reason for paying attention to the everyday struggles that characterize Muslim life, is counteracting the general tendency to understand religion and Islamic religiosity as totalizing. To theorize ways of “being Muslim” in contemporary societies, the authors propose moving away from Foucault and towards an *Islam mondain*: “ways of being Muslim in secularizing societies

and spheres” (Soares and Otayek 2007, 17–19; Osella and Soares 2010, 10). Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec (2012) offer a similar argument, again drawing attention to the contradictory nature of everyday religious practice. It seems that at the heart of the everyday/piety debate lies once again a disagreement over ‘Islam’ as analytical category.

As a response to discussion about *Islam mondain*, more recent works have re-emphasized the procedural nature of the perfectibility of self and surroundings, rather than perfection as an end (N.A. Khan 2012; Fadil 2011; Rytter 2016; Fernando 2014). Fadil and Fernando (2015a) questioned the assumptions and effects involved in framing certain phenomena as ‘everyday/ordinary.’ They argued that this concept, and its use in the anthropology of Islam, “seems to emphasize one side of the paradigmatic agency/power and unity/diversity debates within anthropology, reiterating human creativity against the weight of norms and highlighting the universally shared conditions of the human subject” (Fadil and Fernando 2015a, 61). By privileging ‘everyday Islam’ and framing it as the site where the faithful express their ambivalence toward orthodoxy, scholars exclude exactly those orthodox Muslims that aspire to consistency with Islamic norms. A focus on piety is as legitimate as on inconsistent practice, and self-cultivation does not imply the lack of ambivalence and failure.

In short, Fadil and Fernando (2015b, 59) identified two tensions that vex the debate on everyday/pious Islam, division/unity, discourse/practice in anthropology. The first concerns “the desire, ... to delineate the multiple and heterogeneous ways in which human beings live and make sense of their lives,” and “to underscore the commonalities and shared conditions of seemingly different life-worlds in order to define the human.” The second is between “the imperative to identify powerful social structures and norms that mediate individuals,” and “the attempt to account for individual creativity, agency, and resistance.” I have already argued that an anthropology of religious discourse addresses this heterogeneity/commonality and power/agency, because it shows how seemingly contradicting utterances can coexist within the same coherent formation, taking into account the power dynamics maintaining a discourse without discounting resistance and the agency of individuals as subjects of that discourse. Even when we zoom into Muslim discourse, as the statements in this chapter will show, neither heterogeneity and shared conditions nor powerful structures and individual agency are necessarily mutually exclusive. My interlocutors can say that “everything (we do) is for Allah,” denying neither their creative agency nor the presence of an all-encompassing power. They say it in a multitude of ways, coming from different traditions and schools of jurisprudence, without negating the common origin: Muhammad’s message.

1.2 “Submission Means Worship”

While discussing the meaning of submission in Islam, Basim explains *‘ibādah* as a matter of exclusive submission and complete obedience:

Khalil (translating from Arabic): Submission (islam) means worship (*‘ibādah*). ... Total obedience (with regard to) ... all the things that He has said you have to do. ... And keeping away from the ‘not to do’ list. ... Anything that may make your heart feel *tāshirk*, *shirk*, which means like, the opposite of freedom, like (being) tied to something ... you have to take it away and just let it free. ... Worshiping God ... (means) doing all things that God loves ... Everything you say and everything you do. And even your intentions, ... the acts inside and outside. ... The action is like prayers, and ... good intentions towards anyone else. ... Like love and hatred, this is something which is inside, it’s also submitted to God. This is a verse (6:162–163), ... which says that everything you’re doing in this life, your prayer, your life, your death, everything is for God only. (C008)

Basim is quick to add that Allah—being Self-Sufficient, Perfect, and completely Independent of his creatures—does not ‘need’ this kind of submission. It is for the individual’s benefit alone: “You have also to know that God is not in need to any of this. Even if all people in the world become Muslim or not, that will not make Him miss anything or affect Him in any other way.” Basim explains that, if he himself worships Allah, he will “save himself from hell,” but, if not, “nothing will happen in the opposite to God” (see Q51:56–57). Just like Mamoon, Basim suggests worship is not just an end in itself. The goal is *qarīb*, ‘nearness’ to Allah: “Prayer is the link between the person and God, and as you’re digging deeper into religion, you find your heart linked to God. And so you start to feel the beauty of this link” (C008).

The imam paints a precise picture of worship-subjection, naming a range of things that should be ‘submitted’ to Allah: all one says, does, intends, feels, and even thinks. Basim’s views are commonplaces among Danish Muslims, but also reveal an uncommon piety and commitment. Few are able to attain the level of worship he describes. The imam himself seems to practice what he preaches, rarely putting his *misbahah* (prayer beads) aside. Clearly one of the goals of worship is reinforcing the relation of dependency with the Divine. By dedicating a maximum of one’s time and energy to Allah, one’s life comes to mirror His greater Plan.

Tellingly, Basim calls prohibited and harmful acts *‘shirk’* in the modern sense of trap, entanglement, bondage—something one needs to liberate oneself from. Suddenly spreading his forearms apart, as if breaking free from ropes,

the imam gives a very physical impression of how release from sin should feel. Doing “all the things God loves,” and completely dedicating one’s life to Him, brings abiding freedom. The process of liberation and re-connection also has an affective dimension. Whereas, before worship, the heart “feels” the pains of constriction, through prayer one can again “feel the beauty” of the “heart linked to God.” Surrendering all of oneself to Allah releases from bondage, and this surrendering happens by establishing a connection of the heart through prayer. This connection enables positive sentiments, generating a feedback loop of gratification.

We can start to see how, in Danish Muslim-talk, various elements coordinate to build a sort of soteriological mechanism operating on a daily basis. Bondage, worship, submission, obedience, the heart, intention, freedom, memory, etc. are woven together in a web of meaning, both supporting and capturing the individual. Allah, as Master, performs an essential ‘service’ to his servants: He is the mediator giving them back to themselves, releasing them from the prison of infinite possibility and delivering them to the “abyss of freedom” (Žižek 2018b). Yet before deliverance comes servitude. As mentioned, *‘ibādah* is related to the notion of slavery, with the noun *‘abd* (slave, servant) occurring frequently in the Quran. For instance: “... He is the Irresistible, above His slaves [*‘ibādihī*] ...” (Q6:17–18 MK).⁴ Since Allah Himself refers to the faithful as His slaves or servants, this title is worn with pride by Muslims worldwide, while non-Muslims (and those they worship) are seen as unaware of their status (Q7:194).

The term also appears in contemporary Danish Muslim-talk, where it is taken as self-evident. This counts for both conservatives and self-identifying ‘reformers,’ though the latter are inclined to use the milder ‘servants.’ Khankan, for instance, writes in her “Muslim Manifesto” for the *Forum for Critical Muslims*: “This is for you, who is a servant of Allah and not a slave of medieval traditions such as the worship of national identity.” For “We stand in opposition to those from our parent’s generation, who are slaves of national identity and tradition instead of being servants of God” (W008; D063).⁵ At times, this strategic wording has to do with the individual’s acquaintance with the Danish language, in which ‘slave’ sounds definitely harsher than *‘tjener’* (servant, also in the sense of waiter). Occasionally, the intention seems provocative: a way of

4 Some authoritative interpretations render *‘ibādihī* as “His servants” (S1, S, A), others prefer “His slaves” (MK, P) or “His worshipers” (YA). See 2:186; 10:107; 15:41; 19:61; 27:59; 39:17 etc.

5 Sherin Khankan, “Forum for Kritiske Muslimer: Et muslimsk manifest.” *Kritiskemuslimer.dk*, October 12, 2014. http://www.kritiskemuslimer.dk/?page_id=2. Sherin Khankan, *Women Are the Future of Islam: A Memoir of Hope* (London: Rider, 2018).

spurring non-Muslim audiences to acknowledge the radical nature of Muslim subjection to the Divine.

Amir, addressing Islam's historical relationship with (literal) slavery, emphasizes that humans should be freed from any worldly authority so to better serve Allah. "The most important thing is fighting slavery. Fighting against the people who have slaves (slavers)." Individuals must have their agency fully recognized if they are to surrender it to the Divine. "It's a very very important thing in Islam, people must be free. No one can choose for you And we're all slaves for Allah. ... Slaves for Allah, yeah, it's not slaves for people" (C028). Islamic dealings with slavery, both historically and in the sharia, are more dubious and complex than Amir communicates (see Clarence-Smith 2006). Nevertheless, the reasoning is clear, and Amir does not shy away from using 'slave' when performing a Friday *khutbah* in Danish.

Neither does Ousman, who quite plainly states that "Allah is immense, we don't even have to think about this. The brain of humans however is very weak, and prone to change often. ... God has all the knowledge." Therefore, "we are His slaves. We have to worship Him and thank Him for the chance of getting a place in heaven" (C039).

The popular prayer-book *Fortress of the Muslim* is full of invocations entrenching the slave-master relationship between humans and the Divine: "O Allah, I am Your slave and the son of Your male slave and the son of your female slave. My forehead is in Your Hand (i.e. you have control over me) ..." (D019).⁶ The Danish version of the booklet, translated by *Det Islamiske Trossamfund*, renders the Arabic *'abd* as "*tjener*." Only when there is an unequivocal reference to a Quranic verse, like the invocation above, do we find it as '*slave*' (D020).⁷ Of course,

I mention these instances primarily because of their reach. Thousands of Danish Muslims utter supplications and invocations of this sort on a daily basis. Secondly, because of their capacity to illustrate how Muslim conceptions of (relative) human freedom (or lack thereof) manifest in discursive practice. Thirdly, because—not unlike 'islam' and 'muslim'—there is something going on with the translation from Arabic to English and Danish. This is not limited to interviews, where (especially) young Muslims try to make certain words and expressions that more palatable for a non-Muslim audience (see 3.2). The

6 Sa'id bin 'Ali bin Wahf al-Qahthani, ed., *Fortress of the Muslim: Invocations from the Qur'an & Sunnah*, 7th ed (London: Darussalam, 2009).

7 Sa'id bin 'Ali bin Wahf al-Qahthani, ed., *Muslimenes fort: Dhikr og Du'a (det at huske Allah og uformelle bønner)*, translated by Det Islamiske Trossamfund (København: Det Islamiske Trossamfund, 2014).

same enunciative strategy is employed by organizations and powerful sources like Danish translations of the Quran, ahadith, and invocations. In the case of slave/slavery servant/servanthood, rather than opting to retain the original Arabic, some choose to play on the breadth of connotations, selecting the less controversial. It is telling where and when the terms appear: introductory texts and brochures are naturally more cautious than in-group communication.

1.3 “*Straighten Your Rows!*”

Abdi, regular prayer-leader at a smaller mosque in Aarhus, has just concluded his fiery Friday *khuṭbah*. It is a mixed crowd, comprised of various ethnic minorities and Danish converts. The sermons are usually held in Danish, and this time the theme is violence. The imam laments the involvement of some Muslims in local criminal activities, citing a recent knifing. He instructs the community to keep an eye on these youngsters, advising them on how to approach the problem, and, more pointedly, marking the consequences. “What does Islam say about what goes on in our streets?!” Shouts the imam, so close to the microphone the sound cracks and distorts. “What does Islam say about spreading fear, about threatening another human being’s life, about killing?!” They will get “the worst punishment in Hell!” He admonishes. “Fire! Hell! Damnation! Forever!” (So20).

When it is time for the communal prayer, the imam tells the mosquegoers to “straighten your (prayer) rows,” echoing the Prophet’s instruction. At times, the imam would utter similar directives: straighten up, come closer, bridge the gaps, align shoulders. The men position themselves along the lines weaved into the moquette, watching their feet, moving to the front to fill up spaces, signaling to their neighbors. Once the final prayer is over, I take my things and walk towards the exit. I am about to pass in front of a man who is doing some extra rak‘as, when he suddenly raises his arm and holds me back, while continuing to recite his verses. Even though there was more than enough space for him to prostrate, I circle around the back, embarrassed to have interrupted his prayer. Later, I am told that having someone pass in front of the worshiper invalidates, or detracts merit from, the prayer, with reference to a particular *hadith*: “... Allah’s Messenger ... said: ‘If the person who passes in front of another person in prayer knew the magnitude of his sin he would prefer to wait for 40 (days, months or years) rather than to pass in front of him’ ...” (Sahih al-Bukhari, 1:9:489).

In the mosque, incitements to proper conduct are everywhere: preachers admonish and condemn, lines on the floor direct and limit, gestures guide and correct. Mechanically performing the prescribed movements and memorizing the instructions will not do: there is no reward without right intent. From the previous chapters, we can safely deduce that will/desire is taken as the prime

material of moral conduct. It is innate yet gifted, both harmful and liberating (potentially), a privilege and a responsibility; it is that which paradoxically enables, and stands in the way of, ‘nearness’ to Allah: it can/must be, at once, surrendered and guided. The decision to surrender one’s self to Allah is not the endpoint, but rather the moment at which the ethical work can truly begin. Will/desire is thus a typical case of “some dimension of what is understood to be constitutive of or a part or aspect of the very being of the subject to whose ethical realization it might serve as resource or roadblock or both” (Faubion 2011, 39).

Islam knows a long juridical tradition and a complex legislation parsing mandatory, recommended, neutral, reprehensible, and forbidden acts in great detail: the way that pleases Allah, the *aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm* (Straight Path). Yet the *sharia* (literally way/path) is not quite so determinate as the Catholic Catechism, filled with clear-cut dogmas and anathemas, and lacks a single centralized managing authority. The *sharia* is a moral law, uncontained by national borders, covering disparate affairs beyond secular law (like musical preferences). This is a relevant nuance in the Danish contexts, where political parties are preoccupied with self-determination. One should also differentiate between *sharia* and *fiqh*. In the words of Sherin Khankan: “*sharia* corresponds to the instructions given by God in the Quran, whereas *fiqh*, a fundamental notion in Islam, is the temporal interpretation of these instructions, or Islamic jurisprudence.” In principle, at least for a Danish ‘reformist’ such as Sara Omar or Sherin Khankan, the principles of Islamic law are flexible: “They are general indications left to human intelligence to understand and apply in the community’s best interest” (D063).⁸ As I noted earlier, proponents of ‘everyday Islam’ in particular have shown the extent to which practitioners comply with this standard of conduct—transgressing, resisting, ignoring, and respecting values according to circumstance (Schielke 2009; Louw 2007).

Due to their scope and complexity, *fiqh* and the *sharia* are not easy to access, and Danish Muslims constantly seek assistance in dialogue with local imams, educational websites and fatwa-databases such as the popular *IslamQA.info* or *Islamsvar.dk*, social media, fora such as *Vejen Til Islam*, and the like. In other words, while the ways in which Muslims are incited to recognize their moral obligations is extensively systematized and developed, what constitutes ethical work is not straightforward, and walking the Straight Path requires a certain gradually acquired spiritual knowledge and *savoir faire*.

8 Sherin Khankan, *Women Are the Future of Islam: A Memoir of Hope* (London: Rider, 2018), page 81.

Saba Mahmood employed Foucault's distinction between ethical substance and modes of subjection, stressing that there is more to morality than a static set of values and rules. In her work, she demonstrated how the techniques her interlocutors employed were anything but set in stone. Arguing for the usefulness of Foucault's perspective for understanding key aspects of the Egyptian women's piety movement, the anthropologist relates the diversity in ethical practices to the lack of a centralized authority: "Rather, the piety movement has a strong individualizing impetus that requires each person to adopt a set of ascetic practices for shaping moral conduct. Each individual must interpret the moral codes in accord with traditional guidelines, in order to discover how she, as an individual, may best realize the divine plan for her life" (Mahmood 2012, 235). The individual performs 'ethical work' on herself not only to bring her conduct into compliance with a given rule, but to attempt to "transform oneself into the ethical subject of one's behavior" (Foucault [1984] 1990, 27).

Ethical work is thus a very individual effort, as is the effort of nearing Allah through worship, but at the same time there is an indispensable element of community that keeps the work from becoming a self-centered activity. Instructions such as "straighten your rows" are directed to Muslims as a collective, as a single subject position. Khankan writes in her *Women are the Future of Islam* about the movement between unity (as *tawḥīd*) and multiplicity (of the *ummah*). The muezzin, while numerous, all invoke the same unique God. All believers are different, but respond to the same call. The same movement is expressed in each prayer, from the kneeling position to standing:

In prostrating themselves, the faithful physically feel that everything falls on the community of believers (multiplicity) but proceeds from a single God (unity) whom they address. There are many more examples: when I kneel and place my forehead on the ground (*sujūd*) I feel the oneness of God, *tawḥīd*. But when I stand as believers do at the end of the prayer, then ritually turn my head to the right and then to the left towards my brothers and sisters, and we touch each other on the shoulders, I feel the multiplicity of God through humanity is truly being manifested.⁹ (D063)

The ritualistic movements train the believer to recognize the ultimate Authority/concern by placing the forehead (and nose) on the ground, and the mul-

⁹ Sherin Khankan, *Women Are the Future of Islam: A Memoir of Hope* (London: Rider, 2018), page 41–42.

titudinous community by wishing neighbors peace in the concluding part of the prayer (*taslīm*). Similar to what we see in Mahmood's (2005), Hirschkind's (2006), and Simon's (2009) work, there is an idea that prayer ought somehow to resolve a basic tension between the value of individuality/autonomy, and that of community/conformity. While, on the one hand, prayer is an individual act meant to embody sincere submission to Allah, on the other, it is done in conjunction with other worshippers. It thus constitutes, at one and the same time, an exercise of autonomy, and the realization or maintenance of social cohesion. However, the sense of community Khankan evokes stands in stark contrast to the singular center of the community's attention: Allah. The point is exactly, in her view, to notice that which is diverse, multiplicitous, dissimilar; and that which is coherent, unique, incomparable. In other words, the act not only emphasizes the human-divine contrast, but also affirms other opposites: the recognition of the community comes with an invocation of peace, repeatedly implying the potential of human conflict; the recognition of the Divine comes with praise and glorification (*tasbīḥ*, *ḥamd*), implying the mortification of the human.

1.4 *"The Prostration Is the Highpoint of Freedom"*

Regarding the importance of bodily techniques/practices in Foucauldian ethics, Mahmood (2012, 235) observes that Foucault's practices of the self include "corporeal and body techniques, spiritual exercises, and ways of conducting oneself—all of which are 'positive' in the sense that they are manifest, and immanent, in everyday life." The importance of bodily techniques/practices such as the straightening of the prayer rows or the rak'as themselves does not reside in "the meanings they signify to their practitioners," but "in the work they do in constituting the individual." Similarly, "the body is not a medium of signification but the substance and the necessary tool through which the subject is formed."

Nothing could be more relevant to this discussion than what is commonly referred to as *sujūd* (prostration). The notion of *sujūd* (from *sīn jīm dāl*) is not only theologically complex, but has also a great impact on Muslim ritual practice and conceptions of freedom. The position is part of the *salat*, and thus performed several times a day (depending on the number of rak'as). In it, the faithful's toes, knees, hands, nose, and forehead touch the ground at the same time. Shia Muslims place their forehead on a *turbah*, a small piece of clay or soil. One must also take good care not to rest forearms on the ground "like a dog," as Muhammad instructed. During the obligatory *sujūd* of the daily prayer one typically recites formulas such as 'glory is to the Lord, the Most High' or various pleads for forgiveness, *du'ā'* (supplication), *ḥamd* (praise to Allah), or

tasbīḥ (short repetitive utterances in glorification of Allah). Overall, the purpose is thus to humble oneself in the recognition of Allah's glory. In the Quran, the root occurs in specific instances, since all its forms refer to the same action, including *masjid* (mosque, place of prostration).¹⁰

Many, like Tahir, a middle-aged mosquegoer from Copenhagen, state that the moment of prostration is the most important part of the prayer, because “when you touch the floor with your nose, that’s when you are closest to Allah” (C040). This idea can be traced to several passages in the sacred texts: “... Bow down in adoration, and bring thyself the closer (to Allah)!” (Q96:19 YA). This gives the practice a certain emotional charge. Many are overwhelmed by the experience of closeness to, and recognition of, the Divine. In Danish mosques, some cry and tremble while prostrating, although this phenomenon is reportedly more common in ‘pietistic’ environments, in countries such as Egypt (Mahmood 2005, 129–131). In a very intimate exchange, Mamoon evokes this particular blend of feelings during his explanation:

I am talking to you now. Can I really say everything, every secret in my life? No. Not you, not (to) anyone. The only time is when you are prostrating. You can just tell Him, ... right there. So, that’s one of the highest points of freedom, when you feel you just can cry, ... can explain, can ask for forgiveness. (He’s) the only One who deserves. Then you put your forehead, ... you should prostrate to this God. Because He’s the Creator. ... It’s Him who made all this, ... He gave me my life, He’s calling me, I’m not powerful, any small virus can kill me. I am nothing without His help. (C041)

At various moments during our conversation, Mamoon describes the moment of touching the floor with the forehead in *sujūd* as the summit of freedom. He further connects this practice to the humbling of the self and pleading for forgiveness, but also asserts that, during this intimate moment, one is free from the world—free to express oneself to the Creator.

When you are free from your desires, free from anyone else to worship *anyone*, not yourself, not your desire, ... not sex, not money, not power; not your arrogance, not your mistakes, ... not to be narcissistic ... when you are prostrating, and freeing your mind from anyone else, that’s the *top*

¹⁰ The importance of the *sujūd* stems also from the fifteen verses in the Quran where, according to tradition, Muhammad prostrated while reciting specific parts. See 7:206; 13:15; 16:50; 17:109; 22:18; etc.

of freedom. ... Freedom actually it's *liberating yourself* from everything. Does it mean submission? Yes, in a way. ... No one here has the right to force anyone ... to worship anything. but we can guide people, ... we can convince, we can talk. But (the) decision ... is not mine, not yours. The God, He Decides, when He Created the Quran He Knows that there is something called Paradise there is something called hellfire, it's his (an individual's) choice, if he has in mind (understands, believes) that this Book is the Word of God, ... he should be careful about the future. (C041)

Mamoon is using 'freedom' differently here than discussed in previous chapters. It is similar to what Basim means with '*tahrīr*' (C008): liberation, release, freeing—an Islamic version of positive freedom to appreciate life through a negative freedom from worldly authorities and concerns. Khankan makes a similar connection in her book:

Muslim prayers accompany a physical practice that solicits the body. ... This corporeal dimension is nothing trivial; it facilitates the connection with the sacred. When I kneel and my head touches the ground, the blood circulates through my veins, I am conscious of life and I feel as close as possible to God. My body and my spirit are set free. The bad waves and negative vibrations evaporate. Fatigue and stress disappear. I forget about everything. There is no longer anything but Allah. Five times a day, I leave the earthly world and regenerate myself.¹¹ (D063)

Khankan's "regeneration" and Lutfi's "charging" of the self are linked to remembering the Divine and forgetting the world, a moment in which one's 'body and spirit' are "set free" in a symbolic "breath from daily life." This is prayer as worship-subjection; it is a very physical act, the related statements being full of sensory references: prostrating, kneeling, touching, circulating blood, breathing, relaxing, crying, etc. Feelings are not far away, nor is freedom/liberation. Khankan and Mamoon, two unrelated characters with divergent ideas on many issues, display a striking similarity in describing one of Islam's central practices. Crucially, they point to the embodied dimension of worship-subjection, which seems anything but a mere noetic concern.

11 Sherin Khankan, *Women Are the Future of Islam: A Memoir of Hope* (London: Rider, 2018), page 41.

Returning to Mahmood's claim that the body is not a medium of signification but the very substance and the tool through which the subject is formed, we can start to see why the prostration plays such a key role in the willing submission through worship: it is what makes an individual into a muslim, it has a constitutive power. And once again, we find 'freedom' mentioned in one breath with this central activity. Freedom as something obtained through a physical submission, accompanied by a certain emotional release and mental relaxation. How did prayer and *sujūd* come to be so emotionally charged? Knowledge, of course, but so transformed as to have extended roots, reaching from the head into the body. The achievement of an intimate tear-inducing worship demands a proper Islamic education and precise instructions.

1.5 "The Fingers Should Be Slightly Spread Out"

Danish "Islamic webshop" *JustHalal.dk* offers a variety of *halal* products for children, such as the colorful "educational prayer mat," which "encourages children to pray and instills love for Salah in a fun and easy-to-understand way" (W079).¹² The "iPray Salah Pad" (in either blue or pink) is "an easy and innovative tool for children and young people who want to learn the Muslim prayer. Step by step you can go through the wash for prayer, the call for prayer, the prayer itself, and the following du'a" (W080).¹³ The "Salat Knowledge Game" is suitable for players aged 3+, "a game of slides and ladders, you spin the wheel and race to the finish before your friend reaches there. Along the way you learn the meaning and message of salat, that is, the five daily prayers." As in real life, there are consequences: "If you miss a prayer, you go down through the slippery slide, but if you offer it on time and with care, you climb up the ladder." By answering the questions on the cards correctly, you can "increase your knowledge about the five daily prayers. In this way, you don't just try to run for the finish line, but learn all about salat as well. Isn't this a fun way to play and learn!" (W081).¹⁴

Products such as the educational prayer-mat are (according to the company) "extremely popular" (F050),¹⁵ and (in this case) available in Denmark only since January 2019. The most striking thing about them is the efficiency with which

12 Justhalal.dk, "Educational Prayer Mat—My Salah Mat," *Justhalal.dk* (webshop), January 1, 2019, <https://webshop.justhalal.dk/da/educational-prayer-mat-my-salah-mat.html>.

13 Justhalal.dk, "iPray Salah Pad (Dreng)," *Justhalal.dk* (webshop), January 1, 2019, <https://webshop.justhalal.dk/da/ipray-salah-pad-dreng.html>.

14 Justhalal.dk, "Salat Knowledge Game," *Justhalal.dk* (webshop), January 1, 2019, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://webshop.justhalal.dk/da/salat-knowledge-game.html>.

15 Justhalal.dk, "#MySalah #BedsteGave #Børn," *Facebook* (social media), January 1, 2019,

8–9 years one should be encouraged by one’s parents to regularly initiate the prayer. Only later, when one is 10 years, it becomes a duty. Then one should follow the injunction to pray like adults” (W009).¹⁶

While the ritualistic prayer movements are the most obvious way in which children learn worship-subjection, Islamic pedagogy is broad in scope, encompassing everything from feelings to house chores. Again, the notion of an ever-expanding desiring-machine creating connections between all areas of experience comes to mind. In 2017, the educational website *IslamGuide.dk* circulated a (originally English) video on social media titled “*en god muslimsk dreng*” (a good Muslim boy). The description summarized the “six tips for educating a good Muslim boy” (F035).¹⁷ A few:

(1) “Establish the love of Allah and the Prophet (saw) in their hearts. Dedicate daily a period to teach them the Quran and about the Prophet’s (saw) life.” This first instruction is substantiated with verse 38:29: “[This is] a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded.” (2) “Show them love. One of the biggest mistakes in educating boys is to teach them to ignore their feelings and always use tough love with them.” This tip is followed by a hadith from Sahih al-Bukhari: “The Prophet ... often went over to a young boy and asked him about his bird. ... One day the bird died and the boy became very upset. The Prophet of Mercy visited the young boy to comfort him and encourage him.” (6) “Allocate tasks for them around the house. Following instructions and completing tasks are very important skills to learn. Assign your son a regular task on a daily basis.” To substantiate this, the authors bring an (abridged) hadith from Sahih al-Bukhari: “The Prophet ... engaged himself in serving his family, and when it was time for prayer, he went out for it.” The video and description conclude with a small prayer, the former using the first- and the latter the second-person plural: “May Allah make our/your children from among the righteous. Ameen.” Tips three to five involve being “fair and honest,” getting “the fathers involved,” and embracing “their childhood” (F035).¹⁸

These are sensible directives; far from unusual. The point is to show how something as pedestrian as allocating house-chores is linked to a scriptural ref-

16 Zainab Andersen and Inam Dahl, “Salah (bøn),” *Barn-i-islam.dk* (educational website), January 31 2018, accessed August 1, 2019, <http://www.barn-i-islam.dk/salah.htm>.

17 IslamGuide.dk, “En god muslimsk dreng,” *Facebook* (social media), November 16, 2017, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/islamguide.dk/videos/1573358652745952/>.

18 Ibid.

erent. While the educational toys, and some of the pedagogical advice, seek direct instillation of spiritual knowledge/feeling, other instructions go further, involving all areas of life. For many believers, this is exactly the point. As Basim says: “everything you’re doing in this life, your prayer, your life, your death, everything is (ought to be) for God only” (C008).

The education of the body is not limited to general movements: all extremities are taken into account, and their placement assigned religious significance. There are many places one can find extremely precise instructions on how to position each body part, often accompanied by precise references from the sunna. For instance, educational website *muslimernesvej.dk* provides a full manual with guidelines for each part of the salat. To keep with the *sujūd*:

When going to Sudjūd, ... one’s knees should be put on the ground first and when one rises, one’s hands should leave the ground before the knees. ... Then one bends forward and put one’s hands on the ground so that one can put the forehead on the ground. ... One has to touch the ground with seven body parts: The forehead (includes the nose). Right hand. Left hand. Right knee. Left knee. Right foot (so that the ball of the foot touches the floor and the toes point toward the Qibla). ... One’s feet must be assembled, but one’s knees away from each other. The head should be so far ahead that the stomach does not touch the knees. The fingers should be slightly spread out (still pointing to the Qibla).¹⁹ (D031)

The remarkable precision of these kinds of instructions testify to a preoccupation with involving the body maximally in the act of worship. This is not a mere curiosity; while on fieldwork, partaking in the various prayers, I was often corrected in my execution—from reminders to touch the floor with my nose, to exhortations to cover my lower back. One of the details I found striking while observing these activities was common habit of slightly raising the index finger in prayer. When I asked, most replied that this is how the Prophet prayed, expressing their desire to mimic the Muslim exemplar. Khalil adds that, while this action is not obligatory, Muhammad did exhort Muslims to do exactly what he was doing in prayer, specifying that “we are saying something (with the gesture) which is: God is the only one. And he (the Prophet) did that, ... and he said that this movement (moves up and down with index finger) keeps the devil

19 *Muslimernesvej.dk*, *Muslimernes Bøn*, April 6, 2017, http://muslimernesvej.dk/Boennen/Muslimernes_Boen.pdf.

away" (C008). Many injunctions pertaining to the body stem from a widely accepted tradition of mimicking Muhammad, who models an "exalted standard of character" (68:4 YA). They have the crucial effect of making spiritual education more than an intellectual endeavor.

According to Mahmood (2005, 159), "the outward behavior of the body constitutes both the potentiality and the means through which interiority is realized." What is significant is that bodily acts, like wearing the veil, "do not serve as manipulable masks in a game of public presentation, detachable from an essential interiorized self" (Mahmood 2005, 158). Rather, they are "the *critical markers* of piety as well as the *ineluctable means* by which one trains oneself to be pious." In the case of the veil, while this might initially be a way to practice shyness/modesty (*ḥayā'*), the practice does not lose its function once the individual has acquired the desired attribute. The veil is "integral to the practice of shyness" and "a part of what defines that deportment" (Mahmood 2005, 158). In other words, bodies are involved in the making of meaning.

As Murata and Chittick (2006, 33) note, "people are united by common practices at least as much as by common ideals. Islam has functioned socially by harmonizing people's activities." Contrary to non-bodily realities and subtle arguments, the body is a lived reality for every human being. Taking advantage of this universal experience is key for the success of any discourse. And yet the Quran states that *al-muttaqīna* (the righteous, God-conscious) are those that "believe in the Unseen" (2:3). It is precisely because this Unseen cannot be reckoned that action through revealed guidance is prioritized. "Islam recognizes that correct practice makes people Muslims and that, for most people, correct belief follows upon correct practice" (Murata and Chittick 2006, 33). Rather than being taught a complex catechism, Muslim children learn the proper ways to pray and perform rituals. The basic purification rites determine the nature of hygiene and toilet training; even if they lose interest during salat, the movements will gradually become so ingrained in their muscle-memory that ceasing to perform them will feel unnatural. Almost every sense is activated in the ritual. Simplicity and repetition are key. This is how the religious discourse-machine absorbs the individual as a whole rather than demanding mere mental engagement.

This process is not limited to strategic pedagogy. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, Jensen (2006, 646–647), in her work with Danish converts, notes that many seekers, ashamed of their ignorance, study religious literature at length prior to engaging Muslim activities. "Born Muslims often admit that converts are more knowledgeable than they are themselves because of the fact that they have studied Islam without having any previous information or experience in the faith." One could argue that converts thus develop a 'discursive

consciousness' (Giddens 1984, 44–45) quite distinct from that of the Muslim-born. Together with social and cultural capital, this manifests in an ability to articulate Islam in effective ways, making them (at least theoretically) bridge-builders/mediators between the national ummah and the societal majority. The discursive consciousness developed by converts to Islam can be contrasted with the embodied, pre-conscious, practical knowledge acquired by Muslims through decades of physical practice (see Connerton 1989). At the same time, the body becomes an important field of identity-formation for converts: "Conversion as identity transformation is a ritualistic process that involves bodily experiences as ways to embody Islam. To act like a Muslim thus represents the embodiment of religious identity" (Jensen 2006, 646).

When it comes to a discourse-oriented analysis, it is crucial to see that disciplinary techniques of the kind applied to children are not meant simply to brand the body with significance. Rather, like the techniques Foucault (1977) discusses in his work on discipline, the point of these new and established practices is to connect the body with processes of meaning. "They distribute bodies to various places and activities. They prescribe the body's movements, impose norms on its activity, watch out for any deviation, and exclude the non-conforming" (Macdonell 1986, 109). By executing certain movements while reciting certain formulae, the body is tied to an identity—a set of knowledges, a shared experience, and a recognition of subjecthood. The success of the educational praying-mat for children is indicative of the need for a Foucauldian 'conduct of conduct'; that is, the structuring of a field of possibilities, defining the range of action from which Muslim children learn to 'freely' choose. The power of the parent lies in manipulating the child's action rather than the child *per se*. The educational mat performs a similar function: the range of possibilities is mechanically limited, each sign and sound consistently connecting the child's body with the established ritualized meaning of each movement in the *salat*.

The significance of an embodied practice is not exhausted by its function as an index of social status in a community's ideological habitus. As Mahmood (2012, 228) puts it: "the specificity of a bodily practice is also interesting for the kind of relationship it presupposes to the act it constitutes wherein an analysis of the particular form that the body takes might transform our conceptual understanding of the act itself." In other words, the particular form of the *sujūd*, and its associated instructions, reveal something about worship-subjection. From the interdiction to rest one's forearms, to the imperative to form straight rows, will/desire cannot be given too much leeway. Moreover, bodily practices endow the individual with capacities applicable outside worship. While bodily practices might tell us about underlying social structures

and the ethos of the religious group, their form also reveals something of the particular relationship one has, or it supposed to have, with the acts and the possibilities they open. Looking into an established practice such as *salat*, we might find that some consider the practice as a means to the accrual of rewards; others, as pleasing Allah; still others, as an instrument to cultivate a pious disposition.

2 Spiritual Combat

Regulating the will requires ‘ethical work,’ self-discipline, the cultivated ability to restrain oneself or actively exercise certain virtues (Lutfi’s emphasis on *ṣabr*). This is the dimension which, in anthropology, has been picked up by Faubion (2001), Robbins (2004), and Mahmood (2005) (among others). Their work has furthered explorations into religion not as a cultural system external to the believer, but as the ways that believers produce themselves as ethical subjects through techniques of the self. Ethical work is a kind of ‘spiritual combat’ for self-mastery, the paradoxical process of establishing control over the self/will with the very same self/will. Like other traditions, Islamic ethical work sometimes manifests as a battle against, or for, the soul/self (*jihād al-naḥs*). Foucault ([1982] 1997, 225) famously defined “technologies of the self” as those practices which permit individuals “to effect ... a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.” Islam has a wealth of such techniques, including *salat*, supplications (*du‘ā*), veiling or dressing modestly (*hijab*), being sincere (*‘ikhlāṣ*), doing good deeds (*ḥasanāt*), and so forth. However, in this case it is useful to distinguish between practices whose main function is self-subjection and those meant as self-improvement.

The idea of linking spirituality with a struggle internal to the individual is ancient and effective, found in many traditions. Foucault ([1984] 1990, 88), in his genealogy of sexuality, discerns it in the notion of ‘spiritual combat’ from Plato’s *Phaedrus*, presenting us with the “drama of the soul struggling with itself and against the violence of its desires.” The elements of this struggle were destined to have a great impact on the history of spirituality: “The distress that takes hold of the soul, so alien that the latter cannot even give it a name; the anxiety that keeps the soul on the alert; the mysterious seething; the suffering and pleasure that alternate and intermix; the movement that transports one’s being; the struggle between opposing powers; the lapses, the wounds, the pains, the reward and the final appeasement.”

I have already mentioned that the notion of *fiṭrah* can be seen as a discursive condition for statements about this struggle, and the articulations of freedom it enables (see 2.3). Foucault's analysis is helpful, because it links a pure, 'primordial state' of the human soul to a particular relation to truth/divinity. The Greek phrasings Foucault ([1984] 1990, 88) reports almost pass for Islamic mysticism: "When the soul is ... driven wild and deprived of self-control, it is indeed because it had beheld 'the realities that are outside the heavens' and perceived their reflection in an earthly beauty; ... it undertakes to restrain physical desire and seeks to rid itself of everything that might burden it down and prevent it from rediscovering the truth that it has seen." Likewise, Muslim statements on *fiṭrah* allow for metaphors of 'return' to a primordial state, and claims about the true nature/origin of the soul. It prepares the ground for a complex Muslim ethical work revolving around the emancipation of the self.

In this section, I will focus on the notion of spiritual combat and the struggle of the soul/self for the liberation, purification, and development of the very same soul/self. Some of these themes might seem irrelevant to the discussion on freedom, but they do come up in association with the subject matter. Muslim-talk on techniques to achieve 'closeness to Allah' or 'purification from sin,' for instance, occurs in proximity of statements on freedom, sometimes being conflated: freedom as piety or purity.

2.1 *"Freedom Is about Liberating Oneself from One's Ego"*

Imams across Denmark, in different cities, with different styles, are keen to remind the faithful that piety involves an arduous daily struggle. Many sermons and speeches revolve around a spiritual battle fought within each individual. The following is a passage from a *khutbah* delivered by Abdul in a Copenhagen mosque:

When, every Friday, we say in the opening prayer *na'ūdu billahi min shurūri 'anfusinā* (we seek refuge with Allah from the evil of our own souls), it is not just an empty routine. In fact, it is a very important prayer, which means that we seek refuge with Allah—in His wisdom and guidance—from the evil that lurks in ourselves, ... that may be in our way of acting. al-Shaitan ... has promised that he will tirelessly entice us and try to push us over the edge, away from the worship of Allah. And for this purpose he uses our deepest and most inner self, for we have very little control over this unless we intentionally, consciously and persistently work to refine ourselves. And that is Islam. (Soo2)

Abdul suggests that al-Shaitan takes advantage of the ‘unrefined’ parts of the self, inspiring the believer to consciously work at bringing these aspects under control. If one is prone to ire, the Devil will attempt to trigger/exacerbate this character-flaw to bring social chaos, leading the worshiper away from Allah. al-Shaitan is not the only source of wickedness: evil “lurks in ourselves” and in “our way of acting.” In other words, the imam directs the self/will towards the self/will itself. The believer must “intentionally” and “consciously” target and refine intention and consciousness itself.

Abdul is speaking of ethical work. As I have mentioned, this work includes any number of plans, regimes, methods and devices one employs/follows/performs in pursuit of ethical formation (Faubion 2011, 47). In Islam, it takes the form of a “refinement” of the self/will through long and persistent efforts in learning; memorization of Quranic verses; the internalization of principles of *fiqh* and sharia; ritual practices; a regular monitoring of conduct; a constant checking of exact physical positions; movements, in the case of salat, and so forth.

It is clear by now that Muslim ethical work involves a struggle for surrender, a relinquishing of the will cultivated through worship. At the same time, however, it involves a ‘strengthening’ of the will/self with the aim of resisting *Shayṭān*’s influence and maintaining proximity to Allah (*al-taqarrub*). While believers must rigorously develop both body and mind, ‘self-mastery’ is not the ultimate goal, unlike Foucault’s findings regarding the ancient Greek *épistémè*. Muslim technologies of the self, the instruments of the self’s reflexive work, are usually geared towards what we can call ‘self-servitude’ in a constant recognition of subordination. Rather than a passive subject, coerced or stuck between relations of power, the Muslim ethical subject is constituted as active and free, working to embody a unilateral relation of domination.

There are examples, both in the history of Islam, and contemporary Denmark, of Muslim positions which bring this ethical work to its extreme. The Sufi mystic Rumi (d. 1273) is perhaps the most famous advocate of *fanā’ wa baqā’*, the annihilation/dissolution (of the ego) and subsistence/permanency (in Allah). Rumi’s impact on mystical Islam and contemporary Danish Muslim-talk is hard to trace. There are few Danish *tariqas* (Sufi schools/orders), but projects such as Khankan’s *Mariam Mosque* and Abdul’s articulations draw heavily from this tradition, and Sufi practitioners are scattered throughout the country (see Rytter 2018; 2016).

Earlier, I quoted Abdul speaking of a ‘real freedom,’ revolving around the imperative of “liberating oneself from the way the ego constantly strives to advance its own interests, the ego’s own interests” (see 2.3). Abdul argues that “if one can liberate oneself from that, and it’s a lifelong process, ... then one can

become free” (W031).²⁰ The imam clearly evokes the common notion related to the Sufi path: *jihād al-naḥs*, the struggle/striving against/for/of the soul. The concept most likely comes from al-Ghazali’s *Revival of the Religious Sciences* (early 12th century), where the philosopher argues that one must work to reduce the hold of the body and its passions, in a practice of self-cultivation (al-Ghazali 1993).²¹ Elsewhere, al-Ghazali (d. 1111) argued that humans have the capacity of existing on different planes, ranging from the animal to the angelic. The danger lies precisely in the possibility of falling to the very lowest plane. The philosopher invoked a well-known verse to make his point: “We did indeed offer the Trust to the Heavens and the Earth and the Mountains; but they refused to undertake it, being afraid thereof: but man undertook it;—He was indeed unjust and foolish” (Q33:72 YA). The philosopher interprets *al-amānah* (the Trust or Covenant) as ‘the burden’ of ‘responsibility’ or ‘free-will’: “man may sink to the animal or soar to the angel, and this is the meaning of his undertaking that ‘burden’ of which the Koran speaks” (al-Ghazali 2010, 15). Freedom is thus always present as the human ability to affect their spiritual status, improving or worsening their condition.

Abdul’s notion of striving could not come closer to this idea of ‘spiritual combat,’ though the tools and ends differ. It is connected to the worship-subjection discussed above, including the literal act of prostration—its main technique: “The best tool to work with oneself in this way is ... the kind of prayer where one prostrates in the dust before one’s Creator.” Why must one prostrate all the way down? “Because only by doing just that, the ego is taught something about how little ... (it) is in relation to the Creator’s Will.” We also find again the need to “recognize” (again the idea of *arafa*), that “it is only the Will of the Creator that will be realized in all circumstances” (W031).²²

The *jihād al-naḥs* (as Abdul portrays it) is a struggle of the soul/self against that part of the *naḥs* hindering its natural journey towards freedom, which in Abdul’s narrative is the ‘ego.’ The use of this term is more or less confined to Sufi practitioners, and popular especially amongst converts, but this should not detract from its meaning as signpost for Muslim ethical work. Just like *jihād*

20 Abdul Wahid Pedersen, “Frihed,” YouTube video, 3:33, May 8, 2016, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://youtu.be/xmgLivD4ayM>.

21 Al-Ghazali casually mentions his own struggle with the soul/self, but to him, these practices do not in themselves lead to God, no matter how rigorously pursued and the soul perfected. “The rational soul, once freed of the demands of the body and its passions, must actively pursue knowledge of God through rational investigation of Him and His creation. ... Acquiring this knowledge literally transforms the soul” (Garden 2014, 35).

22 Abdul Wahid Pedersen, “Frihed,” May 8, 2016.

al-nafs,' it is not important whether multiple communities use the notion, but whether it makes sense within the broad Islamic formation—whether it generates meanings that conform to the logic of Islam. Khankan is another well-known Danish Muslim who uses like terminology, directly connecting it to the spiritual *jihād*:

Faith is not a competition; it is an endeavor of personal questioning concerning the deep meaning of one's own faith. The 'great jihad' (unlike the jihad depicted in the media) is the fight within oneself to control the ego. Sufism aims at humility, ... its strength lies not in differences, oppositions or antagonisms.²³ (D063)

Abdul speaks of liberating oneself from the ego's interests, adjusting perspective; Khankan speaks about controlling the ego. Either way, it involves a sort of battle that must be waged in order to attain full humility and subjection. I have already discussed the embodied dimension of the practice, and will address its purifying effect later on; but spiritual combat does not merely take place on the interior plane: it is, to a great extent, a social enterprise.

2.2 *"Prayers Connect to Allah. Prayers Purify from Sins"*

During a *khuṭbah* at an Aarhusian mosque, Abu Abbas exhorts mosquegoers to put their faith into practice by praying, giving alms, and most of all by "stop wasting life on series and movies." The passionate and dedicated imam has a talent for conveying a sense of urgency; he does so not just in live settings but also on his various social media channels. With thunderous voice, Abu Abbas reminds the audience of prayer's function:

Another commandment is continuous salat. ... The prayers connect you to Allah! The prayers purify you from sins! ... Allah has commanded you to pray because it guides you to the good. (reciting) "Maintain with care the [obligatory] prayers ... and stand before Allah, devoutly obedient" (Q2:238 YA). ... We see many of Muslims who don't pray even in Ramadan, Allah has promised punishment to them in the Quran (recites Q19:59 YA). ... Oh those who don't pray correctly and continuously, make Ramadan a chance for repentance! (S027)

23 Sherin Khankan, *Women Are the Future of Islam: A Memoir of Hope* (London: Rider, 2018), page 229.

Abu Abbas's severe tone and heavy use of Scriptural references is typical of mosques with Salafi sympathies (according to Muslims from other milieus). In speaking of prayer, the imam evokes continuity, devotion, obedience, purification, repentance, connection, guidance. We could say that continuous, devout, and obedient prayer constitutes a repentance or return to Allah, allowing for a connection where guidance, and thereby purification, become possible.

How should one pray? As the famous Danish convert A.S. Madsen notes, the most repeated sura of all, *al-fātihah* (the opening), contains all the essential elements. "In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. ... Thee do we worship, and Thine aid we seek. Show us the straight way, The way of those on whom Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace, those whose (portion) is not wrath, and who go not astray" (Q1:1–7 YA). To Madsen, "this sura shows how to rightly pray to God: first, one looks at God's perfect attributes, confessing one's faithfulness to God and one's full dependence on Him, and then one submits one's prayers to Him—with awareness that the abuse of Divine mercy can deprive one of God's protection" (D014).²⁴ As in Abu Abbas's sermon, first comes devotion and obedience, the recognition of one's dependent status, and—only then—guidance. In a way, this process is what brings about purification; a subsequent request seems superfluous. Prayer undoes rather than achieve, it is an act of recognition rather than acquisition.

When it comes to 'connection' with the Divine, one could see this as an end in itself, but it does have its own function. It is through prayer, and the resulting connection with Allah, says Lutfi, that one's worldly problems are put in perspective:

I remember like, the first time I liked a girl, and she ... it didn't work out, and I was, like, not as religious (practicing). It was very hard, very hard. I started smoking, not praying, I was messed up. It was very hard. And the second time it was not that hard. It's like, it brought me closer to God. ... *good* Muslims see it (adversity) as an *opportunity* to get *closer* to God. ... So you practice prayers, and this gives you like, beautiful connection with God, you feel good. It's hard to describe, like, you feel so good about you, and the problem becomes less. (C019)

24 Abdus Salam Madsen, *Koranen, Med Dansk Oversættelse Og Noter* (1967; repr., København: Borgens Forlag, 2009), page 2.

It is worth mentioning at this point the term *salat* already includes a sense of a connection/communication, and must be distinguished from *du'ā'*, a more directed invocation or supplication, sometimes with very precise instructions (Q5:6).²⁵ Repetition and persistence are of the essence: the imperative to do “continuous *salat*,” as Abu Abbas puts it. Besides the individual duty to perform the prayer five times a day, the Quran often couples prayer with the injunction to be ‘steadfast,’ ‘consistent’ (Q2:110).

A ‘free’ secular society, argues philosopher Alain de Botton (2012, 133), “expects that we will spontaneously find our way to the ideas that matter to us and gives us weekends off for consumption and recreation.” Like science, it privileges novelty and discovery. “It associates repetition with punitive shortage, presenting us with an incessant stream of new information—and therefore it prompts us to forget everything.” Not so spiritual traditions, which tend to develop elaborate schedules and calendars for when to enact, speak, reflect, and even think its truths. In Islam, the detailed way the faithful are told to recite, move, act, speak, read, think, is at once obsessive, and calming in its thoroughness. Contrasted with the ever-speeding, ever-changing social reality, one can imagine the appeal of a system that goes to such lengths to provide regularity and stability by means of repetition: the mother of all learning.

All this is to say that the logic behind a regimented spiritual combat and prayer often uses worldly affairs as its counterpoint. Freedom, once again, is contested as a signifier of either disorientation or liberation, it can be used to accelerate perdition or to elevate one’s spiritual status. Abu Abbas warns the mosquegoers during his *khutbah* that there is a price to pay for the time wasted on never-ending series and movie streams: the chance of reminding oneself of the truth one knows in theory, but forgets to live in practice. Novelty amounts to ‘wasting,’ because the knowledge that counts is already present, proclaimed by the Seal of the Prophets. Later in the sermon, the imam proclaims: “Time is life, time is life! Put it in your house as a banner, write it on a slab in your house, you are time, if your time is over, you approach your grave, time is life!” And “how long will we kill ourselves in front of these raging television series, satirical shows, for how long? Do not waste your time! ... Do not be the one who says in his grave: Allah! Give me another chance!” (S027).

The “relief” of prayer Lutfi often speaks about is an important aspect of everyday Muslim life, but seems to require a deliberate ritual act. It is in prayer that one is ‘connected,’ and it is by lack of prayer that one goes astray, losing the battle for their soul. Considering this, alongside the imperatives of persis-

25 See 2:3; 2:110; 2:238; 4:43; 5:6; 9:18; 14:31; 17:78; 22:41; 24:56; 30:31; 73:20; 98:5; etc.

tence and repetition, it follows that one should establish this connection as often, and for as long, as possible. This is the common practice of *dhikr*, meaning ‘remembrance’ (of Allah), which Basim had mentioned: “(in) ‘dhikr’ you have to remember God in every single act you’re doing. ... Your heart should be linked all the time, even when you’re doing something else” (C008). The repeated and persistent remembrance of Allah strengthens one’s ‘link’ with the Divine, maintains the ‘connection,’ and keeps the line of communication open. This worship-through-memory makes sense, especially in light of all the Quranic reproaches of human forgetfulness (*nasīy*).²⁶

Gregory Simon (2009), in his ethnographic work among Indonesian Muslims, found that prayer is deemed a central practice in Islamic self-formation because it directly embodies submission to God. “The cause and the effect of moral transformation through prayer merge. Ultimately, such a transformation both works on and is carried out by the self—it must be a matter of individual will.” Prayer promises “a realization of moral selfhood through complete submission of the self to God; prayer also requires that this realization genuinely reflect and arise from the will of that very self” (2009, 266). When salat is performed correctly, it “transforms a self mechanically into one that is clean and well ordered” (2009, 260), which, in turn, leads to moral behavior, protection from suffering, and a state of calmness (*tanang* in Indonesian). Simon (2009, 268) reports that worshipers interpreted this state using a variety of descriptions, reminiscent of Lutfi’s, as “the experience of moral soundness that results from prayer—and also, paradoxically, to describe the preconditions for genuine prayer.” Similarly, Hirschkind (2006, 72, 74, 85) mentions states of “tranquility,” “calm,” “relaxation,” and “closeness to God” resulting from listening to a taped sermon in Cairo.

Reassuring, many Danish Muslims speak first of all of salat as evoking a sense of freedom/liberation from everyday worries, disappointments, frustrations via remembrance of the bigger picture (i.e. the finality/inscrutability of Allah’s Will). The experience reported by my interlocutors does seem to involve a similar kind of surrender to the course of life. However, the second sense in which freedom connects to prayer is through the effect of spiritual combat itself; namely, the purification of the soul. This is nothing particularly mystical, but anchored in some very concrete verses (Q91:7–10).

26 Q59:19 (YA): “And be ye not like those who forgot Allah; and He made them forget their own souls! Such are the rebellious transgressors!” See 2:44; 9:67; 32:14; 58:6; 59:19; 20:88; 32:14; 38:26; etc.

2.3 “Whispers”

Another dimension of spiritual combat, closely related to that of prayer and purification, is the continuous struggle against demonic whispers (*waswas*) and the negative influence of evil jinn. I have already mentioned the general Muslim view of the world as a testing ground (4.2). Lutfi recounted the story about the pact between *Shayṭān* and Allah, the former’s pledge to lead humans astray (Co19). Succumbing to *Shayṭān*’s whispers means failing the test of life, and Muslims are therefore required to constantly be on guard against this evil force acting from inside their very minds. This task is common to everyone, but some appear to be more vulnerable or unfortunate, requiring a more drastic intervention.

Christian Suhr’s (2019) work on Muslim exorcism and psychiatric therapy reveals a form of spiritual combat well-known to Danish Muslims: *ruqya*. In general terms, this is the practice of summoning jinn by invoking the Names of Allah and the recitation of specific Quranic verses, so as to have them abandon possessed bodies and terminate their negative influence. The very last Quranic sura, aptly called *al-nās* (mankind), illustrates the centrality of this human vulnerability and need to rely on Allah’s Power: “Say: I seek refuge with the Lord and Cherisher of Mankind, ... from the mischief of the Whisperer (of Evil), who withdraws (after his whisper), (The same) who whispers into the hearts of Mankind, among Jinns and among men” (Q114: 1–6 YA). Through the imam/exorcist, the voice of Allah manifests itself through the multiple subject positions included in the Quranic formulas, shifting between addressees and narrator forms:

Through the Quranic verses, the jinn is exposed to an all-powerful speaker who not only speaks directly in the first-person imperative to the prophets and humankind, but who is capable also of speaking through the voices of the prophets, believers, disbelievers, humans, and jinn. The jinn is pushed to recognise that it is battling not the shaykh, but the very laws of the divine, and that even this battle is not really its own, but rather a part of the larger scheme of the divine. The jinn is thereby rendered into a medium through which the battle is played out. (SUHR 2019, 154–155)

Suhr argues that, while the exorcism of a jinn is an extreme intervention, *ruqya* performed on oneself is continuous and used for anything from a psychosis to a headache. According to Suhr, most sheikhs emphasize that the most efficient *ruqya* is the constant prayer for one’s own soul, the consistent reliance on Allah’s Mercy. However, the measure in which individuals (suffering from men-

tal disorders and/or possession) are in control of themselves determines their ability to ‘work’ on themselves with prayer. While at times individuals have the necessary agency to ‘perform’ *ruqya* on oneself and thereby soothe or treat the affliction, at other times the jinn takes over the very body of the possessed, and external help becomes necessary. The problematic part of the process is precisely learning “how to become a patient” (Suhr 2019, 79–110), and fully accept this external help. Suhr’s interlocutors struggle to give over control, and realize that healing will not come solely through their own effort. Besides the spiritual strife that comes with the practice of *ruqya*, Suhr’s findings thus illustrate how the presence and centrality of ‘submission’ as a nodal point in Muslim discourse informs the Muslim patient’s understanding of the healing process. Suhr’s interlocutors repeatedly express their intention to surrender to the will of Allah, and aim to find a resolution through their devotion.

One of the primary ways in which my interlocutors talk about need for protection against demonic whispers is through reminders to ‘purify’ oneself, especially in the sense of *wuḍū’* (from *wāw ḍād hamza*), the ‘cleansing’ from a minor source of impurity. Earlier I mentioned Hanne saying that *wuḍū’* is “not just for when you have to do your prayer, the best thing if you can be *wuḍū’* clean all the time.” Hanne explained that “people cover their ears, ... the eyes, the body parts, so *Shayṭān* cannot come in, he cannot whisper, because it’s covered. Like we cover food, we cover ourselves, so that *something* doesn’t enter” (C038). The practice of ablution, including the ritual washing, the veil, and all the detailed daily precautions Muslims take to avoid evil influence, gives the individual a measure of control. It is especially important to notice that, just like Simon (2009) found among Indonesian Muslims, transformation works on and is carried out by the self, it is and must be a matter of individual (free) will. At the same time, what the individual can do is limited to a range of actions of which the effectiveness is ultimately determined by Allah. The point of spiritual combat is therefore the demonstrated intention and effort to make the right choice, not to win the battle with evil. The point is, as several of my interlocutors emphasized, to make a step on the Straight Path towards Allah, and then he will make a thousand. As Fadil puts it: “you can take the path, but you also need *guidance from* God. ... I take the first step and then God will finish the rest for me” (C015).

2.4 *The Conscious Practice of Freedom*

The late Foucault ([1984b] 1997, 284) stated that “freedom is the ontological condition of ethics,” and that “ethics is the considered form that freedom takes when it is informed by reflection.” Ethics, in other words, is “the conscious [*réfléchie*] practice of freedom.” In this chapter, I have not touched upon

the much-debated notion of 'reflective/conscious freedom' in Foucault, even though it has played a central role in the development of the anthropology of Islam as well as that of ethics. I did not want the discussion to distract from Muslim-talk on freedom, but now there is an opportunity to illustrate some points of contact and some of divergence when it comes to Muslim ethics and the Foucauldian outlook.

Freedom, for Foucault, is not something one *has* or achieves, but rather something one *does/exercises*. Of course, one might have more or less opportunity to exercise choice, and freedom modulates alongside social and historical change. Human nature is not waiting to be discovered/realized, but perpetually reinvented through action. This is something common to Muslim spiritual combat. However, it also explains Foucault's suspicion of a rhetoric of 'liberation,' which implies the release of a suppressed 'true nature.' Rather than committing to a particular characterization of freedom, Foucault rejects two existing conceptions: the idea that acting freely means to act in conformity with reason, or one's 'true' interests; and the idea that to act freely is predicated upon the absence of constraints and relations of (limiting) power. In so doing, he separates freedom from what is commonly seen as 'agency' and 'responsibility.' For many articulations of morality, actions must be voluntary; moral scrutiny takes as its object particular acts/choices, judging the enactor/chooser accordingly. The novelty in Foucauldian ethics is that the agent/character are not simply given, but correspond to a series of practices found in culture, models proposed and imposed upon the agent by her society and community. In other words, the freedom exercised by the ethical agent is produced within a certain socio-historical context. An agent can thus exercise the freedom to choose between a range of characters, and fashion itself through certain practices of the self, but these are far from random or generic.

All this clearly runs counter to what I have related about Muslim-talk on freedom, especially the part on autonomy, responsibility, and the return to a true nature. And yet, the constraints and conditions that delimit human agency are reminiscent of statements on Divine power. What is missing, is precisely the notion of freedom as a 'conscious' practice. The ethical subject exercises the 'freedom' to fashion the self, but this involves a kind of reflectivity. Thought, to Foucault, does not simply inhabit a certain conduct, giving it its meaning. Rather "it is what allows one to step back from this way of acting or reacting, to present it to oneself as an object of thought and to question it as to its meaning, its conditions, and its goals." It is "freedom in relation to what one does, the motion by which one detaches oneself from it, establishes it as an object, and reflects on it as a problem" (Foucault and Rabinow [1984] 1997, 117). This thought/awareness is

what establishes, in a variety of possible forms, the play of true and false, and consequently constitutes the human being as a knowing subject [*sujet de connaissance*]; in other words, it is the basis for accepting or refusing rules, and constitutes human beings as social and juridical subjects; it is what establishes the relation with oneself and with others, and constitutes the human being as ethical subject. (FOUCAULT [1984a] 1997, 200)

In other words, as Rabinow ([1984] 1997, xxxv) puts it, ‘thought’ is itself an action, and “actions arising from experience and formed by thought are ethical ones.” Through this ‘stepping back,’ reflective freedom effectively establishes one’s relation with oneself and with others, creating the ethical subject.

Foucault’s understanding makes it possible to conceive of how the ethical subject exercises agency and freedom within relations of power and even domination. When it comes to Islam, the virtuous person neither chooses her character independently; nor is she the mere product of indoctrination or training. This is because, while the process of becoming virtuous might begin with commandment (sharia) and exemplification (sunna), continuing through encouragement and punishment (*fiqh*), its full realization requires the attainment of what Laidlaw (2014, 74–75) calls “a conscious understanding of who one is and what one is doing, of ongoing reflective endorsement based on critical self-understanding.”

The relation between freedom and power is not a zero-sum. As Butler (1993, 15) puts it: “The paradox of subjectivation (*assujettissement*) is precisely that the subject who would resist such norms is itself enabled, if not produced, by such norms.” Although this constitutive constraint does not foreclose the possibility of agency, “it does locate agency as a reiterative or rearticulatory practice, immanent to power, and not a relation of external opposition to power.” For Mahmood (2005, 31), in the case of Islam, the question is then the following:

How does one rethink the question of individual freedom in a context where the distinction between the subject’s own desires and socially prescribed performances cannot be so easily presumed, and where submission to certain forms of (external) authority is a condition for the self to achieve its potentiality? What kind of politics would be deemed desirable and viable in a discursive tradition that regards conventions (socially prescribed performances) as necessary to the self’s realization?

Mahmood (2005, 195) states that the desire for liberation and freedom is historically situated; its motivational force cannot be assumed a priori. She laments

“how the veil and the commitments it embodies ... have come to be understood through the prism of women’s freedom and un-freedom.” Laidlaw (2014, 142) observes that the problem here is the consuming liberal concern with the apparently non-liberal, rather than a particular conception of freedom. Foucault’s double critique of historical-materialist determinism and the ideal of freedom and liberation rooted in theology is in line with the growing hostility to what Flathman (2003) has called ‘soaring’ conceptions of positive liberty.

To illustrate how freedom works within power relations, Foucault (1983, 220–221) evoked the equivocal nature of the word ‘conduct,’ observing that ‘to conduct’ means at once to ‘lead’ others according to mechanisms of coercion, and “a way of behaving within a more or less open field of possibilities.” The exercise of power, in other words, is a “conduct of conducts” and “a management of possibilities.” Power, for the late Foucault, is not simply an antagonistic confrontation/engagement between adversaries, but rather a ubiquitous question of ‘government.’ Exercising power in social relations is to orchestrate/conduct/structure the possibilities of action for others. Most importantly, it is not action carried out directly on the person-as-object, but on the *action* of the other subject, i.e. irreducibly reflective, conscious, and (relatively) free conduct (see Laidlaw 2014, 97). Since power is acting on an other’s action, it can only take place insofar as the one acted upon is free—a subject with the capacity of self-directed conduct. When one defines the exercise of power as “a mode of action upon the actions of others,” or “the government of men by other men,” one simultaneously includes freedom itself. “Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are ‘free’” (Foucault 1983, 221).

Now we can finally see why Foucault’s model is pertinent to Muslim-talk in Denmark. Foucault’s freedom is an aspect of the configuration of power relations rather than the absence of power; it is a practice rather than a state, something exercised through those same relations of apparent ‘domination’ which seem to constrict it. In the case of Danish Muslims, the problem is to define/learn/exercise ‘practices of freedom’ that contribute to the formation of the moral substance. Focusing on practices of freedom, rather than processes of liberation, allows for a conception of agency within the circumscribed moral code of Islam and Divine Will. More importantly, it guards against an overemphasis on the soteriological narrative, which plays such a central role in other religious traditions.

One might interpret Mahmood as saying in her *Politics of Piety* that the freedom achieved by her Egyptian interlocutors is distinct from ‘liberal’ freedom. One might also read her as stating that freedom is historically situated and that the piety movement aimed for something else altogether. I have argued that reflective freedom can be seen as a precondition for ethical life, and that Danish

Muslims as well as Mahmood's piety movement clearly employ this freedom to acquire certain virtues, achieving something akin to Isaiah Berlin's positive liberty (Laidlaw 2014, 177). It is tempting to presume that the end-goal of Muslim spiritual combat is the achievement of a subjection developed *at the expense* of reflective freedom: the intentional 'perversion' of Berlin's positive liberty. Danish Muslim-talk on freedom only *appears* to indicate that Muslims strive to subordinate and diminish reflective freedom in favor of maximizing obedience to Allah—a state of subjection which harmonizes human will/desire with Divine Decree.

The point is this: 'reflective freedom' is a medium for my Danish interlocutors' efforts, not the object of ethical work. It is something Muslims, like anyone else, *do* rather than achieve or give up. When I suggest to Kareem and Mubin that maybe submission to Allah involves surrendering freedom, they immediately correct me: "You (don't) sacrifice your freedom" because "you are free to obey or disobey." They developed a keen eye for this paradox: surrendering freedom would be an act of freedom itself (C025). In Denmark, Muslim-talk on freedom does not point to some kind of exchange between reflective freedom and instinctive obedience, but the reflected use of freedom to continuously direct the personal will/desire towards the Divine, i.e. worship-subjection. There is an important difference between freedom as the ontological condition of ethics, and will/desire as Muslim ethical substance—the material of the individual's moral conduct. The first allows for working on the second, and this work requires knowledge.

3 Knowing-Belief

In the previous chapter, I payed special attention to the convert/revert's condition (see 3.3), arguing that 'recognition/acknowledgment' of Allah's nature leads to spiritual knowledge (*'ilm*).²⁷ In Danish Muslim-talk we find mentions of 'the freedom to seek knowledge and learn,' and 'the duty to see life as a learning process.' This kind of learning requires, as discussed in previous chapters, both the privilege of freedom and the affirmation of one's subjection vis-à-vis Allah (see 3.2). Fadil says "knowledge will come *after* the decision to become Muslim" (C019), and Kareem "when you become Muslim, *then* you will learn things" (C048). I have argued that these statements, and the distinction of my

27 This is a very common term/notion in both Quran and sunna, where it figures as a gift, something that is not exclusive to Muhammad's followers, and as something that leads to great harm when lacking. See 2:32; 3:61; 4:162; 7:52; 11:14; 22:3; 45:24; 47:16; 58:11; etc.

interlocutors make between knowing (being aware), accepting (respecting), and (spiritual) understanding, are linked with faith (*ʾīmān*).

This substantiates Michael Lambek's (1993, 4) claim that, in Islam, "knowledge," rather than "belief," becomes "the critical expression of the relationship of the adherent to the faith." In fact, the 'real knowledge' Fadil, Kareem, Lutfi and many others speak of, is part of a single Truth—recorded, independent of human experience, accessible, cumulative. Because of this, Lambek (1993, 11) observes that "objectified knowledge is also seen to be a major currency of social life in Islamic societies." Ethnographic evidence abounds. Lawrence Rosen (1984, 58) relates that his Moroccan interlocutors assume "it is knowledge that distinguishes men from one another and sets one person's social stature above that of another." Other classic studies have analyzed Islamic education and the ways knowledge is related to practice (Eickelman 1985; Gilsenan 1982; Fischer 1980). Perhaps there is a sense in which the 'false sense of freedom' mentioned earlier (1.2) resides precisely in that lacking of knowledge/belief, a lack creating the perception of a choice/decision to resist submission to Allah's Decree.

In this section, I want to tackle two themes in my data concerning the composite notion of knowing-belief. First, the freedom and duty to seek out spiritual knowledge, involving also the thorny issue of so-called 'independent reason' (*ijtihād*). Second, the idea that belief precedes understanding. More than this, the very meaning and value of one's actions (including *ḥasanāt*, the rewards for good deeds) depend on belief. Only *ʾīmān* can make one say that "everything we do is for Allah" and actually draw benefit from it.

3.1 "The Freedom to Seek Knowledge and Learn"

Muslim-talk and ordinary theology do not allow for broad comparative statements, but do reveal a common distinction between a superficial knowledge of Islam and a 'real knowledge' grown out of belief, acceptance, and surrender (see 3.2). One place this distinction manifests is in informal religious education. In Denmark, various organizations regularly offer Muslims ways to develop or maintain their spiritual knowledge, often emphasizing the role of knowledge in Islam. For instance, the 'tawhīd school' *Madrasatu at-Tawheed* offered a "*ʾIlm Dag*," (Knowledge Day) (F052),²⁸ in Copenhagen; *Udforsk Islam* (Explore Islam) promoted one of their regular events at a mosque in Aarhus, titled *Påmindelser Til Hjertet* (Reminders for the Heart), with the following:

28 *Madrasatu at-Tawheed*. "ʾIlm dag | Undervisning i Usuul al-Fiqh." *Facebook* (social media), April 18, 2019, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/events/419394365481586/>.

Allah created humans and provided them with tools to acquire knowledge, namely hearing, vision, and wisdom. ... “And Allah has extracted you from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing, vision and intellect ...” (16:78). Islam is the religion of knowledge, the first verse that was revealed, ordered us to read, which is the key to knowledge. Allah says in the Quran: “Read! ... And your Lord is the most Generous, who taught (writing) by the pen, taught man that which he knew not” (96:1–5) In Islam, knowledge comes before action; there can be no action without knowledge.²⁹ (FO53)

The common Quranic verses used to encourage participants suggests that humans are born “not knowing a thing;” that Allah has given us the means to learn; that learning is a characteristically Islamic duty, being “the religion of knowledge;” and that Allah is ultimately the one Who teaches. *Udforsk Islam* states that “knowledge comes before action,” which might seem to contradict the previous discussion on “the decision” to believe (see 3.2 and 3.3). This event, however, is meant to increase knowledge/belief rather than initiate the quest; the organization positions itself as distributor of the knowledge which participants can “acquire.” At the same time, the title of the event suggests the lessons will be “reminders” for the “heart,” rather than ‘information’ for the intellect. This is because the heart is supposedly the seat of ‘real,’ spiritual knowledge. As Fadil states, upon becoming a Muslim “the belief itself will grow in your heart.” In this sense, both ‘proper’ knowledge (as *‘ilm*) as well as belief (*‘īmān*) come *after* the testimonial.

Some communities stress the acquisition of knowledge more than others, but the most important distinction lies in the flexibility of interpretation. It is unlikely that any Danish Muslim would deny the importance of studying the scriptures, the various authoritative interpretations, treatises in jurisprudence, etc. It is likely that some would delimit the authoritative canon, and manage the extent to which students can use ‘independent reason’ (*ijtihād*), employing different criteria. Khankan’s ‘muslim manifesto’ accentuates the human ability and duty to decipher the truth:

Instead of blindly imitating the interpretations and renditions of the Quran by other Muslims, we encourage the individual to use their rea-

29 Udforsk Islam. “Påmindelser Til Hjertet.” *Facebook* (social media), November 3, 2018, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/events/712412782468090/>.

son and to study the Quran themselves. In this process it is vital to find a guide who has knowledge. Our point of departure is that God has given us an intellect, that makes it possible for us to interpret and make living the Word He has revealed to us.³⁰ (W008)

Khankan writes that *ijtihad* means “to deduce or draw out,” being applicable to the individual’s use of reason to understand the Quran and sunna. She also refers to *tafsir* as “an exegesis of the Quran. Discovering, clarifying and revealing that, which before was hidden or veiled. Explaining the meaning of words, which might at first encounter seem unclear.” This is not solely an intellectual endeavor: “the individual should seek to understand the Quran by creating a balance between reason and the heart Some of the verses of the Quran are clear in their meaning, while others require further interpretation” (W008).³¹

The practice of *ijtihad* is somewhat controversial, implying a number of notions not addressed in this document. A specific passage in the Quran makes a distinction between clear/precise (*muḥkamāt*) and ambiguous/allegorical (*mutashābih*) verses (Q3:7). It also condemns blindly conforming/following/imitating (*taqlid*) others when it comes to belief (Q5:104).³² The notion of conforming/imitating has been used differently between schools and traditions. The Sunni seem to take *taqlid* as normative; Shia tradition underscores the authority of those qualified to exercise *ijtihad* (the *mujtahid*); contemporary Islamic reformists use the *taqlid* negatively, as in blind imitation/conformism. Still, for most Muslim scholars, the practice of ‘independent reason’ requires a range of skills and knowledge, including scholastic theology and jurisprudence. It is not to be applied to passages in the Quran and sunna whose meaning is deemed clear, or on which there exists a scholarly consensus (*‘ijmā’*).

The history of *ijtihad* is complex and long, and the various attitudes toward it have reached and formed Danish Muslim communities. Sherin Khankan, with some allies, has striven to transform the more rigid patriarchal and conservative structures limiting a full expression of Muslim spirituality, but has not gone unchallenged. Notwithstanding their humble origins and membership numbers, the broad influence of *FEMIMAM* and the *Mariam Mosque* is in part due

30 Khankan, Sherin, “Forum for Kritiske Muslimer: Et muslimsk manifest,” *Kritiskemuslimer.dk*, October 12, 2014, accessed August 1, 2019, http://www.kritiskemuslimer.dk/?page_id=2.

31 Ibid.

32 See 5:104–105; 17:36; 21:52–54; 43:22–24; etc.

to the visibility enthusiastic media granted to their charismatic leader (N010; N167; N168).³³ For now, I would like to emphasize the general attitude of re-opening the ‘gate of *ijtihad*.’ Regarding the esoteric interpretation of the Quran (*ta’wil*), Khankan hints at the quest to uncover the hidden or inner meanings of the scriptures.³⁴ Most importantly, she states that *ijtihad* and *ta’wil* are both “tools to understand” Divine Guidance. This is a notion that comes up in discussions on freedom as yet another reason why Guidance and Destiny do not absolve humans from making an effort. Even Guidance has to be interpreted, and interpretation is nothing less than a manifestation of human freedom. In one conversation, Lutfi is keen to stress the importance of autonomous reflection:

The Quran says also: ‘You have to *think*, you have to use your knowledge, you have to *look* around yourself, ... you don’t have to ... blindly imitate.’ There was a lot of blind imitating once, I think, in Islam. If you live in a village, you are an old woman, you don’t have access to knowledge or anything, but you follow this particular sheikh, because of his behavior, he is a good man In this case you can follow (imitate an exemplar). But other people have to understand by themselves, research, know. Those who can. (C019)

Lutfi reiterates the previously mentioned idea that “you submit when you believe, when you have faith,” and, moreover, “because you know” (C019). It is important to remember that one can ‘think’ she is being guided while in fact being in error.³⁵ Divine Guidance (*al-Hidāyah*) is not imparted to just anyone, a brute fact to be acknowledged and adopted; paradoxically, one must be guided towards Guidance. Once again, Allah’s Will trumps human will, and freedom crops up because of its destructive potential. As Abdul puts it: “precisely because we have ... received this both excellent and dangerous ability, we need Allah’s protection and guidance.” Allah did not merely give us freedom “for our own benefit or for our own destruction,” but “He also gave us guidance on

33 Sanni Jensen, “Danmarks første kvindelige imam,” *Berlingske*, March 30, 2015. Ditte Giese and Sherin Khankan, “Forsidehenviisning: Opgør med islams patriarkat,” *Politiken*, February 11, 2016. Ditte Giese and Mette Olsen, “Danmarks første kvindemoske slår dørene op,” *Politiken*, February 10, 2016.

34 In the Quran *ta’wil* refers to interpretation in a more general sense, including interpretation of dreams. See 3:7; 10:39; 12:6; 12:21; 12:44; 12:101; 18:78; 18:82; etc.

35 See 2:70; 6:56; 6:82; 6:117; 7:30; 9:18; 10:45; 16:125; 28:56; 36:21; 68:7; etc.

how to protect us from ourselves” (So02). Unseen Divine Intervention assists, at every step, the cyclical movement of knowledge-acquisition and choice.

I have hinted at the notion that Danish Muslims connect spiritual growth, and the raise in spiritual status via freedom (as free will), to life-purpose and humankind’s status in relation to other creatures. Muslim notions of human status, purpose, and freedom as privilege, lead to the ethical imperative to acquire knowledge which, as it were, actuates these ideas. It is through knowledge of right and wrong that the worshiper can take her rightful place in nature’s order, fulfill her purpose, and grow in spiritual status. This is to say that ethical work depends on more than the drive to manipulate the ethical substance. What makes a technique of the self both sensible and effective is the number of connections with established notions.

What else directs the Muslim’s quest for spiritual knowledge in their daily spiritual combat? Most Danish Muslims would agree with the general tenet that one should always act in accordance with the Prophet’s example. Discussions and advice revolving around ‘good manners’ or Islamic ‘etiquette’ (*’adab*) are common on social media. The key rule in these kinds of posts is reliable sourcing; each value should be traced to a verse or hadith. The non-profit organization *Udforsk Islam* posts the following:

A sahabi came to Aisha (ra) and asked, “Oh the mother of believers, tell me about the character of the prophet?” She (ra) said, “Have you not read the Quran?” He replied that he had, to which she replied: “The character of the Prophet was the Quran ...” Imam Nawawi explains that what is meant is that he acted in accordance with it, followed its injunction and prohibition, ... he reflected on its importance and recited it correctly #EtiquetteFromQuran #Lifestyle.³⁶ (F044)

The hadith is followed by a picture with twenty-five squares, each containing an ethical imperative together with its Scriptural basis. To cite a few: “Don’t be extravagant (Q17:26); be humble and avoid pride (Q17:37); help others in reconciliation (Q49:10); be indulgent and avoid anger (Q3:134); think about others (Q49:12); be honest (Q40:28); be kind and generous to your spouse (Q4:19); do not delay (Q49:12); don’t be jealous (Q4:54); be kind to your neighbors (Q4:36); help the poor and needy (Q9:60); overlook others’ mistakes (Q42:40)”

36 Udforsk Islam, “Etiketetter fra Quran,” *Facebook* (social media), October 29, 2018, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/UdforskIslam/posts/2261053917300466>.



FIGURE 3
Image depicting a collection of ethical rules, including Quranic references, titled “*Etiketter fra Quran.*” Created by *Udforsk Islam*, circulating on Danish-Muslim social media in 2018
REPRODUCED FROM WWW .FACEBOOK.COM/UDFORSKISLAM

(F044).³⁷ Anchoring these principles in Quranic passages makes *’adab* a matter of conscious application. Many confess its direct impact on their behavior: “I express myself in a measured, nuanced manner, even to people who denigrate or threaten Muslims.” Says Khankan “I always make sure to act this way, in the media as well as in real life, because I’m conscious of the impact of my words, and I believe that *adab* ... makes up half of our religion” (D063).³⁸

The effects of good manners go farther than shaping one’s character. Mubin says that “everything is predetermined. But still the human being has a free will. And he can also change some of his destiny, I think, by doing some things. For example, we know from the prophet Muhammad that ...” Mubin asks Kareem in Arabic how to translate *’adab*, to which he replies “being nice.” Mubin continues: “Being polite to your parents. It’s called *’adab.*” Kareem chuckles. “One cannot translate it into English!” Mubin agrees. “Yeah. Good behavior and polite and listening to them (one’s parents). ... And this act can longer (extend) your

37 Ibid.

38 Sherin Khankan, *Women Are the Future of Islam: A Memoir of Hope* (London: Rider, 2018), page 207.

life.” He goes on to explain how the “angel of death” will “get new orders” if one has been good to one’s parents, and defer the reaping of one’s soul by several years.

Islamic ethical imperatives are meant to ‘control’ or discipline the self, but they also affect the quality of the soul. This is again where freedom enters: the privilege to ameliorate one’s condition or, as Mubin states, to ‘change some of one’s destiny.’ Freedom, in this picture, is the precondition of ethical work, which, as I outline below, is exactly what Foucault was driving at with his distinction between the various dimensions of morality, and the idea of self-conduct.

3.2 “If You Believe, You Understand”

Towards the third hour of our conversation, Fadil asks me if I have ever considered becoming Muslim. I answer evasively, blaming my inchoate knowledge and spiritual immaturity, unwilling to articulate my position. The mention of knowledge, however, prompts the imam, who evidently recognizes a common issue and breaks into a long speech, attempting to tackle what he sees as unexpressed doubts:

To all those that come to me that can agree with the *shahādah*, advise them to take it *now*, because the *knowing* of God, it takes time! ... It’s a lifestyle, you grow up with it, and day for day you will know something new. ... *Study while you are living it* ... I also say, when a person is interested in Islam, *it doesn’t cost any kroner to be a Muslim*. You don’t lose anything. ... Sometimes I say to them: ‘ok you have to run 5 km,’ but it’s just for fun, I don’t mean it! (laughing). ... Now you prayed with us, and this prayer will ... feel different! ... When you are Muslim or not Muslim, because ... the belief itself will grow in your heart. ... In the beginning there is some light, it’s weak. But for every good deed you do, for every time you pray, for every time you ... *think* about God, ... it’s gonna be stronger and stronger ... You mentioned you don’t have enough knowledge to make that decision, and I say to you that *knowledge will come after the decision*. ... Some say: ‘I have to understand it fully.’ Then I say: ‘You would need three or four lifetimes to understand it fully!’ (C015)

Fadil misconstrued my academic curiosity for spiritual availability (see Crane 2013; Renders 2018), which nevertheless leads to an interesting development in the conversation. Fadil emphasizes that “the knowing of God” and spiritual knowledge—hinting also at *taqwā*, i.e. God-consciousness, fear of God, piety—comes after the decision to become Muslim. I single out ‘the decision’ because

sometimes the privilege of free will comes down to a binary decision to accept or reject Allah. There should be “no compulsion in religion” because “Truth stands out clear from Error” (Q2:256), and “the truth is from your Lord,” “let him who will believe, and let him who will, reject (it)” (Q18:29). There is no in-between, and the stakes are high (Q18:29).

It is not uncommon to find interlocutors who are critically aware of the distinction between religious experience and social theory (the latter usually analyzing and explaining the former within a scientific discourse) and thus mistrust the anthropologist’s motives (Rytter 2015). Aware of my occupation, Fadil tries to challenge my habitual approach to things: understand the issue, gather information, make a decision. Like others I encountered during fieldwork, he stresses that an understanding of Islam requires some kind heartfelt commitment: understanding does not precede, but follows it, in an argument reminiscent of Pascal’s wager.³⁹ Rytter (2015, 140) was told by a Sufi sheikh that trying to explain the experience of ‘Muhammad’s Light’ to a non-Muslim was “just as absurd as asking me to explain the scent of a rose to a person who has never smelled this wonder of God.” During my own fieldwork, Mubin expressed a similar notion when advising me to “start believing” because then I would be able to “see purple when we talk about purple” (C025).

There is a tendency to speak of an Islamic focus on *praxis* rather than *doxis*, practice rather than belief (Lukens-Bull 2007, 183). Yet many of my interlocutors would claim that, without having uttered the *shahādah*, the ritual is, in a sense, socially meaningless (the *ummah* does not include the un-initiated), experientially superficial (*salat* feels different after ‘the decision’), and spiritually unrewarding (non-Muslims cannot earn *ḥasanāt*). Some go so far as to contend that Islam cannot be thoroughly studied, or even ‘observed,’ without acknowledgment of, and submission to, Allah. Mechanically copying the external behaviors, from *rak’as* (ritual prayer movements) to *ṣawm* (fasting), while not without its benefits, does not lead to a true understanding/experience of their value. Fadil makes a distinction between imagined, or inferred, and ‘real’ knowledge.

If you stand outside of a house, and you want to study what is inside this house, you can *only imagine*. You can say ‘there could be a sofa inside’ The day you will get the *real* knowledge about inside the house, is when

39 In the Islamic tradition, imams such as Ja’far al-Sadiq (Shia, d. 765) and al-Juwayni (Sunni, d. 1085) have put forward a similar reasoning, positing that humans bet with their life on whether Allah exists or not.

you open the door and enter. ... That's why as an imam I advise any person who reaches the point of interest, and you are free to join Islam, ... to take the *shahādah* and see it for yourself! ... In Denmark, we have something called '*praktik*,' (internship). You try out this for three months, or six months. If, during this period, you find out there is something ridiculous, ... no one will stop you from going away. (C015)

Fadil clearly seems to think that one must take a 'leap to faith' and use one's volition to decide and commit to 'trying out' Islam. If there is interest, and one is "free to join," (meaning spiritually available and not member of another religious community) then he cannot imagine any reason to resist. Lack of knowledge is no excuse. Lutfi and Kareem likewise hold that spiritual knowledge and understanding grow in time through sustained belief and acceptance of Allah's Decree. Both, however, add that, before this acceptance, is an awareness of the notions themselves. Kareem often expresses the idea that information about the Divine and His Attributes must "enter one's consciousness" before it can initiate change from within. Once the thought has taken hold, one must make a conscious decision to accept or reject it (C034; C042). For Lutfi, it always comes back to acceptance of Allah's Plan—an acceptance that stems from a knowledge rooted in belief:

The basic thing is you *accept* God's Decree and you accept His Will. And everything happens (only) if it's God's Will. But you choose your own ways. ... What I'm trying to say is like, *if you believe, you understand*. ... Everything happens for a reason, and God is aware of everything. So you have to acknowledge, as a Muslim you have to believe, then that's enough to understand. ... Believing is (an emotional) but also intellectual (thing). ... When they say 'you have to believe Allah's *Qadar*, you have to believe Allah's Decree.' ... So you can ask a question like: 'okay why am I doing this?' (snaps his fingers) ... 'I'm not doing this?' ... You are aware of these things (and you can act on them). ... A lot of things happen, and if you know this is *planned* and everything is written out of God's Hands. So you have, like, this calm. (C023)

Here, and elsewhere, Lutfi and his friends maintain that it is "enough to know about Islam and Muslim practice," because real understanding requires a long period of spiritual growth. The same argument goes for society at large. In the group conversation at the Somali mosque, both Axmed and Lutfi insist that non-Muslim Danish compatriots should start with simply "knowing" and "accepting" Muslim customs, such as wearing the hijab or niqab, rather than

trying to “understand” them: “You don’t have to *understand* it, exactly, you have to *know* it. Because it would take ... a lot of time. ... It’s very difficult to understand, to answer like specific what it would be like”. (C010)

The distinction Lutfi and others make between knowing (being aware), accepting (respecting), and (spiritual) understanding is revealing in that it shows how the latter is inextricably linked with faith (*ʿimān*). This is a common notion. In his study on Islam, sorcery, and spirit possession in Mayotte, Michael Lambek (1993, 4) writes that, in Islam, “the core texts are identified in a very profound sense with the revelations themselves.” Because of this, “knowledge” rather than “belief” becomes “the critical expression of the relationship of the adherent to the faith.” The anthropologist goes on to explain that “belief has its roots in a relationship of trust in another person (Ruel 1982), whereas the key phrase of commitment to Islam, the *shahādah*, refers to ‘testifying.’ Where Christians ‘believe’ in Christ, Muslims ‘know’ or affirm their Quran.” Lambek then echoes the claim made by Islam scholar Franz Rosenthal ([1970] 2007, 29, 108) that the Quran itself expresses “the equation of religious faith [*ʿimān*] with knowledge [*ʿilm*].” In a way, the ordinary theology of Danish Muslims seems to confirm this view in that it clearly distinguishes between a barren, superficial knowledge of the religion and a “real knowledge” grown out of belief and acceptance, acquired “when you open the door and enter” the house of Islam.

3.3 “*Everything We Do Is for Allah*”

It is striking how heavily the senses figure in metaphors when conversing with Danish Muslims, especially when it comes to spiritual insight/knowledge. Kareem often exhorts me to “open your eyes” (C025) and Abdul states, “when one does not understand God, but considers people’s relationship with God as a scientific equation, we end up in the black and white (picture of the world).” Spiritual knowledge, to Abdul, gives the world “color” and an extra “dimension” (C056). This trend underscores the experiential character of knowing-belief, and the idea that freedom plays a role in the rational decision to initiate a process, rather than just reaping its affective results. After making “the decision,” says Fadil, prayer will “feel different” (C015; C054).

As I mentioned, only *ʿimān* can make one say that “everything we do is for Allah” (C015) and actually draw benefit from it. Muslim ethics, in this sense, is ‘knowing-belief’ in action, acquired through willing submission. Once again, everything seems to hinge on human freedom, because it is the act of freely subjecting that allows for initiating the development of knowing-belief. Yet the spiritual knowledge gradually acquired after ‘the decision’ reveals a state of dependency that makes Muslims reconsider their views on human agency. The

deeper one's dedication and tighter one's relationship with the Divine, thanks to the constant ethical work and relentless spiritual combat, the more one finds that the choices that bring freedom are already set by the higher power. This perfectly fits when considering the previously discussed state of worship: when "everything you say and everything you do," "even you intentions," are "submitted to God." According to my interlocutors, the more one worships, "doing all the things that God loves," the more one understands that there is no freedom away from this path, only 'traps' leading to captivity, a state that Basim, in an Arabic word-play, calls *shirk* (C008).

If all this sounds vague and confusing, it might be useful to return to the order outlined in the previous chapters: first, there is the (auto)establishment of Allah's existence and nature through revelation, together with a complementary primordial human nature, and a predestination of the soul; second, there is the willing surrender of the Muslims to their fate, in an acknowledgment of the inevitability of Allah's Will, and a recognition of being always-already among 'the submitted;' third, there is the putting into practice of this realization, the worship of Allah and combat with the *Shayṭān's* whispers. This constant practice "grows" the knowledge and faith sown the day one testified the truth of the first point. A mature knowing-belief allows for the realization of the 'real freedom' I discuss in the last chapter. It is not by accident that the process just outlined seems circular: the power of the sequence lies precisely in its ever-deepening potential. The firmer one's understanding of Allah's qualities, the deeper the willing submission, and the more devoted the worship. Vice versa, the more consistent the worship and ethical effort, the more complete one's surrendering, and the deeper one's insight into Allah's nature. Freedom-talk, in its various forms, is present in all stages, but most of all in talk of what results from this cultivated submission, worship, and insight.

This Is Real Freedom!

Emancipation, Liberation, Iterative Choice

In a quiet café somewhere downtown Copenhagen, Hanne shares with me the reasons that led her to convert almost two decades ago. Her brilliant blue eyes match her hijab, and radiate a contagious sense of serenity. She seems at ease talking about her difficult youth, the absent parents, the financial problems. Hanne traces the conditions for her conversion all the way back to her childhood, and her thinking about freedom played a big part in the process: “I already had this idea that ‘they tell me I’m free, but I’m not.’ That was my basic intuition. This confusion, *ya’nī*, that what people are saying is not what is really going on in this world.”

“I think that with subjects like these there are many layers. You peel one off, but when you study deeper then suddenly what you said before doesn’t make sense anymore, it might be exactly the opposite.” Says Hanne. “What I think about and say today, is that freedom is the freedom to *choose* who you are. This is what we are given in Islam. We are not given *one* choice, we are given a choice every second. ... And we choose freely who we are in any situation in front of other people.” Hanne is keen to emphasize the iterative aspect of this choice, and the key role of intention:

“I usually say that the Americans know the price of oil, the Jewish know the price of diamonds, but we (Muslims) know the price of *actions*.” She laughs, and then insists that Muslims are continuously reminded that one day they will be held accountable: “We have an angel here (points to the left shoulder), and we have an angel here (right), and they write for us, every day. This angel writes all the good things I do, this one all the bad things.¹ But I am the one who has the intention, and God is the only one who can measure it.” According to Hanne, this knowledge of “the price of actions” has to do with a good form of authority and fear. The Prophet found the people of his time “enslaved,” both in the sense lacking rights and “praying to God, but also other ... things.” This is precisely what modern-day people are doing: “We have a lot of Gods, because

1 Hanne is referring to Raqib and Atid, the so-called ‘honorably recorders’ (*kirāman kātibīn*, see 82:10–12, 50:17) who have the task of recording all the people’s good and bad choices (see Q50:16–19).

... what is God? It's whom you give your attention, who you think has *authority* over you. ... The one who *scares your heart*." Muhammad reminded humanity that there is only one Creator, and in doing so "he set the people free, in *true* freedom, and that's what people tasted, that's why they became Muslims."

To Hanne, the reasoning is unambiguous: by fearing and taking Allah as ultimate Authority, Muslims become "nobody." This is to say, by responding to a transcendent power alone Muslims are not only freed from worldly masters, but also from the tyranny of their own will/self. "That's why they became the Muslims, the Arabs, that's why people said they were *submitted*." This state made Muslims indomitable: "The Christian kings ... were like: 'what can we do?' Because they (the Arabs and Muslims) found out they're nobody. *I am* nobody." Hanne sees a clear parallel with what she considers to be her community's political stance:

"We are trying to tell this government: we don't need you, actually!" Notwithstanding her critical political outlook, Hanne says she intends to create community rather than division. "What's going on in our world is that people *agree*, but they are (segregated) in groups!" Human beings will be "free" when they can "unite around something which is not material," when they act and live "not for someone who's here" but beyond petty concerns: "If you have to find a person, a name, a value ... why not the Creator?" (C038).

How Hanne moves from the "freedom to choose who you are" to being "nobody" is not immediately clear. On the one hand, there is an assertion of self-determination, on the other, the apparent relinquishment of identity. In the middle, there is "the one that scares your heart." Once again, knowledge of the nature of Allah seems to be the key to understand the religious logic. As a convert, Hanne understands that the acquisition of spiritual knowledge is a confusing process, yet the resulting insight is empowering. Hanne's drive to challenge prejudice through dialogue is an example of a discursive practice where the speaker can redefine what something like 'conversion' means, leveraging a personal history and experience. By actively looking for dialogue, the pious Muslima does her best to 'own' her narrative, to not allow her audience to frame her religiosity as simply the result of difficulties earlier in life. She cannot deny her past, but she can interpret various events from it as the 'hand' of Allah pushing her towards the Straight Path.

While the fear of God, common to many religious traditions, might play an important role as an underlying psychic drive, this is not how Danish Muslims commonly frame their spiritual objectives. In the previous chapter, I discussed ethical work, 'willing submission' put into practice. But what is the ethical goal, the *telos* of the ethical subject? For Foucault ([1984] 1990, 28), an action is not

(just) moral in its singularity, but also “in its circumstantial integration and by virtue of the place it occupies in a pattern of conduct.” Action is an element/aspect of this conduct, marking “a stage in its life, a possible advance in its continuity.” The ethical goal thus consists in the kind of person one strives to be by working on oneself, a destination to keep in sight throughout the journey. Yet freedom, as an ethical goal, is here not projected into the future, but inherent to the process of submission itself. Hanne’s comments contain the three salient versions of ‘real freedom’ which I discuss in this concluding chapter: emancipation from authority, liberation through Authority, and iterative surrender.

In the following I will also discuss some responses to the challenge outlined in chapter two, involving social struggle, Islamic soteriology, and their local articulations. Statements on these themes convey, in different ways, an ethical goal, and, crucially, the right to pursue it. Actions mark a possible advance in self-continuity, aiming beyond mere accomplishment, toward a certain mode of being. When it comes to Islam, what comes to mind—in this life/world—is righteousness/piety (*taqwā*), spiritual excellence (*‘ihsān*), spiritual freedom (*ḥurriyyah*), success/salvation (*falāḥ*), ‘annihilation (of the self)’ coupled with ‘subsistence in Allah’ for Sufi practitioners (*fanā’ wa baqā’*). Moreover, since Islam teaches a works- rather than (purely) grace-based deliverance, it might be appropriate to speak not of an achievement but of a ‘return’ to *fiṭrah* or safety/salvation (*najāt*, see Q40:41). Finally, for many the end-goal to secure one’s place in the afterlife, reaching the highest possible stadium of *Jannah*.

Authority plays a key role here, and cannot be disentangled from the “real freedom” and the continuous exhortations to spiritual ‘success’ mentioned in Muslim-talk. First, I tackle the demand for freedom *from* authority, such as tradition, family, government, religious leaders, etc. Second, I work toward some kind of resolution, delving into the idea of freedom/liberation *through* Divine Authority, and salvation as the recovery of a pure state of nature rather than the building/achievement of a new spiritual persona. I conclude by focusing on Hanne’s idea of a continuous choice and thus an *iterative* surrender to Allah, which is the end point and the beginning of the never concluded relinquishing of the will.

1 Emancipation from Authority

In his analysis of ancient Greek ethics, Foucault (1984) links *sōphrosynē* (self-mastery) directly to freedom. The personal freedom Foucault identifies is distinct from independence of will: “its polar opposite was not a natural determin-

ism, nor was it the will of an all-powerful agency: it was an enslavement—the enslavement of the self by oneself. To be free in relation to pleasures was to be free of their authority; it was not to be their slave” ([1984] 1990, 79). Muslim ethics includes a similar notion of being free from the authority of pleasures, of escaping self-servitude, and it is crucial to emphasize that it is this self-servitude and not Allah’s power that stands at the opposite pole of this freedom. In previous chapters I have argued that human freedom does not interfere with either *al-Qadā’* or *al-Qadar* (see 3.1 and 2.2). Freedom has neither Allah’s Will, nor determinism, as its antithesis. In one of its senses, it denotes the release from bondage to the worldly through submission to the other-worldly. In another sense, it denotes the liberation resulting from this submission, but these are two distinct (yet concomitant) processes.

The fact that Muslim ethical work frequently revolves around servanthood does not mean Danish Muslims have not developed practices of resistance/ domination regarding what is at times perceived as a Western political-cultural hegemony. Practices like wearing the veil, or accepting religious authority, can function to ignite protest against modernizing projects or Islamophobic policies (see 1.2). The Muslim women’s struggle latches onto a series of narratives involving negative freedom from all that hinders private ethical goals—a striving for “the absence of obstacles which block human action” (Berlin [1996] 2002, 325). I will not attempt an exhaustive review of the gendered discussion on emancipation, but rather sketch some of the principal ways that freedom manifests as a demand, and struggle, in my own data. The point is not to list the myriad ways in which emancipation comes up in Danish Muslim-talk, but to achieve insight into how ‘emancipation from authority’ figures in the broader Muslim discursive field, allowing for certain articulations of freedom. I will ease into the discussion on gender and the veil by addressing some of the more evident concerns, then two related conditions: the addiction-freedom dichotomy and the effort to resist disempowerment.

1.1 “Welcome to Freedom. You Can Take That Off Now”

On a rainy winter day of 2019, a group of thirty-five demonstrators have assembled for the event *200 dage med Burkaforbudet i Århus* (200 days with burqaban in Aarhus). Some wear animal-masks; others have their faces wrapped in scarves; most are young. Two women are wearing their hijab—one has dared to come in niqab. *Kvinder I Dialog*, expanding their activities from the capital to other major Danish cities, has organized the demonstration in collaboration with *Aarhus for Mangfoldighed* (Aarhus for Diversity). Joining forces has not repeated the success of the earlier demonstration in Aarhus, when participa-

tion reached the hundreds (N162).² Meryam, a 21-year old niqabi and university student, speaks to the press before the event:

The burqa- and niqab-ban is a frontal attack on women's right to decide for themselves how much or little clothing they wear. Unfortunately, it is yet another gross example of state persecution of a particular religious minority. ... We therefore hope that many of the city's citizens will meet up to protest against state discrimination and regimentation (*ensretning*).³ (N163)

Later, in front of the small gathering, Meryam describes her experiences of daily harassment and discrimination. The *KID* spokesperson takes care to involve other religious symbols and minorities, whether to evoke Christian sympathy—by naming Jesus (instead of *Īsā*) as a major Muslim prophet, and drawing a parallel between the cross and the veil—or to draw lateral attention, by comparing the plight of the Muslim minority with other groups. Another evident tactic is the dissemination of concepts that have proven effective in uniting disparate interests: state persecution, governmental regimentation, systematic discrimination, etc.

Each of the home-made protest signs seems to represent a distinct stake. One, held by *Aarhus for Mangfoldighed* members, reads “*systematisk discrimination*,” another, by *KID*, has “*liberalt hykleri*” (liberal hypocrisy); a lone man, his face hidden by his scarf, stands stoically with the sign “*Hvad blev der af religions frihed?*” (whatever happened to freedom of religion?). The slogans resounding through the streets start with a positive affirmation, followed by a list of negatives: “*min krop min vælg!*” (My body my choice!), “*Nej til burkaforbud!*” (No to the burka-ban!), “*Nej til islamofobi!*” “*Stop chikane!*” (Stop harassment!). Suddenly, the choir switches to some common *Antifa* choirs: “*Nej til racisme! Nej til racisten!*” “*Igner fascister I vores gader! Igen racister I vores gader!*” (No fascists/racists in our streets!).

In chapter two, I discussed the importance for Danish Muslim activist organizations to hitch their counter-narratives to an established discourse. To an extent, the success of the anti-covering-ban movement depends on the promotion of a common denominator that can mobilize disparate activist cells. In this case, slogans target more than the opposition; they also hail those sec-

2 Jonas Wrede Hansen, “Aarhusianere Demonstrerer Imod Burkaforbuddet,” *Lokalavisen*, August 1, 2018.

3 Jonas Wrede Hansen, “Politikere i Aarhus Bliver Mødt Af Maskerede Demonstranter Inden Dagens Byrådsmøde,” *Lokalavisen*, February 20, 2019.

tions of society able/willing to imagine the Muslim women's struggle in league with their own: dedicated liberals opposing state interventionism, third wave feminists questioning notions of oppression and emphasizing the body as personal expression, fourth-wave feminists stressing spirituality and community (see Wrye 2009; Munro 2013; Rampton 2015). The demonstration is a case of what Laclau and Mouffe ([1985] 2001, 139) call 'condensation,' the fusion of diverse identities and meanings into a united whole. The two draw on philosopher Tzvetan Todorov (1977, 291), according to whom "there is a condensation every time a single signifier leads us to comprehend more than one signified; or more plainly: *every time that the signified is more abundant than the signifier.*" Condensation is a form of (Althusser's adaptation of Freudian) overdetermination, i.e. the precise symbolic fusion of a multiplicity of identities, giving social identity a symbolic dimension. The inherent danger here is the marginalization of a specific identity or meaning. As Torfing (2003, 96–97) notes, the overdetermined presence of certain identities prevents others from achieving closure. For example, fighting their battle under the banner of liberal injustice might lead *KID* to a cooperative victory, while also compromising their primary concerns, rendering their alliance 'unholy.' The slogan 'my body my choice' might be halal when coming from the mouth of a niqabi, but its import might change when an implant/tattoo-covered member of *'sluts & queers'* joins the choir (see 1.2). At the 2019 demonstration in Aarhus, some *KID* activists looked confused when the aggressive style of experienced *Antifa* demonstrators took over.

Not everyone has the energy and will to defy the *maskeringsforbud* on the streets, but the cries of 'liberal hypocrisy' are not confined to protest-signs. In a newspaper article titled "The niqab-ban got Fatima to leave Denmark with her family," a Danish niqabi explains her decision to move to Pakistan:

In Denmark I was constantly assessed (*malt og vejjet*), because for Danes the niqab is a symbol of oppression of us Muslim women. People looked at me strangely, (as if saying) 'welcome to freedom,' and 'you can take that off now.' But hey, it's my own choice. I have gone with niqab since I was 18, and there are others who do not wear a niqab that are more isolated than I am. ... The woman used to be owned by the man. A son could own his mother. With Islam came rules for the woman's role so that women got freedom. Freedom in the West is the freedom to be naked, while I think that freedom is to be the best version of oneself.⁴ (N151)

4 Kirsten Nilsson, "Niqabforbuddet fik Fatima til at forlade Danmark med familien," *Politiken*, October 12, 2018.

Similarly to the niqabi women I spoke to during my fieldwork, Fatima explains that, according to Islam, a woman should cover her face to avoid inappropriately seducing men. The niqab gives her freedom, because it draws attention away from the cosmetic, and toward personality. She also states that, in Islam, women's primary task is to maintain the house, educate themselves, and raise children. She does not consider it problematic to be 'dependent' on a husband. "I know very well the mindset according to which it is not freedom, when it is the man who is the breadwinner. ... Some women are afraid they will end up without working experience, ... in case they divorce. But I'm never afraid of that. It is completely against our values to divorce" (N151).⁵

The stance of women like Fatima and *KID*'s spokesperson Sara is clear—there is no one to liberate (N107).⁶ As another Danish niqabi puts it: "Politicians force me to undress during the pretext of liberating me. ... The only thing that the burqa-ban will do is exclude me from society and make me angry and bitter" (N160).⁷ Often these statements come with a challenge: are women in so-called 'free countries' truly free? In some cases, the value of freedom itself is questioned. As Fatima says: "Maybe freedom is just a concept we keep running after. If we are completely free, does that also mean we are happy inside? Are we?" (N151).⁸ As Fatima sees it, one will be 'evaluated' by Allah according to the extent of one's surrender and belief, not individual achievements. Sasha (also a member of *KID*) tells me there is no such thing as "absolute freedom," and that everyone lives with a set of regulations and restrictions:

As Muslim women, we say, 'who puts the boundaries to your freedom goes?' Some people, say ... the majority decides when something is okay, and your freedom is then limited where the majority says. ... But we say, *true freedom, true liberation*, is when you stop taking the definition of people and you let God set the ... not the limits, but ... how God wants you to live your freedom. (C054)

5 Ibid.

6 David Rue Honoré, "Jeg har gået i dansk vuggestue, dansk børnehave og dansk folkeskole: this is made in Denmark," *Berlingske*, April 6, 2018.

7 Lene Galia Al-Fayoumi, "Niqabklædt studerende: Politikerne tvinger mig til at klæde mig af under påskud af, at man frigør mig," *Politiken*, April 23, 2018.

8 Kirsten Nilsson, "Niqabforbuddet fik Fatima til at forlade Danmark med familien," *Politiken*, October 12, 2018.

This is simultaneously a statement of emancipation from the authority/tyranny of the (Danish) majority, and a statement of liberation through the highest Authority. Sasha introduces the religious narrative (Allah ‘regulating freedom’) as a secondary step. The first task is to disrupt the established understanding of what it means to be free. Referring to her organization’s (*KID*) activities, Sasha notes that the term ‘freedom’ mainly comes up in critiques of liberalism: “they’re limiting our right to self-determination in the name of freedom” (see 1.2). *KID*’s usage of the word is more tactical than internally meaningful. Sasha says that the point is to defend Muslim communities from a damaging understanding of the term, not to impose a new one. Yet, a few minutes earlier, she had mentioned a “true freedom” that involved letting Allah take charge of one’s life (C054).

This is the problem with attempting to reject an established meaning while hesitating to claim another: in condemning the hypocrisy of politicians and the general public, while claiming that freedom is ill-defined, *KID* creates an unfulfilling vacuum. Understandings of freedom depend on the master-signifiers giving them meaning, not the coherence of their definitions. Sasha does not want to limit herself to saying ‘this is how the legislators defined freedom, and this is why it is inconsistent,’ but speaks rather of a “shallow use of the word freedom” and a “true freedom” which should take its place. After having outlined her political critique, Sasha returns to the religious logic:

Everyone has regulations according to what is permissible and what is not permissible, and we believe that the Creator, God, is the one who knows what is best for you. So you can’t go around and say, ‘... just do it because you’re free to do whatever you want.’ We believe that there are restrictions to freedom He (Allah) sets the limits so you can live a peaceful, good life. And *then* the Danish parliament, or society, or politicians, ... they’re punishing innocent, peaceful, Muslim woman for thinking differently. (C054)

Sasha sees the preoccupation with ‘freedom’ as an opportunity to introduce a reasoning which she deems sensible, to create the conditions for the admittance of Islamic truths into the public sphere. Echoing Hanne (whom she never met), Sasha argues that If someone is to regulate our freedom, if we need an authority to unite us, “why not the Creator?” Emancipation from worldly authority might be the first step, but few of my interlocutors can resist suggesting the next: subjection to the highest power.

Listening to Danish Muslim women, it would seem that the opposition hijab-freedom is something externally imposed, something they struggle to undo.

This struggle is itself an emancipatory movement. When Aaheda speaks of her efforts to convince Arab family members and Danish acquaintances that her decisions were ‘freely’ chosen (C032), she exemplifies how veiling can be an empowering identity practice, an effort to reappropriate the Islamic tradition, and an expression of religious belonging in a secular context (see Navaro-Yashin 2002; Moors and Tarlo 2007; Bracke 2008). Yet the focus on veiling should not detract from “not-/unveiling” as an ethical practice. Nadia Fadil (2011, 86), analyzing the contemporary problematization of the hijab, works to “denaturalise a perspective on the body that views not-veiling as a ‘natural’ state of being,” and to “explore the complex agency of non-veiled Muslim women in the current post-migratory context, wherein forced unveiling has turned into one of the preferred modes of disciplining Muslims.” The formation of a secular Muslim subject can be helped along by Muslim engagement with the continuous problematization of the veil.

At the same time, this emancipatory movement can acquire a taste of entitlement, resulting perhaps from a misunderstanding of the raging ideological conflict. The participants in Mariam Khan’s (2019) collection of essays, *It’s Not About the Burqa*, each, in different ways, dispute the media’s fixation by candidly discussing the multitude of other concerns belonging to Muslim women in the West. What the contributors are saying, in effect, is that they, as Muslim women, have the ultimate say on what veiling means. This is both a misconception and a (ineffectual) tactic. During and after the 2018 *maskeringsforbud*, the niqabi’s from *KID* repeatedly lamented that “they are talking about us, but not with us” (N182).⁹ They supposed that, by establishing themselves as the subjects of the debate, they could acquire a special pulpit, rectifying the stereotypes/prejudices pervading the political arena. This enterprise was largely ignored in the political sphere, notwithstanding a number of public appearances and efforts on social media. These examples go to show that—in an ideological conflict—success comes not through gaining entitlement to ‘speak the truth.’ Success seems to come from associating one’s ‘truth’ with hegemonic discourse, engaging most of its established meanings, and, as I argued, also this comes at a price.

1.2 “Who Has the Right to Evaluate a Person’s Freedom?”

From casual rhetorical devices to conscious protest tactics, the aim is to sustain what Peter Berger (1974, 21) would call a ‘plausibility structure’—the particu-

9 Nicolas S. Nielsen and Sophie Brochdorff Himmelstrup, “Kvinder i niqab besøger Folketinget: De vil gerne tale om os men ikke med os,” *DR*, February 8, 2018.

lar social circumstances making a certain kind of consciousness plausible. In other words, the key message must make sense within a familiar context, its strangeness minimized. Already half a century ago, Berger (1974, 75) discussed how modernization processes make it increasingly difficult for religious traditions to integrate the “plurality of social lifeworlds in one overarching and comprehensive world view,” and how “the plausibility of religious definitions of reality is threatened from within, that is, within the subjective consciousness of the individual.” What we can witness, in other words, is Danish Muslims’ struggle to reclaim the plausibility of a certain religious logic, both in casual conversation with non-Muslims, and on a national political scale. There is a basic, ongoing miscommunication respecting the nature of emancipation, with consequences for the Danish Muslim community at large, and Muslim women in particular.

In his challenge to the antinomy between ‘secular’ criticism and religious ‘censure,’ Asad (2009, 21) provides a rationale for why the criminalization of blasphemy in Islamic countries strikes Westerners as an absence of freedom/free speech. It boils down to “a Western conceit of the self-owning individual presumed free from all forms of coercion, including those potentially entailed in religion, commerce, love, belief, and comportment” (Asad et al. 2009, 14–15). In official European (and Danish) discourse, this “self-owning individual” possesses a fundamental, inalienable agency, understood not only as the ability/condition of exerting power, but as “the capacity to realize one’s own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendent will or other obstacles” (Mahmood 2005, 8).

Several authors in Mark Sedgwick’s (2015) edited volume *Making European Muslims* show the impact of this discourse on Muslim citizens. Its pervasiveness led to the formation and promotion of a liberal-progressive ‘European Islam,’ one in which, to Rannveig Haga (2015, 44), “the individual is the authority who can choose between different options in the marketplace.” According to this logic, observes Haga, “Muslims can be trusted to be rational if they become free and have agency.” Haga (2015, 47) also relates how the rhetoric of freedom delegitimizes Muslim parents’ authority. Parents feel “liberation” is equated with freedom to embody European liberal-progressive norms: “therefore, encouragement to become liberated can be experienced as a demand to assimilate.” To be sure, no Muslim parent would deny the importance of being critical and thinking for oneself; the resistance is against the disempowerment of family and child in the name of freedom/ emancipation.

Examples of this brand of Islam abound in Denmark, most clearly in so-called ‘mosque-shopping.’ Christian Suhr (2016) mentions that, during his fieldwork, he often experienced how “especially the young shopped around be-

tween different competing mosques, and chose to associate themselves with the imams they thought best suited to give them what they needed.” It is also well-known that Muslims seeking marriage or divorce, whose request is denied, petition mosques and imams around the country until they succeed (D070).¹⁰ The mosque-shopping trend allows for interfaith marriages and ameliorates the condition of abused women who are often negated the right to initiate divorce proceedings (D063).¹¹ But, it also results in a balancing act between the demand for autonomy, and resistance to mainstream notions thereof.

Another case of this balancing act involves the so-called ‘24 year-old rule,’ a policy introduced by the Danish government in 2002, which set twenty-four years as the mandatory minimum age for residents intending to marry a foreign citizen. For Mujde Erdinc (2012, 21; 2010), this rule is an example of “how a gendered knowledge about immigration becomes a reality that steers biopolitics, enables practices of normalization and subjectifies immigrants in various ways.” Erdinc (2012, 30) presents the case of Deniz, who employs certain identity tactics to resist the stereotype of the agency-lacking immigrant woman, while, at the same time, portraying herself as a victim of unequal treatment in (native) Danish society. Weak/oppressed Turkish women are othered by Danish women, “while she, because of her strong position, is rendered invisible or unknown/unknowable.”

In short, Danish Muslims are caught between emancipation and disempowerment, shifting subject-positions in accordance with environment and audience, attempting to satisfy the various claims competing discourses make on their identity. In this instance, the female body has become a battleground for meaning. Unlike Muslim statements on spiritual combat or destiny, established discourses in Denmark have a stake in ‘conquering’ the Muslim female body as a symbol, or at least impeding its potentially disrupting effects. In chapter two, for example, I mentioned the *Nye Borgerlige* party-campaign poster depicting a woman in niqab and the text “Freedom, also for Muslim women” (W082).¹² This audacious move bypasses factual grounding and academic sub-

10 Ahmed Akkari, *Min afsked med islamismen: Muhammedkrisen, dobbeltspillet og kampen mod Danmark*, ed. Martin Kjær Jensen (København: Berlingske Media Forlag, 2014), chap. 10.

11 Sherin Khankan, *Women Are the Future of Islam: A Memoir of Hope* (London: Rider, 2018), chapter 7.

12 Nye Borgerlige Aalborg, “Frihed, også for muslimske piger,” *Facebook* (social media), October 28, 2017, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/Nyeborgerligeaalborg/photos/a.882639295194958/1347770215348528/>.

stantiation. Here we have a political party, with four brand-new seats in the Parliament,¹³ unapologetically appropriating an Islamic symbol (the *niqab*) while, at the same time, imposing a chain of signification (freedom-oppression-Islam-women) that suits their ideology. Contesting this requires a reassertion/reconfiguration of meaning. This must include both the veil and freedom.

As a side-note, it should be noted that some of the historical literature also displays a tendency to frame Islam as tied to the ‘Muslim body’—the tacit idea that ‘Islam’ needs ‘bodies’ to occupy the Danish territory and imaginary. With some exceptions (e.g., Simonsen 2004), in much of the academic and public discourse non-Western foreigners still ‘bear’ Islam, and Islam needs ‘bodies’ to carry ‘it’ within the country’s borders (see 1.1). Conversely, some politicians suggest the need to carry Muslim bodies out of the country to ‘remove’ Islam (N184).¹⁴ The distinction I made between Islam and individual practitioners justifies the approach of collecting statements on freedom from disparate environments and sub-groups, allowing ‘freedom-talk’ to emerge as the central thread, rather than the speakers themselves. On the other hand, the previous paragraphs also show how in Denmark the battle for freedom is often fought over real, often female, bodies. While Islam, Muslim-talk, and Muslim bodies should not be conflated, neither can they thus be completely disentangled.

As discussed in the socio-historical overview, the 2018 Danish covering-ban was so named because a targeted ban of the burqa and niqab was deemed irreconcilable with Danish constitutional law (1.2).¹⁵ In an interview from months before the implementation, Naser Khader, a prominent Muslim politician who voted in *favor* of the law, plainly recognized this, asserting that the law rightly challenged the constitution, since the *burqa* and *niqab* are “extremely women-oppressing” (N117).¹⁶ Khader (2013) had long positioned himself as a “Muslim with Christian culture,” so his stance did not come as a shock to the community.¹⁷ Before and after the introduction of the *maskeringsforbud*, the narrative of oppression was a main justification offered by those favoring the ban.

13 Mikkel Secher, “Nye Borgerlige Kommer i Folketinget,” *TV2*, June 5, 2019.

14 Marchen Neel Gjertsen, “Rasmus Paludan har tippet den udlændingepolitiske balanceskælgang,” *Jyllands-Posten*, May 11, 2019.

15 Nicolas S. Nielsen, “Jurister skriver sort på hvidt: Burkaforbud strider mod grundloven,” *DR*, February 2, 2018.

16 Pia Glud Munksgaard and Johan Blem, “Khader om forbud mod skæg og huer: Vi vil blive latterliggjort,” *DR*, January 25, 2018.

17 Naser Khader, *Bekendelser Fra En Kulturkristen Muslim* (København: Kristeligt Dagblad, 2013).

Muslim voices were quick to reverse this narrative, generally ignoring the formal justifications (involving security and the *vivre ensemble* principle).¹⁸ In the fall of 2017, for instance, a coalition of Danish Muslim organizations jointly declared that the law proposal was itself a tool of women-oppression. The organizations lamented that the case moved beyond ‘*symbolpolitik*’ (symbol-politics/tokenism), entailing actual legal consequences. As many others, they argued that evidence of coercion is nonexistent, and that many Muslim women exercise their right to dress in the way they think best reflects their beliefs:

As Muslim organizations ..., we very rarely encounter cases where the woman is forced to wear a particular attire. ... We encounter several cases where women ... out of their own zeal choose the niqab. ... They consider it as part of their worship. Since when ... can external actors to tell people whether they are oppressed or not? Who has the right to evaluate something as crucial as a person’s freedom? ... Is the Danish government willing to compromise its own democratic values? ... A decision like this opens the door for greater interference with all women’s personal freedom. ... This is therefore a fight we jointly have to take on, to defend women against oppression It’s about our rights as a community.¹⁹ (W005)

The challenge in this statement lies in the reconceptualization of presumed ‘oppression’ as an expression of agency. This alliance of Muslim organizations state in unison that, where the governing parties see oppression, they see empowerment. They question the motives and narrative put forward by those favoring the law, and question the right to evaluate a person’s freedom. In an effort to reappropriate the notion, the document deems freedom ‘crucial,’ in contrast to those in the community who discredit its status as a democratic value. It is striking to see how, again, this public statement is stripped of religious jargon, which is otherwise rife in publications by the individual organizations. The prominent mosque/organization *Det Islamiske Trossam-*

18 The ‘living together’ principle is employed in various ECHR rulings, echoing the reasoning in the French “Gérin report” of 2010. See for instance *S.A.S. v. FRANCE*—43835/11—Grand Chamber Judgment [2014] ECHR 695 (01 July 2014).

19 Det Islamiske Trossamfund, “Fælleserklæring fra muslimske organisationer i Danmark: Burkaforbud er kvindeundertrykkende!” *Wakf.com*, October 8, 2017, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://wakf.com/index.php/da/presse/1634-faelleserklaering-fra-muslimske-organisationer-i-danmark-burkaforbud-er-kvindeundertrykkende>.

fund (*DIT*), for instance, ends another statement on the #*MeToo* campaign and “women’s freedom in Denmark” with a reminder that the rejection of sexual harassment, and the defense of a woman’s right to wear religious attire, originates in God-given guidelines:

The Islamic guidelines for how man and woman behave towards each other takes into account our diversity and attractiveness. These guidelines are God-given, and God is the one who knows the nature of man best. ... If there is no strong moral code of divine nature, there will always be situations where morality and reason do not have a gravity point. That is precisely what we are witnessing at the moment, but is suppressed to death (*forties ihjel*) in the Danish public sphere.²⁰ (W001)

When organizations in the joint statement emphasize the “zeal” of niqabis, and elsewhere the “desire of their hearts,” they purposely keep silent about Divine Command. *DIT* conveys a very common standpoint among Danish Muslims: gender equality (*ligestilling*) does not negate gender difference (*kønsforskell*). This generates discussion, because the attitude results in justifications for the various gender gaps: segregation of the sexes, traditional and binary interpretations of masculine and feminine, etc. In dramatic language, the organization condemns, on religious grounds, the overvaluing of equality at the cost of difference. Typically, when provoked by journalists on this topic, Danish Muslim women answer like Helene, interviewed here on TV2:

Interviewer: A lot of people are of the opinion that the Quran and Islam is oppressing women. ... *Helene*: No. ... As a Muslim woman I’m very independent. ... I’ve not felt oppressed. On the contrary, I don’t feel oppressed at all, because God has a plan with my life, there is a meaning behind me being here, which makes is so I feel welcome in this life. ... God is not oppressing me, but we as human beings can have a tendency to oppress each other.²¹ (W091)

20 Det Islamiske Trossamfund, “#Metoo—Kvindes frihed i Danmark,” *Wakf.com*, December 15, 2017, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.wakf.com/index.php/da/dit-mener/dit-blog/1662-metoo-kvindes-frihed-i-danmark>.

21 *Menneskebiblioteket*, “Konvertit,” hosted by John Rahbek, featuring Helene Larsen, aired on May 29, 2017, on TV2 Lorry, <https://www.tv2lorry.dk/menneskebiblioteket/menneskebi-blioteket-konvertit>.

Citing freedom and oppression in close proximity is not merely a media provocation; it also appears in Muslim circles and academic research. During my own fieldwork, Aaheda spoke of the popular idea among Arab family members, and Danish acquaintances, that some of her decisions, as a Muslim, were forced upon her:

It's very difficult to say that 'I have chosen to' (wear the hijab). I remember when ... we went to Lebanon and they didn't want to talk to me. ... They yelled at my mom and my father. ... So it's the *same* thoughts you have in some places in Middle East and in Denmark. They thought that my father and my mother *forced me to do it*. ... but I *thought* about it, that if I do it when they are in Denmark, then my teacher would think (she had been forced). ... I prepared for a long time. But ... if my father had said that '... you are 14, you have been adult for two or three years, you have to do it right now,' then I would *not* have done it. (C032)

Herbert and Hansen (2018, 17), writing about the ways ethnic Danish Muslims cope with negative responses to their Muslim identities, state that, when asked about self-definition, most female respondents contrast freedom and oppression, describing themselves as “both free—as opposed to oppressed—young women, and freed from contemporary sexism.” One woman's response to negative experiences is focused around an assertion of continuity, aiming to show that “she is still the same free and modern young woman—Muslim or not, veil or not—as she was prior to reversion—only better: more determined, harder working” (Herbert and Hansen 2018, 14). Respondents stated that the veil made them feel “freed” from objectification and sexist invitation, seeing themselves as more respected after the reversion. Studies like this attest both to the widespread tendency to counteract the oppression narrative with one of liberation, and to the difficulty of breaking free from this framing. Converts are perhaps especially privileged in this respect, being “uniquely intermediary,” acting as “bridge-builders between communities” (Sealy 2017, 206). Moreover, the moderate/progressive Muslim voice can be seen as short-circuiting the polarized public debate.

1.3 “*Nydansk kvindekamp*”

In her seminal work *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Abu-Lughod (2013, 17) condemns the “sensationalized stories of oppression that capture media attention,” contributing to the widespread view that the situation of “the Muslim women” is dire. This assessment is based on the “stubborn conviction that women's rights should be defined by the values of choice and freedom,” and

that these are compromised in Muslim communities. As Abu-Lughod (2013, 18) argues, “no book about women in the Muslim world can avoid confronting the question of how to think about choice and what it means to assert freedom as the ultimate value,” given the terms in which Muslim women’s lives are represented in the West. This leads her to focus on the much-discussed symbol, just like the media she critiques: “Can dress symbolize freedom or constraint? How can we distinguish dress that is freely chosen from that which is worn out of habit, social pressure, or fashion?”

The debate was already formulated by Azizah Al-Hibri (in Okin 1999, 46) decades ago: “Why is it oppressive to wear a head scarf but liberating to wear a miniskirt?” The crux of the explanation “lies in the assumptions each side makes about the women involved and their ability to make choices.” If veiling is more often than not a choice, then it would seem a legitimate exercise of autonomy, an argument Danish Muslim women have made on many occasions. Leila Ahmed (2011) even speaks of a “quiet revolution” in relation to the veil’s late resurgence, arguing that religious attire like the burqa can foster autonomy and liberate women. Besides being an expression of piety, Ahmed (1992, 223) sees veiling as an empowering practice, expressing “an affirmation of ethical and social customs.” By adopting Islamic dress, argues Ahmed (1992, 224), women carve out a legitimate public space for themselves, redefined to accommodate their lifestyle. “The adoption of the dress does not declare women’s place to be in the home but, on the contrary, legitimizes their presence outside it.” The entry of Muslim women into public universities, professions, and other spaces indicates that the acceptance of the veil cannot be reduced to a retreat from the affirmations of female autonomy advanced by the previous generation. On the contrary, the two are interconnected.

My approach, again, involves zooming out to the level of discourse. Why is it oppressive or liberating to wear something? What is interesting in the whole ordeal is not so much the ‘veil’ as symbol of empowerment/oppression, but the web of meaning that informs it. One can equally conceive of the veil as oppressing and empowering, depending on the discursive relations giving it significance. The crux of the explanation, then, lies not so much in “the assumptions each side makes about the women involved and their ability to make choices,” but in assumptions about choice and freedom as such. Debaters suppose the terms ‘oppression’ and ‘freedom’ register the same way in wildly different discourses. The point of having a master-signifier like ‘Islam,’ retroactively attributing meaning to empty signifiers, is precisely to assign them a discourse-specific significance. Those who partake in the debate are engaged in an ideological conflict: the winner determines the meaning of the symbol.

Fernando (2014, 148–149) critiques sociologists of French Islam who, in their effort to counteract the majority-perception of the veil as a symbol of women's submission to patriarchal authority, have tried to “normalize the veil, portraying Muslim women as modern, even quasi-feminist subjects.” In so doing, according to Fernando, these scholars reproduce “the same analytical schema as secularist critics of the veil: choice opposes constraint, and autonomy emerges in resistance to or in the absence of normative authority.” This relates to the point I have repeated throughout this study: while it is true that many statements by Muslim women testify to their appreciation of human agency as a certain ability to author one's own life, they also prioritize a cultivated surrender to Allah's Will through normative practices, including veiling. In this sense, one could argue that contraposing personal autonomy to social-religious authority (and internal choice to external constraint) ends up doing Muslim women a political disservice.

Just like the display of ‘condensation’ explored in the introduction, framing the headscarf as a voluntary expression of religious belonging might lead us to see Muslim women as ‘normal’ modern religious subjects. However, it also restricts their ability to articulate what it means to wear the veil in religious terms. The idea that one loses the ability to think critically once one submits to certain beliefs and practices—abdicating the autonomy crucial to the sovereign subject at the basis of secular democracy—involves a series of dubious oppositions. Fernando (2014, 175) mentions, for instance, some oppositions central to secular ideology: “emancipation and discipline, freedom and authority, ... individuality and the norm.” Dichotomies such as oppression-emancipation are indicative of self-narratives rather than fundamental distinctions. While doing a great job at depicting the ‘unsettling of the Republic,’ Fernando does not go all the way, because she ignores similar dichotomies in Islamic ideology. Still, her point is to illustrate that, “by disturbing the viability of a strict distinction between normative authority and personal autonomy, practicing Muslim French women reveal the intensely intertwined relationship between discipline and freedom that has been crucial to the secular-republican project” (Fernando 2014, 180). We can identify a similar movement in Denmark: the *nydansk kvindekamp*, ‘new-Danish’ (i.e., with an ethnic background other than Danish) women struggle.

Safia Aoude, a self-described Muslim feminist, considers the biggest problem for Muslim women in Denmark to be that “we are not taken seriously as individuals, but indiscriminately judged by the women's movement as ethnic wretches (*stakler*) in a Muslim cage.” For Aoude, “Islamic feminism as a concept is simply not accepted by the Danish women's movement, and, as a practicing Muslim woman, one is caught in a spiral (*skrue*) of prejudices about one's reli-

gion.” This calls for an active stance: “we should not be fooled by either cultural tyranny, obscure religious fundamentalism or political secularization efforts” (N155).²² This assessment typifies a dissatisfaction with the state of feminism in Denmark, due especially to its ‘ultrasecular’ history. To Aoude, and other women fighting the ‘*nydansk kvindekamp*,’ there is a need to overcome ‘forced secularism’ (*tvangssekularisering*) in the movement and make space for ‘believing feminists,’ following similar trends in Euro-America (see e.g., L. Ahmed 1992; 2011; Abu-Lughod 2002; 1998; M. Khan 2019).

Those active in this movement (e.g., Sara Omar, Sherin Khankan, Khaterah Parwani, Geeti Amiri, Natasha Al-Hariri, Halime Oguz) include both practicing and non-practicing Muslims; their fight is primarily against social control and for the right of young minority women to live their own lives between two cultures. Recently, the latter four joined forces to bring about a Muslim sexual revolution. Al-Hariri states: “the minority needs all of us. There is a need for someone who says: I want to fuck 100 men, and you should not judge me. While another does away with the illusion that just because one wears a scarf, one is a good and virtuous Muslim” (N094).²³ The message is that there is nothing defiant or disdainful about taking religion as a means of female self-development for society at large. There are attempts to latch onto similar Christian women’s struggles for public expression of faith, but with a more vocal demand to equalize religious and secular feminism. At the same time, there is a clear emancipatory move away from conservative and patriarchal structures in Muslim communities.

Some Danish Muslim feminists argue that Islamic history is full of female role-models (see Petersen 2016; 2018; 2019). Besides pointing at these models—which include mystics such as Rabia of Basra (d. 801) or Muhammad’s own wives Khadija (d. 619) and Aisha (d. 678)—the main weapon in the Muslim women’s struggle are the scriptures themselves, said to contain all the elements of female emancipation. This point leads some to distinguish between Islamic views on gender, and ‘feminism’ as a tradition/signifier. Zahra, a young and well-read Muslim woman, states:

It becomes clear that Muslim women have been victims of oppression in the name of Islam for generations, when women themselves reproduce the thought that women can’t possess the same authority as men. The

22 Safia Aoude, “Kvindernes kampdag: Muslimske kvinder savner rollemodeller i Danmark,” *Kristeligt Dagblad*, March 8, 2011.

23 Sandra Brovall, “Nu står de nydanske feminister sammen: Fælles fuckfinger til jomfruinder og ideen om den pæne muslimske pige,” *Politiken*, October 9, 2017.

Prophet (peace be upon him and his family) beautified our status, and to ask for that is not feminism. It's Islam!²⁴ (F046)

The post concerns a Muslim wedding, and the debate among Danish Muslims surrounding the rights of women to perform these kinds of rituals. On another occasion, perhaps hinting at Khankan's project, Zahra tells me that "whenever women lead other women in prayer, or work as imams, it's viewed as a feminist project, but ... Islamic law always said that both women and men can wed others" (C057). The feminist project does not add anything new to the scriptures, which give women their rightful, elevated status. Things falter, the argument goes, in the consistent historical and cultural integration of these values, the widespread "call to contextualize Islam." For Zahra, it is not just that there are feminist projects in Islam (rather than Islamic views in feminism), it is their categorization as 'feminist' projects. It is not just "Western Muslim women without hijab" who fight for human equality across genders. Some "traditional male scholars from Middle Eastern countries" have similar concerns (C057).

Freedom, in many of these statements, functions as an exhortation for women to find 'space' or take their rightful 'place' within Islam, while discerning between the oppression of the patriarchy and Divine command. Danish-Kurdish author Sara Omar said of her debut semi-autobiographical novel *Dødevaskeren*: "My book is a cry for freedom." Omar repeatedly expressed her desire to reform Islam, even at the cost of her own life: "Women in Islam should have a place, which we don't have today. Young girls should have a place. And it is us women that have to take this place. We cannot ask men to give us our freedom, we should understand that freedom is our right" (N120).²⁵ These metaphors of space illustrate how emancipation from authority can be a matter of distancing oneself from something close, such as controlling families and communities, but also personal negative habits and social conditioning.

Another element feeding the discussion on Muslim women's struggles are the frequent comparisons with Muslim-majority countries, places of provenance, or experiences abroad in general. Aadila, having lived both in Egypt and the United States, observes that each Muslim community has its own customs vis-à-vis intersexual relationships: "It depends on the families, but (in the US) it's still more liberal than even in Egypt or in Denmark. I think in Denmark might be even more conservative than in Egypt." Aadila's experience abroad

24 Zahra [pseud.], personal communication, August 2018.

25 Gudrun Marie Schmidt, "Forsidehenviisning: Min bog er et råb om frihed," *Politiken*, November 2017, 30.

made her aware of how strict Danish Muslims can be respecting the segregation of sexes and ethnic belonging. “In Egypt it’s fine to have friendships and stuff like that, but still it’s a bit limited. ... It’s not nice for a girl to go out alone with a male friend” (C024). When asked about the reasons, Aadila brings up diverging opinions in Islamic law:

Some say ‘you cannot be alone in one place together with a closed door.’ ... But others are more open minded. ... It’s a big grey area, like, how people interpret that. And also the type of *fatwa*, ... or which kind of imam they follow, his *fatwa*. ... The sources of *fatwa* here (in DK) are sometimes completely different from in Egypt, where there is some moderate opinions. But here ... who’s (deciding on the issue) might not be specialized, or studied, it’s just a kind of ... experience, or he might have good language skills to say *fatwa* or prayers and eventually he ... became the one responsible Not everyone here is really qualified. (C024)

Aadila is skeptical of Danish imams claiming authority—pronouncing upon issues they have not thoroughly investigated. Because of her fluent Arabic, she is used to finding guidance in highly qualified sources, and shuns “do-it-yourself,” uneducated religious leaders. Besides association with feminism, critique of its secular manifestations, invoking the authority of historical exemplars, emphasizing certain parts of the scriptures, and leveraging knowledge of Islamic law, this is a common emancipatory move: discerning between religious authorities, and religious logic/argumentation. As in Aadila’s case, developing this ability requires exposure to different environments and leaders, which is precisely what the diversity of the Danish Muslim community allows.

1.4 *By Whom Am I Ruled?*

In a cartoon circulating on Danish Muslim media (hailing from the French blog *Muslim’ Show*), a character in Islamic religious attire listens patiently to two men. The first exclaims: “liberate Palestine first!” Then the second rebukes: “Well I say liberate Iraq first!” Finally the Muslim character intercedes, calmly pointing his finger up while the others tremble with tension: “and I say: let us liberate ... ourselves.” The last panel in the cartoon reveals that the three characters are chained to giant steel balls with the text “*dunya*,” i.e. the material world (W083).²⁶ The point is that one should prioritize the health of one’s

26 Muslim Show Danish, “Muslim’ Show—Befri ...” *Facebook* (social media), October 2, 2014, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/MuslimShowDk/photos/a.833318260>

soul, freeing oneself from the worldly attachments that breed all problems. To someone not particularly preoccupied with spiritual-ethical concerns, the twist ending might prove uncanny, since it eludes what the first two characters were talking about. However, the last panel does not leave room for alternative interpretations (e.g., the characters as merely confused by the interjection): all are visibly chained to heavy iron balls, restricting their freedom, limiting their movements.

It is worth noting the many references to freedom/liberation from worldly powers such as desire, addiction, slavery, pleasure, tradition, concern, secularization, etc. This list ends roughly where ‘that which pleases Allah’ begins, involving a tangential discourse on Allah’s pleasure/satisfaction (*marḍāti allahi*). Yet at the basis lies a quite commonsensical understanding of what it means to be ‘free.’ Mamoon puts it like this:

(In Islam) everyone is free to believe, so there is no compulsion in our religion. ... But to make it deeper: a *free* man ... somebody who is an alcoholic is not free, somebody who is addicted to women, ... dependent on others, ... addicted to money, he’s not free. He thinks he’s free. ‘I live in free country! I should do whatever I want!’ ... Yeah, right, exactly. (C041)

This fragment illustrates the coupling of freedom with dependence/addiction as an entry point for a narrative of spiritual emancipation. Rhetorically, Mamoon elicits belief by association with something his interlocutors have previously experienced and know. Likewise, the statement “let us liberate ourselves” makes sense precisely because of the ‘political’ prelude. The steel balls are tacitly present in the background: the (still) silent religious ideology.

In many of the previous statements, freedom figures as a variant of Isaiah Berlin’s ([1996] 2002, 325) negative liberty, “the absence of obstacles which block human action,” the “negative goal” of “warding off interference” sacred to classical liberal thinkers like John Stuart Mill. Berlin’s ([1958] 2002, 177) intent in his celebrated 1958 essay *Two Concepts of Liberty* was to disentangle a fundamentally flawed conflation: “The answer to the question ‘Who governs me?’ is logically distinct from the question ‘How far does government interfere with me?’ It is in this difference that the great contrast between the two concepts

034866/849279631772062/. See also *Muslim’ Show* at <https://themuslimshow.tumblr.com/> and www.muslim-show.com (accessed August 1, 2019).



FIGURE 4 A short cartoon named “befri ...” (liberate ...) originally appearing on the international blog *Muslim' Show* (www.themuslimshow.tumblr.com), translated and spread on Danish social media by *Muslim Show Danish*
REPRODUCED FROM WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/MUSLIMSHOWDK

of negative and positive liberty, in the end, consists.” For Berlin ([1996] 2002, 325), the obstacles referred to by negative conceptions of freedom are rarely biological or physical—negative liberty rather depends on the degree to which one is “free to go down this or that path without being prevented from doing so by manmade institutions or disciplines, or by the activities of specific human beings.” Berlin’s ([1996] 2002, 326) negative liberty is not simply a matter of freedom to do what one likes, but concerns the availability of a “number of paths down which a man can walk, whether or not he chooses to do so.”

The positive sense of liberty comes to light by answering a different question: not “what am I free to do or be?” but “by whom am I ruled?” or “who is to say what I am, and what I am not, to be or do?” (Berlin [1958] 2002, 177). The desire ‘to be governed by oneself,’ or at least to participate in the process of controlling one’s life, is, for Berlin, distinct from (and perhaps historically antecedent to) the wish for a free zone of action. It is this ‘positive conception of liberty; freedom ‘to’ rather than freedom ‘from,’ which the adherents of the ‘negative’ notion “represent as being, at times, no better than a specious disguise for brutal tyranny” (Berlin [1958] 2002, 178).

These politico-philosophical reflections on freedom allow for a quite different usage. What if we were to distinguish between a negative freedom ‘from’ the attachments, rules, and troubles that we (as humans) continuously generate, and a positive freedom ‘to’ let oneself be ruled by the ultimate Authority? The parallel with Berlin’s celebrated nuance becomes particularly interesting when we consider that the act of prayer, and moment of subjection, effectively turn freedom *from* manmade obstacles and perdition into the positive freedom *to* walk the Straight Path of Islam. We can spin the questions Berlin ([1996] 2002, 326) associates with this second sense of freedom into religiously meaningful ones: “Who determines my actions, my life? Do I do so, freely, in whatever way I choose? ... In what sense am I master of my fate?” The statements in the previous chapters provide the answers—Allah plans and owns the individual’s life and fate; agency ought to be understood in relation to one’s subordination.

Berlin describes how negative and positive liberty can be perverted, either by economic laissez-faire, or despotic control. Discursively, ‘quilted’ with ‘Islam,’ these extremes acquire a quite different meaning: ideally, prayer completely liberates the faithful from world and self, while, at the same time, re-asserting the power of the ultimate Authority, opening freedom to express one’s ‘true nature.’ If we re-read Berlin’s ([1996] 2002, 327) comments through the lens of the Islamic ideology, they do not seem so alarming: “the great perversion which the positive notion of liberty has been liable to: whether the tyranny issues from ... the masters of an authoritarian Church or class or State, it seeks for the imprisoned, ‘real’ self within men, and ‘liberates’ it, so that this self can attain to the level of those who give the orders.” If Allah is the ‘Controller,’ the so-called ‘perversion’ of positive liberty is a cherished goal, an Islamic form of spiritual salvation/liberation. This is the subject of the next section.

2 Liberation through Authority

What does it mean to take freedom as an ethical goal? I mentioned that Foucault ([1984] 1990) famously identified freedom through self-mastery as the *telos* of ancient Greek ethics. The exercise of self-mastery, through restraint of the pleasure-instinct, was not problematic because of a hope to preserve/regain an original innocence; nor because it sought to maintain a state of purity. Rather the problem stemmed from the fact that the extent to which one could be called ‘free’ affected one’s right to rule. The important difference is that Muslim statements about being ‘free from worldly authority’ and being ‘slave to desire’ are regulated by the imperative to reserve one’s servitude for Allah. The contrast with Foucault’s case is instructive: ethical work and self-mastery are still a means to achieve freedom from worldly/sensual authority, but this process is merely a step toward ‘real freedom’ resulting from complete surrender to the *ultimate* Authority.

Tracing the trajectory of ethical action to uncover commitment to a future self does not mean sitting around and waiting for the vision to be realized. Statements about this cherished anticipation occur in the present, concomitant with practices of self-fashioning and lamentations of inadequacy. Freedom plays a key role because it figures as both the capacity to walk the spiritual path, an experience along the way, and an ideal, future destination. I have mentioned that Muslim asceticism involves establishing simultaneous control, and relinquishment of, will/desire (see 4.2 and 5.2), but this ‘battle for/of the self’ also has many ‘soothing’ sides, for example Lutfi’s characterization of prayer as a “breath from daily life” (see 4.1). These moments of relief/liberation are encouragements on the road to something more durable: abiding emancipation from social conditioning, enabling a return to the safety of the Straight Path, and ‘true (spiritual) freedom.’

In short, statements on “real freedom” found in Danish Muslim-talk come in three forms: statements conveying a sense of freedom as emancipation from authority, the continuous ethical work already described in the previous chapter (freedom as a conscious practice), and the freedom/liberation *through* Allah’s Authority which the initial emancipation made possible. In this section I will discuss this third form.

2.1 “Hasten to Success!”

During the *adhan* (call to prayer), the *muezzin* recites some lines very familiar to Muslims worldwide: *Ḥayya ‘alā ṣ-salat!* (Hasten to prayer!) *Ḥayya ‘alā l-falāḥ!* (Hasten to salvation/success!). The term *falāḥ* (*fā lām ḥā*) has a range of connotations, including success, winning, welfare, prosperity, achieving goals,

passing a test, deliverance. Those who are ‘certain in faith’ and receive ‘guidance’ are the ‘the successful ones’ (*al-mufliḥūna*).²⁷

While *falāḥ* usually refers to the success of human beings, it is not used for the Divine act of deliverance, nor salvation/deliverance per se. In the few Quranic passages referring to this separate phenomenon we find the verb *najjā* (*nūn jīm wāw*), usually meaning to save, escape, deliver (see Q39:61). Authoritative interpretations render ‘*najjā*’ as Allah’s act of saving/delivering. The root occurs only once as the noun *najāt*, which is translated as either ‘salvation’ or ‘deliverance’ (Q40:41). From this we can surmise a couple of distinctions between *falāḥ*, the human achievement of prosperity, success through worship-subjection; *al-mufliḥūna*, denoting those who were/are predicted to be successful in attaining some kind of salvation; *najāt*, the salvation/deliverance in the hereafter promised by Allah through His Prophet; and *najjā*, the Divine act of saving/delivering.

Danish Muslim-talk on *falāḥ* is quite inconsistent. It comes up primarily as a reminder for all Muslims to not focus on worldly rewards. It does not seem coincidental that ‘hasten to success’ comes after the formula ‘hasten to prayer.’ This it is meant to shift the attention of the faithful toward the spiritual success attainable in the hereafter, following many Quranic verses that contrast life on earth with an afterlife promising true happiness (see Q62:9–11, 93:4–8). So the notion of success acquired in the afterlife through proper use of freedom of the will is well-anchored in the scriptures. That said, many Danish-Muslim statements also point to a kind of immanent spiritual success, attained in this life.

One often finds an undefined ambition, straddling the mystical state of ‘being found’ and the spiritual prosperity awaiting the faithful beyond Judgment Day. It involves the idea of good behavior/mindset as an immediate, self-fulfilling reward. Some speak of a spiritual ‘maturity’ paired with ‘right intent’ as an end in itself. Khankan, for instance, dedicates her “Manifesto” to the one “who is aware of the motives behind actions ... who knows, that the motive that creates the character of your actions.” The imamah elaborates with a self-development narrative:

That which motivates our actions is not the anticipation of heaven or the fear of Hell, but purely our devotion to our Creator. Love, without any hint of selfishness or calculation. Our path allows for the unfolding of an

²⁷ See 2:4–5; 5:100. A similar root forms the noun *ḥawz*, translated as ‘success,’ ‘triumph,’ ‘attainment,’ ‘achievement.’ See 9:20; 23:111; 24:52; 59:20.

enormous spiritual potential and leads to the development of the self. Our path sets us free as human beings. Humility, inner purity and gratitude are faithful pillars of support as we walk the path of the heart. This is a forum for you, who wishes to awaken before you die.²⁸ (W008)

Undoubtedly, as in the case of Hanne, ‘fear’ functions as one of the cardinal signifiers and sentiments maintaining Allah as terrible Reckoner (*al-Ḥasīb*), Harmer (*aḍ-Ḍāru*), and Absolute Vanquisher (*al-Qahhār*).²⁹ At the same time, a wide range of Attributes work to ‘soften’ and balance this image, such as the Merciful (*ar-Raḥīm*), (Giver of) Peace (*as-Salām*), the Ever-Forgiving (*al-Ghafūr*, *al-ʿAfīw*).³⁰ It is telling that *taqwā*, the key term for being pious/God-conscious/righteous, comes from the verb *ittaqa* meaning ‘fearing’ or ‘avoiding.’ The faithful are commanded to fear Allah (*ittaqullah*) over and over (Q49:10). From one angle, the ‘fear of God’ common to Abrahamic religions has to do with the dread of divine judgment and hellfire; it is by fearing Allah’s punishment that one obtains *taqwā*. This can lead to real suffering, such as in Naveed Baig’s (2012, 224) case of a Danish Muslim woman who ended up hospitalized with a clinical depression in connection with fear of Divine punishment (D064).³¹

Khankan downplays these associations. Resembling the widespread spiritual imperative to ‘die before you die,’ the imamah’s words propose a worldly ethical goal, a reachable destination. She does so though a precise chain of charged terms, linking action to motivation; motivation to devotion; devotion to love and unselfishness; spiritual potential to development; development to freedom; and all these to humility, purity, gratitude, etc. Things are different when it comes to *najāt* (as salvation/deliverance), which, for the general Sunni tradition, and most of my Danish interlocutors, is promised by Allah and achieved in the hereafter by those submitted His Will (Q2:130–132).

Islamic soteriology revolves around repentance and atonement, but all are responsible for their own actions, not those of their ancestors (including the

28 Sherin Khankan, “Forum for Kritiske Muslimer: Et muslimsk manifest,” *Kritiskemuslimer.dk*, October 12, 2014, accessed August 1, 2019, http://www.kritiskemuslimer.dk/?page_id=2.

29 Reckoner: 33:39; 4:6; 4:86. Harmer: 6:17. Vanquisher: 12:39; 13:16; 14:48; 38:65; 39:4; 40:16.

30 Merciful: 2:37; 2:128; 2:160; 2:199 2:226; 3:31; 6:145; 8:70; 9:104; etc. (Giver of) Peace: 59:23. Ever-Forgiving: 4:99; 2:173; 4:43; 4:99; 4:149; 8:69; 16:110; 22:60; 41:32; 58:2; etc.

31 Naveed Baig, “Counseling in the Health Service,” in *Islam in Denmark: The Challenge of Diversity*, ed. Jørgen Schøler Nielsen (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012), page 224.

original sin committed by *Ādam*/Adam and *Hawwā'*/Eve). This obviates rituals such as the Christian 'baptismal regeneration,' and emphasizes constant repentance to Allah, as well as resistance to *Shayṭān*'s whispers. Muhammad himself said: "I ask for forgiveness from Allah and turn to Him in repentance more than seventy times a day".³² The need to *continuously* repent and correct one's mistakes leads to a heightened preoccupation with human volition and its relation to Allah's Will, Decree, Destiny (see 2.2 and 3.1). Eventually, this cycle must end; humans will be called to account for their choices on Judgment Day, leading to the distribution of souls either to *Jannah* or *Jahannam*.

My interlocutors often told me that, traditionally, while there are several ways to demerit Paradise (e.g., dying/disbelieving in Allah or in Islam), a Muslim can never be certain of achieving a place in the Garden of Eden until she sets foot in it. Moreover, a person's commitment to Islam must be actual at the hour of death, and consistent with Muhammad's message (Q3:85).³³ This seems to leave Muslims in a state of insecurity, something mosquegoers are reminded of weekly in cautionary sermons: "don't neglect your soul," "don't lower your guard," "you're not safe yet!" On the other hand, piety and contentment are there for the taking.

In earlier chapters, I have mentioned the 'pure' primordial human nature (*fiṭrah*) and the privileged status of human beings, created with the potential for spiritual elevation (3.3). Primordial nature bestows upon humanity the capacity to actualize/develop their 'divine traits' and reach a higher spiritual status. This leads to statements involving freedom as a return to safety. True freedom, here, is thus a returning to the safety and purity of one's primordial nature, the state achieved by the Prophet. William Chittick (2012, 201) describes Ibn Arabi's writing about this ultimate freedom as "the Muhammadan station" and "the station of no station." Achieving the fullness of human possibility, to Ibn Arabi, involves "recovering the state of non-determination and returning to the freedom of the All-merciful Breath, which underlies every articulation in the universe." This freedom amounts to *wujūd* (existence, being), which in the Sufi tradition means 'being found' by Allah, the final stage of *fanā'* (the annihilation of the self).

In one sense, Sufi discourse is reminiscent of a notion present in many spiritual traditions, wherein the 'primordial self' is portrayed as an open, fluid, state

32 Sahih al-Bukhari 6307 (vol. 8, book 75, hadith 319).

33 Some have argued the Quran regards Jews and Christians among the potentially 'saved' (see 2:62; 5:69), but the most common view is that this counts for the Abrahamic religions as they were before Islam, uncorrupted by later alterations (such as the doctrine of the Trinity).

of 'pure potential,' which is congealed by overdetermined social/environmental circumstances. Clearly, the medieval mystic goes way beyond what most Danish Muslims dare to think of, but he still evokes a familiar connotation of freedom, involving recovery, return, reversion. What matters is not how many have achieved this 'station,' but that it is part of Danish Muslims' interpretative repertoire. The idea of a state of 'true freedom,' that involves turning back rather than moving forward, a repenting-atoning rather than careless-enjoying, seems to have a great impact on Muslim-talk. Most importantly, it is a way of talking that many potential 'reverts' can relate to, and that thus creates 'entry-points' in Muslim discourse. Someone who dabbled in New Age spirituality, and then comes in contact with a Sufi notion of 'true freedom,' of 'being found,' and 'returning home,' might feel an attraction to the tradition that the blunt imperative to submit would not effectuate.

Why is this principle of 'restoration' such a pervasive aspect of Muslim soteriological talk and articulations of freedom/liberation? The prominent place given to human volition, on the one hand, and Divine Decree/Destiny plus the interpellation of humans as always-already Muslim, on the other, creates a situation where the soteriological resolution must undo the former while affirming of the latter. It is precisely because of their imperfect and, at times, destructive volition that human beings need to 'correct' their wrong actions and return to a place where each and every choice is consciously in line with Allah's Will and Plan.

The theme of submission is inextricably linked to the basic ability to choose salvation. One of the most important Muslim holidays, the *Īd al-ʿaḏḩā* (Festival of the Sacrifice), is a good illustration of this, celebrating *ʿIbrāḩīm*/Abraham's willingness to offer his son as an act of submission/obedience to Allah's command. The case of Abraham's sacrifice has been analyzed by many Western philosophers, most notably Søren Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling*. In the Christian reading, the story is perhaps primarily about Abraham's inner intention, and the parallel with the sacrifice of Jesus. In the Quranic version, it is Ishmael rather than Isaac who is to be sacrificed, and, crucially, he actually agrees to fulfill Allah's command, so that no actual 'binding' to the altar takes place (Q37:102–111). Both father and son willingly surrender, act this out with Ishmael's prostration, and this satisfies the Divine: "So when they had both submitted their wills (to Allah), and he had laid him prostrate on his forehead (for sacrifice), We called out to him 'O Abraham! Thou hast already fulfilled the vision!'—thus indeed do We reward those who do right" (Q37:103–105 YA).

When I propose to Mubin that submitting to the Will of Allah involves surrendering one's freedom and putting it in the hands of the sole trustworthy

Authority, he corrects me by saying that such an act of “sacrifice” is precisely the exercise of freedom: “You (don’t) sacrifice your freedom! ... You are free to obey or disobey. ... You use your freedom to sacrifice, but you can also use your freedom to not sacrifice” (C025). I have also mentioned Fadil making a similar point: “I am perfectly free in surrendering to God. Because I am fulfilling my destiny” (C015). This stance makes perfect sense in relation to the centrality of Abraham’s sacrifice as a Muslim festivity, and again demonstrates that piety is not linked to the nature of the sacrificed, but to the sacrificial ‘giving back’ to Allah of the will that was never really one’s own, to the surrendering of the illusion of personal autonomy. Piety, as Suhr (2019, 115) puts it, “becomes a matter of recognising and acknowledging one’s inevitable state of dependency, that one is already in the hands of the ‘sacred’; that there is no outside, no escape from the space and rulings of divine law.”

Both *falāḥ* and *najāt* follow ‘naturally’ in the sequence freedom-purpose-submission, but the latter is a long-term goal. It is one thing to achieve benefits, quite another to enjoy them forever (see Q2:82). While *najāt* involves the safety of Paradise, it also implies salvation *from* hellfire. As one popular educational booklet sates: “this life is our only chance to win Paradise and to escape from Hellfire, because if someone dies in disbelief, he will not have another chance to come back to this world to believe” (D005).³⁴ A point taken straight from the Quran (6:27). Both *falāḥ* and *najāt* are dimensions of the ‘real’ freedom or liberation Pedersen referred to in the speech mentioned in chapter two (W031), and they are both forms of freedom that come about through the Authority of Allah.

The notion of liberation through authority allows for many parallels with other spiritual and philosophical traditions. Suhr (2019, 159) opts to invoke Hegel’s (d. 1831) *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the notion of “self-consciousness” as “the freedom and peace of mind that can be experienced upon realizing that autonomous mastery is not possible.” Hegel, according to Suhr’s (2019, 160) reading, argues that “this special sense of freedom” is nothing but “as the peace enjoyed when the fatality of earthly life is accepted as one’s ultimate destiny,” a point also made by Frank Ruda (2016a) in his previously mentioned *Abolishing Freedom* (1.1). Stefania Pandolfo (2018, 206) makes a similar argument, but by drawing from al-Ghazali’s theology of deliverance (*najāt*), according to which liberation comes about through the “remembrance of death.” Death spoils transient pleasures, and dis-enthalls the self from the tyranny of

34 Ali Ibrahim Abu Harb Ibrahim, *En kort illustreret vejledning til forståelse af Islam*, translated by Marianne Havndrup and Mohamad Barakeh (Houston: Darussalam, 2006).

the worldly appetites. The point is that both Suhr and Pandolfo, in their studies on Islam and psychiatry, found it necessary to account for the sense of liberation many Muslims are keen to convey and deem characteristic of Islam. In my model, it is of no use to draw parallels with different times and traditions to substantiate a contemporary discourse, for I am sketching the internal coherence Danish Muslim-talk on freedom on its own. Yet it is clear that, together with the chain of equivalence constituted by Allah's names (2.1), the logic of transference at play in seeing oneself as always-already defined by the master signifier (2.3), and the interpellation of Muslims as subjects of Islamic ideology (3.3), freedom enjoyed through fatalistic resignation is a key ideological mechanism. Another way this manifests is in the need to balance out the emphasis on individual effort with the inscrutability of Allah's Mercy: *falāḥ* can never be the result of human dedication alone.

2.2 “We’re Going to Paradise Because of Allah’s Mercy”

In Danish Muslim-talk, the notion of Divine Guidance (*al-Hidāyah*) often connects mentions of purpose, success, peace, tranquility, happiness. Guidance is most often the result of the recognition/worship of, and cultivated relationship with, Allah. Introductory documentation often stresses what the potential convert can expect to achieve—the results and benefits of Divine Guidance, personal and interpersonal: “guidance enables us to live a successful and blessed life in all aspects. This includes personal actions such as prayer, as well as actions that benefit the entire community, including being good to one’s neighbors” (D026).³⁵

Tellingly, terms like ‘tranquility,’ ‘lasting happiness,’ and ‘inner peace’ are especially frequent in text/speech directed at a non-Muslim audience. When in-group communication is scrutinized, one is more likely to find terms such as ‘bliss,’ ‘rewards,’ ‘blessings,’ ‘success,’ ‘credits,’ ‘points’—all linked to Allah. Most originate in Arabic counterparts; for instance, rewards, credits, or points often refer to *ḥasanāt*. Here, ‘blessings’ refer to more than good fortune, extending to the oft-mentioned *baraka* (or *ni’mah*), blessing/grace flowing from sources such as: the Quran, the ahadith, Muhammad, and other prophets (essentially, all that is ‘close’ to Allah). In other words, Danish Muslims ‘translate’ religious jargon into common Danish/English terms when addressing a non-Muslim audience, but, by doing so, create a misleading impression of shared meaning.

35 Det Islamiske Trossamfund, *Hvad er formålet med livet?* (Islamicpamphlets.com). Brochure found in a mosque in Aarhus, January 2018.

In the Quran, *ḥasanāt* usually refers to merit or good deeds (Q11:114), the positive credits that Allah weighs up against an individual's negative credits (from bad deeds) on Judgment Day. In some Danish Muslim milieus, the term has become almost a reward-unit, employable for calculations. In a video posted on the Facebook group *Religionen Islam*, the description explains a commonly held idea:

The great scholars used to interrupt their teachings (During Ramadan), so that they could focus on just reciting the Quran. We get a reward for 10–700 good deeds—all depending on one's sincerity and intention. In the month of Ramadan, all rewards are doubled, so there are millions of rewards to earn if you read the entire Quran. ... If you read 20 pages every-day, you will have read the entire Quran by the end of the month. It's very simple. You can distribute it over the day—if you read 4 pages after each salat, you are already up to 20 pages. If you have a hard time reading Arabic, you can listen to a sheikh recite on an app.³⁶ (F028)

In the video, Mehmet, a Danish-Turkish man, lectures with an open Quran and a scientific calculator at hand, showing with a series of multiplications how much one could 'earn' by reading the Holy Book during Ramadan. The subtitles explain that "we get at least 5250 rewards per page," but since rewards are doubled one can "reach 367500 per page." Mehmet becomes more and more animated during his exposition "imagine if you read the entire Quran during Ramadan month! ... If you count everything up, *ya'nī*, it's many millions!" (F028).³⁷

The custom of calculating rewards is rooted in specific 'authentic' ahadith and Quranic passages. On the Day of Judgment, good and bad deeds are weighed against each other on a so-called 'scale of deeds' (*mīzān*, see Q21:47). The imagery of a weighing scale, with Allah as moral accountant, results in particular ways of speaking of reward, including dry calculations, but this reasoning is limited. Some admit that human beings can never know the number of *ḥasanāt* assigned for each good deed, but simultaneously stress that Allah keeps an account. Good deeds cancel out more bad/evil deeds (*sayyiāt*)

36 Religionen Islam, "Ramadan belønninger." *Facebook* (social media), May 14, 2018, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/ReligionenIslam/videos/1715131881888899/>.

37 Mehmet is calculating 35 letters for each line, and 15 lines for each page. So $35 \times 15 \times$ either 10 or 700 = between 5250 and 367500 rewards per page.



FIGURE 5
Homemade video titled “*Ramadan belønninger*” (Ramadan rewards). Created by a Danish Muslim, depicting a man calculating the extra *ḥasanāt* acquired through recitation of the Quran, posted on *Religionen Islam*’s Facebook page
REPRODUCED FROM WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/RELIGIONENISLAM

than vice versa, which eases the process of ‘achieving’ Paradise. The specificity in the calculation might be tied to a certain age group/milieu, but the notion of ‘earning rewards’ is common, at least in Aarhus (Donslund 2017; Renders 2018).

When, for the second time after Friday prayer, Kareem brings me to witness a burial, I ask why he never misses one. His reply is simple: rewards for good deeds. He elaborates by re-telling a common hadith, in which the Prophet asks his companions who had, that day, been to “*al-janāzah*,” had “visited a sick man,” or was fasting. Abu Bakr responded in the affirmative to each question, and the Prophet declared: “No man, who does all these good things in one day, will fail to go to Paradise.” Kareem concludes his story by stating that “our life is about tripping (traveling) to Paradise. One way or the other. And sometimes you cannot, because you have to eat shawarma” (C048). After relating his own version of this popular narration—and having a good laugh—Kareem feels he has exhausted the explanation. Like many others, he rarely seeks sophisticated theological arguments for his ethical principles: a solid reference is enough.

I ask what happens when somebody utters the *shahādah* just before dying, without having had the time to perform any good deeds. “When you say the *shahādah* all your bad deeds are canceled,” says Kareem, “the heaviest thing you have on your *vægt* (weighing scale) is the sentence *lā ʾilāha ʾillā Allah Muḥammadun rasūlu Allah.*” This reminds Kareem of another narration:

On the Day of Judgment, God asked a man who had done many good deeds: ‘would you want to go to Paradise with my Mercy, or with my Fairness?’ He said ‘I want to go to paradise with your Fairness.’ The man thought he had done a lot of good deeds, you know? ... So God said ‘Okay, ... on this side (of the scale) I will put just one *niʾmah*: the blessing of the eyes ...’ So the point is, the blessing of the ability to see is heavier than all his good deeds. ... At the end of the day, we’re going to Paradise not because we’ve done a lot of good deeds, but because of God’s Mercy. (C048)

Kareem here uses—curiously speaking in the past-tense—the Quranic term indicating a favor, blessing, good thing bestowed by Allah (*niʾmah*).³⁸ Similar ahadith and verses confirm Kareem’s view, almost as cautionary tales against paying too much attention to the calculation of reward. When it comes to ‘blessings,’ some use the term ‘baraka’ in the sense of a blessing received directly for a good effort. Lutfi: “If I get a good grade it’s because ... He give barakas, because I worked hard, ... He blessed me. If I get a bad grade, is because Allah has like, something other for me, something better, this was not for me” (C019).

Khankan goes a step further, expressively stating that one should not worship Allah for the sake of some reward. She does so citing a haunting passage from the revered mystic Rabia of Basra (d. 801): “O my Lord, if I worship Thee from fear of Hell, burn me in Hell, and if I worship Thee from hope of Paradise, exclude me thence, but if I worship Thee for Thine own sake then withhold not from me Thine Eternal Beauty” (Smith 2010, 30). To Khankan, this is an expression of the purest humility:

God must not be worshiped in the hope of obtaining a reward. ... Rabi’a al-Adawiyya handles paradoxes and deconstructs the most absolute of oppositions, that of Heaven and Hell, in order to bring about unification. ... Dogmatic believers too often claim to be on the right path while in fact

38 See 2:231; 3:103; 5:3; 8:53; 12:6; 14:34; 16:18; 16:53; 39:8; 48:2; 92:19; etc.

leading others astray. Rabi'a reminds us of one of the meanings of faith: we must strive not to love God out of self-interest ...; rather, we must believe in God absolutely out of a desire for Him.³⁹ (Do63)

Cautionary tales about pursuing behaviors or lines of thought that might pervert the religious tradition are embedded in the tradition itself, but also in the living discourse. The reason I use these three examples is to show the different levels on which the discussion on reward/deeds can take place. Mehmet speaks from deep within Islam, completely absorbed in the practical details of its regulations, with affective displays. Kareem values the idea of reward and applies it to his own life, but is reflexive and nuanced about its centrality. Rather than expressing excitement, he counteracts any attempt to overemphasize the topic. Khankan, ever the reformer, basically condemns the tendency to focus on personal gain; while elsewhere she pushes the boundaries of what is considered acceptable by officiating a same-sex marriage, here she pushes the general standards of (her understanding of) piety. The discussion on reward is instructive for understanding Muslim-talk on freedom because it contains the sense of surrender to Allah's Mercy, the drive to apply freedom of choice to spiritual ends, and the injunction to engage the will/desire in intentional goodness rather than performing the good as a sheer automatism.⁴⁰ Most of all, these statements make clear that ultimately 'liberation' or 'salvation' as in admittance to *Jannah* is a matter of Divine Mercy, and not a free will employed for good deeds. Although Mehmet can get excited about the rewards he can accumulate, and Kareem can rely on the narratives promising Paradise to the virtuous, ultimately they all admit that there is no liberation without Allah's Authority.

2.3 "I See His Reflection in the Universe"

In a way, the emotional state achieved through devotion and the right intention is a reward in itself. We are finally in a position to make sense of the 'ultimate,' 'real,' 'true' freedom Pedersen was referring to, the freedom acquired through submission to the highest Authority: "One can only find the ultimate freedom by prostrating before the Creator, by recognizing that it is only the Will of the

39 Sherin Khankan, *Women Are the Future of Islam: A Memoir of Hope* (London: Rider, 2018), page 214.

40 For most, action without intent might be instructive but not 'rewarding,' and uttering the *shahādah* is a necessary first step for individual redemption and the ability to earn *ḥasanāt* from ritual activities (Renders 2018).

Creator that will be realized in all circumstances, and that one's own will can only be realized if the Creator allows it. If one prostrates into the dust before one's Creator, one can liberate oneself" (S032). One of the ways this liberation is expressed in words is "the sense of freedom acquired through the contemplation of Allah's creation." This is a passage from a conversation with Mamoon:

This nature is beautiful, and complex, and *designed*. God actually, the Perfect, *he* made it perfect. We are destroying it. When you look at ... (the) Niagara Falls. When you look or go to the savanna, when you go to Brazil, and you see the nature, ... the sea, it is just a perfect place. *I am seeing God in that*. I am seeing this best design in that. That's what makes me more in touch with him. It's, at the same time, freeing you from human beings' products. ... It (the world) can't just (randomly) be beautiful, ... because when you see all this beauty you just see God. You *see Him* in there, in His reflection in the universe. That's a freedom. ... to *free your mind* from things.⁴¹ (C041)

While his comment contains the idea of freedom/liberation from worldly restraints discussed above, there is something else to it. It is through the recognition of Allah as Perfect Designer/Creator that Mamoon is able to experience the freedom associated with contemplation. This is a hard notion to convey, which is why the retired imam resorts again to something relatable, in this case the awe evoked by nature.

It might be worthwhile mentioning the link between *fiṭrah* and the notion of nature as the 'reflection of God,' since the term itself can be translated as human nature/design.⁴² While *fiṭrah* is often left untranslated, within a verse it can be rendered as: "... be devoted to the upright religion. It is harmonious with the nature (*fiṭrata*) which God has designed for people. The design of God cannot be altered ..." (Q30:30 MS). Just as the 'return to *fiṭrah*' (as one's primordial nature) can be construed as freedom and safety, the contemplation of nature as the pure, uncorrupted design of Allah can be seen as 'a freedom'—an experience of liberation. However, this experience requires submission to the

41 Mamoon echoes the sura *al-sajdah*: "(It is He) Who perfected everything which He created and began the creation of man from clay" (Q32:7 MS).

42 The *'ahl al-Fiṭrah* are those who lived in complete ignorance of revealed religion, but still according to the 'natural' religious instinct Allah instilled into human nature.

highest Authority and Creator of all natural beauty. To Mamoon and others, a non-Muslim might appreciate the sight of the Niagara Falls, but fail to see the Divine reflection, thereby missing its 'freeing' effect.

Mamoon's comment demonstrates a remarkable achievement of religious discourse: coupling sensory experience with spiritual sentiments. Elsewhere, I argued how anthropologists undergoing a sort of 'discursive conversion' might end up having semi-mystical experiences (Renders 2018). Discursive conversion involves acquiring the particular religious language of the speech community, involving the internalization of the 'language of faith' and its logic, affecting not only the quality of the conversation but eventually the ethnographer's conception and experience of the world. For instance, both Mikkel Rytter (2015) and Katherine Ewing (1994) report their dreams of saint-visitations during their work with Sufi communities. As Ewing (1994, 575; see Rytter 2015, 156) notes, this dream came only after a certain period of personal struggle with belief itself, and after the decision to "approach the whole encounter as a personal experience rather than as anthropological research." For those intensively engaging with Islam, and Muslims 'belonging' to the discursive formation, it seems the experiential aspect depends on the embodiment of knowledge, allowing for the attribution of religious significance to what had previously been deemed 'neutral.' This does not mean the experience is new, but that it has been given a name and place in a mechanism of sense-making, in a structure of plausibility.

The 'real freedom' Pedersen mentioned in chapter two is nothing less than the experience resulting from the embodiment of this spiritual knowledge, paired with the continuous practice of worship-subjection. It is the ability to see Allah where others see 'mere' natural beauty, the ability to see the world in "color" where others see shades of gray. Needless to say, it is something many Danish Muslims saw as my chief 'issue' as a researcher. This is a comment from a well-regarded imam, whom I asked for feedback on a chapter of my dissertation:

It's fun to see how one's words can be taken apart and put into research equations (*forskerligninger*), where they seem to be given a completely different weight than one intended. It is by no means problematic to me, merely entertaining. The world comes in two versions, just like a photo. It is available in both in black-and-white and color images. Two pictures of the same can be very different if there is one of each kind, but still you can clearly see what is in the picture. The difference is that one of them has an extra dimension. When one doesn't understand God, but considers the human relation with God as a scientific equation, we end up in the

black-and-white. I'm not writing this because I want to offend you (*støde dig*), or because I disagree with the way you conclude. It's just a simple observation (*konstatering*). (C056)

According to my interlocutors, 'real freedom' will always elude me, as long as I insist analyzing their statements without "recognizing" or "understanding" Allah; as long as I refuse to abandon the subject position that I occupied when talking and listening to them: the anthropologist. Only some of them seemed to accept that this was never my intention, and that it is precisely that positioning which allowed me to observe the matter from a viewpoint they gave up, forgot, or never conceived.

3 Iterative Choice

Muslim-talk on freedom in Denmark is versatile: it can move in many directions, adapting to the circumstances, adjusting its course. Freedom itself is clearly multivocal: it refers to distinct experiences and evokes a wide range of associations. Yet, as I hope to have shown in the previous chapters, there is a pattern to the statements uttered by Danish Muslims, at least in the second half of the 2010s, and there are a number of pathways in the discursive network that are particularly busy. I started with the concerned questioning (see 1.1), disruptive resistance (1.2), and subversive redefinition (1.3) of the established uses of freedom in the public domain, as well as the desirable subject positions that the Danish liberal discourse attempts to produce. These themes resurfaced in this chapter, in the general striving for emancipation from authority (see 5.1), allowing for the liberation and deliverance through Allah's Authority (5.2).

I do not wish to end on these notions 'liberation,' 'deliverance,' or 'safety,' because time and again my interlocutors emphasized that the process of cultivated relinquishing of the will to Allah is never really fulfilled, and 'real freedom' is not quite an abiding quality that can be achieved in a final manner. At one end of the spectrum, there is the daily confirmation of the *shahādah*, both in word during salat, and in deed with the *sujūd* (see 4.1). At the other end of the spectrum, we have the many stages of the mystic Sufi path, which I occasionally hinted at. I use 'iterative choice' to refer to exactly this continuous choice of committing to Allah's Decree, the repeated willing submission to the inescapable divine Destiny, the gradual backwards falling into Allah's *faḍl* (grace, favor). As I demonstrated by the statements on reward, this last notion is always present on the background, and one should keep in mind that, notwith-

standing all talk of human freedom, the success of this willing surrender and nearing to Allah is always dependent on His discretion.⁴³

In chapter three, I already outlined statements regarding willing submission, involving Allah's Will/Decree (see 3.1), the notion of servitude (3.2), and the interpellation of the individual as always-already Muslim (3.3). I concentrated on the choice and commitment to recognize oneself as Muslim, but have left out talk about the circularity of the activity. I also want to distinguish this 'iterative choice' from Foucault's ([1984] 1990, 284) conscious practice of freedom, outlined in the previous chapter (see 4.2). Moreover, while in its essence it might not be exclusive to Islam, I am dealing with how it is formulated in Muslim-talk in Denmark, with its respective associations and connotations.

To summarize, we can say choice and freedom allow for submission and worship, which, in turn, allow for salvation and following the path to Paradise. While the believer achieves success and reaps benefits along the way, this should not distract them from the ultimate goal. Freedom is not only present at the start of the journey, but also there in every act and reaffirmation of submission. In order to dig deeper into salvation as a repetitive and immanent process (rather than an unforeseeable outcome completely in the hands of Allah), I want to return to the idea of 'nearness' to Allah (see 4.1), and the need to keep oneself safe on the road to salvation.

3.1 *"The More You Submit, the Closer You Are"*

Lutfi spoke of how adversity improved his relationship with Allah (see 4). Rather than wallowing in self-pity, the Muslim subject is called to accept Allah's Will and trust that everything ultimately happens for her benefit. The young man had a hard time coping with his first heartbreak, but, thanks to prayer and his new attitude, the second time became an occasion for spiritual growth: "you practice prayers, and this gives you a beautiful connection with Allah, ... and the problem becomes less" (C019). The importance and benefits of this 'connection' makes perfect sense in light of the already discussed Divine act of 'attracting' the faithful (see 2.3), and in light of worship-subjection (4.1), but Lutfi also mentions that this connection requires maintenance. Basim puts it even more explicitly, giving a prominent place to the 'remembrance of Allah':

43 Q24:10 (YA): "If it were not for Allah's grace and mercy on you, and that Allah is Oft-Returning, full of Wisdom,—(Ye would be ruined indeed)." See 2:64; 12:38; 24:10; 24:38; 57:21; 62:4.

Prayer is the link between the person and God ..., you find your heart *linked* to God. And so you start to feel the beauty of this link. ... One kind of worship called 'dhikr,' where you have to remember God in *every single act* you're doing and you shouldn't forget Him, and your heart should be linked all the time, even if you're doing anything else. (C008)

The common theme of being drawn near/close to Allah is rooted in the characterization of the Creator as constantly attracting his volitional creatures (see 2.3 and 3.2). Two useful Quranic terms outlining this notion are *al-taqarrub* (to seek closeness, proximity) and the passive participle *al-muqarabīna* (those brought near). The metaphor of attraction seems an effective way to convey progressive submission: "... But prostrate and draw near [to Allah]" (Q96:19 S1). It also refers to an ultimate state of closeness to Allah (and the various layers/grades of *Jannah*).⁴⁴ This passage is from a *khutbah* by Abu Abbas:

Allah created the seven heavens, and chose the upper one as a settlement for the close ones and his angels, and allocated it near his Throne and inhabited it with chosen ones. And Allah preferred 'al-Firdaws' to all other heavens, and created it directly under his throne. And chose from the sons of Adam ... to be prophets. (S027)

The hierarchy and spacial organization in Paradise is no mere theological curiosity, but in some environments affects individual reasoning about reward. When I ask Kareem why one would keep accumulating *ḥasanāt* he is exasperated by my ignorance:

Allah, Allah, Allah! Because it's not just one Paradise! It's a lot of Paradises. You know, there are levels. ... In Paradise, it's like 99 stages, you know? So, the 99th is like, the best of the best. So, after all, I'm trying to get to level 99. (I suggest 'the penthouse') Yeah, yeah! (laughing) No, the 99th. Because the roof is the Throne of God. (C048)

Then Kareem tells me the story of a woman who approached the Prophet lamenting that "the men run away with all the *ḥasanāt*." As a woman, she could not earn rewards by, for example, "making jihad," and wanted an alternative. What could she do to achieve equivalent merit? Muhammad simply replied:

44 See 3:45; 4:172; 7:114; 56:88; 83:21; 83:28; 96:19; etc.

“Obey your husband.” As Kareem explains, semi-serious: “actually, that’s the big jihad (chuckling). If she obeys her man, her husband, *khalas*. She will go to Paradise. ... She goes to the 99th level, because she’s obeying her husband.” Then he mentions some activities that nullify sins, such as uttering the *shahādah* for the first time, or going on pilgrimage (hajj). The most interesting case in his list, especially given the previous discussion on gender, is the one about birth-giving: “when a woman gives birth, it deletes all her sins. And if the woman dies giving birth, she will go straight to the 99th level” (C048).

Both Abu Abbas and Kareem specify that the highest stage of Paradise—the Throne—is reserved for Allah. Centuries ago, al-Ghazali had already insisted that ‘seeking closeness,’ or ‘being drawn near to Allah,’ means proximity in quality, not quantity. He denounced the claims of those Sufi (Mansur Al-Hallaj and Bayazid Bastami) claiming to have reached ecstatic union with the Divine, with Al-Hallaj proclaiming the famous *shath* “I am the truth” (Massignon and Gardet 2012). Still, according to al-Ghazali, “the soul was created for this perfection and thirsts for it. There are infinite gradations of this perfection and thus of felicity, which will only truly be grasped after death, the separation of the soul from the body, and the resulting cessation of the appetites, sensory data, and imaginings” (Garden 2014, 43).

While to most Allah Himself is unreachable, many statements affirm his presence/proximity in daily life. In a previous chapter, I mentioned how Fadil speaks of ‘real’ happiness: “My happiness, as Muslim, is not dependent on whether I am rich or poor. ... My happiness is dependent on my relationship to God” (see 3.2). Therefore, Fadil concludes, “if I’m *near* Him, by reading the Quran, praying my prayers, and so on, I can have a happy life” (C015). Likewise, Nabil speaks of Divine intervention: “He has some kind of power over the daily life of humans, and in the big scheme of things, God is present and He’s near” (C037). Speaking of prayer, Sharif states that one is “closest to God” in the moment of prostration (see 4.1):

When you make *sujūd*, you are closest to *Allahu ta‘ālā*. It is because it is the way you show your complete submission to God. So as a Muslim, you should bow, and you know, ... you bow only to *Allahu ta‘ālā*, in Islam. And the more you submit to Allah’s Will, the closer you are to Allah. ... This is why we also say that if you have ... a special *du‘ā*, then it is good to do it while in *sujūd*. (C045)

This view is confirmed by Suhr’s (2019, 137) interlocutors in other Danish mosques, who see *sujūd* as “the situation in where the believer reaches the closest proximity to the divine—a moment of staring right into the unseen face of

God.” Submission, enacted through prostration, leads to closeness; and closeness, safety. Most statements involving *al-taqarrub* imply continuous activity on the believer’s part. Reciting the Quran, praying, prostrating, remembering, taking calamity as an opportunity; these are all are ways to find refuge in the safety of Allah’s proximity. Seeking this nearness is a movement of return—a reversion—because it is where the human soul originates: a primordial state of purity (see 2.3). While there is talk of an ultimate station, reaching the level in Paradise nearest the Throne, working towards this condition involves keeping as near as possible to Allah throughout life. The trick, in other words, is not to stray into the world and its temptations, but to consistently choose to repent and return to the safety of piety.

3.2 “Muslims Found Out They Are Nobody”

Just like freedom of religion/belief, the freedom of self-definition is subject to negotiation, which is further complicated by its entanglement with social and religious identities. It is everything but a stable nodal link in the chain of signification, which is exactly why it comes up so frequently—many Muslims, in a diversity of situations and life-stages, struggle, or have struggled, to give it a place (C013; C018; C032). To what extent am I free to define myself? What are the repercussions of my self-definitions? As a Danish Muslim youth organization argues in the description of one of their events, Muslims in the West are confronted, on a daily basis, with “opinions about how they should be Muslims” (E020).⁴⁵ Groups such as HuTS style themselves as paladins of an Islamic identity, shunning detrimental “Western freedom-ideals” (see 1.2). Members of the organization see it as their mission to “warn Muslims in the West about the constant treats against their Islamic identity” (D033).⁴⁶ Others have chosen a different approach, but in all cases self-definition is monitored/regulated.

I opened this chapter with Hanne’s seemingly inconsistent two-fold claim that “freedom is the freedom to *choose* who you are” and that “Muslims found out they’re nobody. *I am* nobody” (C038). Hanne’s comments make it sound as if the individual has, at any moment, the freedom to choose between innumerable options. At the same time, the agent must be aware of how each choice

45 Muslimsk Ungdom i Danmark, “Labelled Muslim—Konference 2015,” *Facebook* (social media), May 16, 2015, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/events/793980467348539>.

46 Hizb ut-Tahrir Skandinavien, *Statskontrol af muslimernes familieliv. Virkeligheden bag “bekæmpelse af social kontrol,”* June 1, 2014, https://www.hizb-ut-tahrir.dk/data/books/social_kontrol.dk.pdf.

affects the condition and ‘innocence’ of one’s soul. According to Hanne, one’s choices/actions impact the “spiritual world” because humans have “two bodies,” the material body and the soul. While she insists she “freely and willingly” chooses the things she does, she knows she will eventually be held accountable: “at the Day of Judgment, the Almighty Creator will not ask us *what* we have done, because He knows what we have done, He will ask *why*” (C038). Of course, Allah also knows the ‘why,’ but the point is personal recognition of, and confrontation with, some inner truth.

Several weeks after this conversation, speaking of his work at the Center for Danish Converts, Ali tells me the idea of self-definition is closely related to the experience of conversion: “The sense of freedom, the sense of liberation, the sense of choosing who you want to be, choosing who you are, that’s something that is highly valued. Maybe not always the particular word, but the sense of freedom, ... we talk about it a lot” (C052). Contrary to my ‘Muslim-born’ interlocutors, both Hanne (as convert) and Ali (as assisting converts) tellingly highlight the power of self-definition as a key dimension in one’s spiritual development.

Hanne’s and Ali’s use of ‘freely choosing’ can be confusing, because they assume a series of tacit presuppositions that give self-definition a distinct Muslim flavor. For one, they happen within the space of *fitrah*, the primordial inclination towards Allah (see 2.3). Ali’s converts have already framed their choice in terms of a ‘return’ to Islam (5.2). The freedom of “choosing who you are” is rather a freedom to choose who you always-already are/were: to affirm/accept one’s fate and ultimate destination (3.3). During the conversation, Hanne speaks of a gradual discovery of ‘who she really is’ rather than a choice between discrete alternatives. Taken alone, a statement such as Ali’s makes sense in many contexts, and to a diverse audience, but is easily misunderstood. When I relate his comment in a different Muslim environment, and suggest inserting the word ‘already’ in Ali’s formulation ‘choosing who you are,’ this yields an instant recognition: it is a step deeper into the religious discourse, a signifier socketing into an organized system, opening up the conversation for new articulations and the visibility of new relationships.

It appears that the idea of an ‘innocent’ and ‘natural’ self/soul regulates the ‘freedom to choose who you are’ quite rigidly. This becomes clear in casual remarks on public displays of ‘improper’ choices. For instance, during a living-room conversation, Mubin draws a surprising parallel between freedom of religion and sexual orientation. After having established that one is “free to choose” one’s religion and to “either believe or disbelieve” (with due reference to Q2:256), Mubin claims that the same counts for being homosexual: “If you don’t want to be homosexual you don’t have to be homosexual.” As if this were

not enough of an assertion, he argues for a private expression of the (supposedly wrong) choice: “you can do it ... in your private home, ok? But don’t go out and ruin the society with your thoughts about homosexuality and non-believing and things like that. ... freedom is a private freedom.” Allah does not force us to worship Him, states Mubin, “you can do whatever you want! Just do it in a closed box, ok?” (C025).⁴⁷ Mubin cannot deny the possibility of making different choices, but he can create associations within them (homosexuality as choice), labeling some as ‘ruinous.’ On social media it is easy to find similar statements in groups frequented by Danish Muslims. Maudud for instance connects homosexuality to freedom and democracy:

To ALL you Muslims who call for Democracy & Freedoms! Would you accept it if your children became homosexual? After all, it is a Democratic right that harmonizes perfectly with the idea of freedom (*frihedstanken*). If you can’t, then I think you’ve gone wrong when shouting slogans in the city without understanding the content! Sorry to say ...⁴⁸ (F034)

Self-definition, which at first glance might appear a matter of emancipation from authority, might, in Danish Muslim-talk, turn into one of liberation *through* Authority, but only if it involves a continuous renunciation of certain worldly identities. Not all Danish Muslims would agree with this particular case, but according to Mubin and Maudud one *can* and *should* renounce defining oneself as ‘homosexual’ and let oneself be defined by Islam. Being faced with Allah’s Judgment constitutes the self on a completely different level. As Hanne puts it, Allah “will not ask us what we have done, He will ask *why*.” The individual can choose who she wants to be, but is then held accountable by a power that penetrates any façade, any fleeting desire and worldly caprice. In other words, by imagining the ultimate judgment of their every intention, Muslims evoke the ‘truth’ about themselves, their highest spiritual form: a fully surrendered soul, emptied of worldly clutter.

47 Mubin’s comment on homosexuality is just an instance of the many heated discussions and grievances on Danish-Muslim public fora, pointing at a marked adverse preoccupation with sexual and gender norms (see Gezen 2014). A handful of public figures struggle to change these attitudes, most notably Michael Sinan Thomsen and Abdul Aziz Mahmood in the case of gay rights. Naveed Baig has also argued for a certain compatibility between homosexuality and Islam (see Jakob Sheikh, “Dansk imam går i brechen for homoseksuelle,” *Politiken*, September 4, 2013; Dorthe Lønstrup, “Abdel Aziz Mahmood: Alt for mange muslimske homoer føler sig som freaks,” *Politiken*, April 7, 2018).

48 Maudud [pseud.], post in closed Facebook group *Den Lige Vej* [pseud.], December 2015.

At times, zealous Danish Muslims accuse an abstracted member of the community who has ‘wrongly’ identified with talk of ‘confusion’ and ‘identity crises’ to be corrected with clear exclusions:

When can you know that you have an identity crisis? One of the symptoms is when you mix your real identity with other identities, so you have a contradictory identity. For example:—I’m a Christian and Muslim at the same time.—I am both a Muslim and a communist.—I am both a Danish and a Muslim.—I advocate democracy and freedom, but I believe in Islam, according to which it is only Allah and His laws that you must submit to. Such a person is confused, he doesn’t know who he is, and can’t put his identity together. He may see blue, but thinks it’s black ... Haqq (truth) is ONLY Islam and batil (falsehood) is EVERYTHING else. If you live by that rule, you are at least on the right path.⁴⁹ (F030)

Hamza, the author of the post, concludes with a seemingly straightforward verse: “Such is Allah, your real Cherisher and Sustainer: apart from truth, what (remains) but error? How then are ye turned away?” (Q10:32 YA). This is a quite extreme example of aggressive identity construction, and the post is not left unchallenged by a few other members of the group. Still, it is evidence for the existence, within the Muslim community, of antagonisms similar to those propagated by Muslim-skeptical politicians such as Liberal Alliance’s leader Pernille Vermund, who proclaimed that “Islam is in opposition to democracy and freedom” (F039).⁵⁰

Identity politics aside, the art of being ‘nobody’ constitutes an emancipation from authority through Authority, but tellingly involves an active choice to direct one’s submission: “he whom you think has authority over you is your God” (C038). The act of prostrating towards the *Kaaba* is a daily confirmation of this basic individual decision to put Allah at the center of one’s attention, to orient one’s life towards the only Authority worthy of submission, and empty oneself of worldly definitions. Submission to Allah is not a novelty, but an acknowledgment of what has always-already been so. Some might argue that submission to the world could imply emancipation from Allah, freeing the self to author its fate, but according to some of my interlocutors this is not possible.

49 Hamza [pseud.], post in closed Facebook group *Den Lige Vej* [pseud.], October 2018.

50 Pernille Vermund, “Islam er i opposition til demokrati og frihed,” *Facebook*, October 15, 2019, accessed August 1, 2019, https://www.facebook.com/permalink.php?story_fbid=10156785169982219&id=740127218.

It is rather a misperception: one merely fulfills the (in this case unfortunate) destiny set by Allah. According to this logic, liberation is not the last stage in the process, the final fulfillment of one's true role and place, but rather a continuous fulfillment, requiring a constant re-affirmation, in an uninterrupted closure/fixing of meaning.

3.3 *Aliberal Freedom?*

Can the Muslim notion of an iterative and willing submission outlined in this book be seen as evidence for the presence of an 'aliberal freedom' in Denmark? Calling it such would mean building a broken bridge between two distinct discourses, both suggesting and denying a relationship. Yet it is undeniable that liberal and Muslim-talk on freedom cannot simply be analyzed in isolation. In anthropology, the preoccupation with freedom has perhaps been projected on Islam without first ever completely disentangling from liberal thought and biases. I will briefly sketch this preoccupation, arguing that, in Denmark, we can see a gradual entwinement of the liberal and Muslim discourse on freedom. This entwinement results from a sustained mutual engagement, not a preexisting affinity.

Above all, anthropological engagement with the concept of freedom has been a cautionary tale *against* taking the notion as a universal human good. Luminaries in the field have traditionally been concerned with documenting the presence or absence of freedom/liberty in the cultures they investigate (Powdermaker 1939; Benedict 1942; Boas 1940; Malinowski 1947; Douglas 1986; Riesman 1974). Here, a liberal definition was often presumed as normative: "in primitive societies there are civil liberties, the crux of which is that they are guaranteed to all men without discrimination. Wherever these privileges and protections to which all members have an inalienable right are important privileges in the eyes of that tribe, people regard themselves, whatever their form of government, as free men enjoying the blessings of liberty" (Benedict 1942; cited in Hayek 2013, 59). Malinowski, for his part, was concerned with making a statement about the dangers of totalitarianism and the future of humanity: "it is not enough to establish the fact of primitive freedom; it is necessary to show that this early freedom played a dynamic part in the processes of culture. Freedom in fact is essential to the survival of culture at its earliest stages. Culture, let us repeat, is a gift of this early freedom" (Malinowski 1944, 237). In doing so, he was echoing concerns common to his era, articulated in Erich Fromm's (1941) classic *Escape From Freedom*.⁵¹

51 David Bidney (1963) attempted to expand the conversation with his edited volume *The*

Even if the discipline's relation to politics was revised in the 1980s, the liberal agenda of the old guard (Boas 1940, 55; Lee 1959, 53; Bidney 1963, 22) has never completely disappeared (Wolf 1990, 4; e Silva and Wardle 2017a; 2017b). The new millennium saw the rise of another directive: to make space for "alternative freedoms" (Humphrey 2005) or "aliberal freedoms" (Furani 2018), entailing the recognition of various experiences, moments (Fabian 1998), and practices of freedom (Mahmood 2005). Some thought that the proper way to look at freedom in an anthropological framework was to take the perspective of non-Western cultures, in particular how they perceived and resisted the imposition of 'Western freedoms.' Authors like Mahmood played a big role in critiquing the idea of freedom as the mere exercise of free choice/autonomy. As Mahmood (2005, 5) sates, her goals was also to make het material "speak back to the normative liberal assumptions about human nature," to "the belief that all human beings have an innate desire for freedom, that we all somehow seek to assert our autonomy when allowed to do so, that human agency primarily consists of acts that challenge social norms."

Even efforts to reveal freedom where it is presumed absent, for example among pious Egyptian women and Indian Jain ascetics, cannot seem to avoid reference to liberalism. When anthropologists leverage the ethnographic record and produce new material for "a comparative analysis of the varying social forms that freedom can take" (Laidlaw 2014, 139), they still do so in opposition to a 'Western' and 'liberal' notion of freedom. Moreover, The rush to break "liberalism's hold on anthropological understandings of freedom" is not without normative undertones. Khaled Furani (2018, 700), for instance, seeks to avoid language employed in past ethnographies, which he finds "couched in suppositions of liberalism," in a severe reading of Boas's (1940, 50–51) *Liberty among the Primitive*. Some authors have been less outspoken in their agenda. In their edited volume *Freedom in Practice*, Moises Lino e Silva and Huon Wardle (2017a, 1–2) frame freedom in conjunction with autonomy, self-determination, liberty, and above all governance, yet insist that this does not amount to liberal bias.

Concept of Freedom in Anthropology, which was mercilessly shot down a year later by Margaret Mead (1964, 1402): "This volume simultaneously represents Dr. Bidney's belief that because freedom is important it should be important to anthropology, and that freedom is not a cross-cultural concept." In the same volume, Edmund Leach (1963, 77) had already dissociated himself from the editor's universalist inclinations: "To prate of Freedom as if it were a separable virtue is the luxurious pursuit of aristocrats and of the more comfortable members of modern affluent society."

Laidlaw's (2014) work *The subject of virtue* is an interesting attempt to go beyond the oppositional approach to freedom. A decade after his call for an "anthropology of ethics and freedom" (2002), Laidlaw (2014, 1–10) lamented that a focus on 'unfreedom' had historically eluded a theoretical and ethnographic engagement with the social sciences vis-à-vis forms of freedom and responsibility in non-Western cultural traditions. Laidlaw wants to move away from a theory building on Comte, Marx, Durkheim, and Bourdieu, where agency is inscribed in a mechanistic system of social reproduction, bringing anthropology out of the social "sciences of unfreedom," which through social explanation and emphasis on broad processes indirectly discount the ethical dimension of human conduct (Bauman 1988, 5). For Laidlaw (2014, 10), the anthropology of ethics should be more than another sub-discipline; it should rather enrich the core conceptual vocabulary of anthropology. Freedom should be part of this vocabulary not as an object of ideology critique (a discourse) but as "a concept we think about and also think with."

The point was to securely link freedom to reflexivity. According to Laidlaw, Mahmood and Hirschkind's projects on Muslim reformist movements presuppose a 'reflective freedom,' a notion which had also been developed by liberal scholars, distinct from (political) negative liberty, and similar to Foucault's concept of 'reflective thought.' "Tied as it is to the reality of consciousness and the constitution of the subject through socially instituted practices and relations of power and mutual recognition," Laidlaw (2014, 177) writes, "reflective freedom is a precondition for ethical life in general" (see Foucault [1984b] 1997, 284). This is a key idea, because the reformist projects described by Mahmood and Hirschkind "subordinate and reduce" this reflective freedom "in favor of securing a degree of obedience to God that will no longer depend on consciousness but will become as if instinctive" (Laidlaw 2014, 177). For Laidlaw, this amounts to a purposeful abstention from the practice of 'intransigent' freedom identified by Foucault: an 'agonism,' a relationship of simultaneous reciprocal incitation and struggle (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983, 222).⁵²

I should emphasize that, while his contribution is valuable, I do not fully subscribe to Laidlaw's critique. The reason why I bring up this debate is that I see the need to de-exoticize 'Muslim freedom' as something alien to 'Western' and Danish discourse. Obviously, one can find different notions than one

52 In the last two decades, anthropologists such as Joel Robbins (2007; 2012) and Jarret Zigon (2007; 2008) have contributed in their own ways to the development of an anthropology of ethics, maintaining that ethical life must involve moments of freedom and choice, manifesting especially in how norms re inhabited, desired, and reimagined.

is accustomed to in unfamiliar traditions, but in positing diversity there is a risk of reinforcing charged dichotomies. Without necessarily seeking the decolonization/disavowal of liberalism in freedom and anthropology at large, some studies have striven to rethink the issue, at times achieving the former as a by-product. One example is Caroline Humphrey, who in her paper *Alternative Freedoms* outlined three separate notions of freedom in Russian language. Humphrey (2005, 9) concludes saying: “The three ideas of freedom have come to inhabit very different worlds of value. None of them is identical with Western ideas of freedom. But after all, Russians are far from alone in this. Much of the world is culturally different in this regard.” Through her material, Humphrey achieves an *a posteriori* understanding of freedom reminiscent of Foucauldian ethics: “If we are thinking about ordinary lives, perhaps everywhere freedom can be understood not mainly as a principle or a goal, but rather as an *outcome*, which can emerge in various contexts.”

Laidlaw (2014, 142–149) argues that while Riesman, Humphrey, Mahmood, and Hirschkind think they are providing ‘alternatives’ to liberal notions of freedom and autonomy, they are really evoking forms of Isaiah Berlin’s ‘positive freedom.’ To him, Mahmood presents us with a straightforward but facile opposition between the piety movement and the secular-liberal position on autonomy. For instance, she describes (2005, 11–14) Western liberal thought as overemphasizing autonomy; construing self-realization as the achievement of autonomous will. The problem with this is that it offers a one-dimensional representation of liberal theory, which includes many more nuanced conceptions of autonomy. The idea that one cannot be free unless one achieves complete autarchy goes all the way back to the Stoics. The riposte is equally ancient: “attempting to secure autonomy as invulnerability ... is an ethical impoverishment” (Laidlaw 2014, 155–156; see also Nussbaum 1986; Brennan 2005).

I do not believe Mahmood was unaware of all this, or ignored Foucault’s understanding of freedom itself. These observations merely defuse what some might see as the force behind seminal works in the anthropology of ethics and Islam: an objection to liberal freedom imported from ‘non-liberal’ countries. To an extent, ‘Western’ thought already contains/anticipates the critiques of Islamic discourse, and *vice versa*. It might well be, as Laidlaw submits, that reformist Islamic movements presuppose a notion of reflective freedom developed by liberal thinkers—a notion that supports Foucauldian ethics. Following Laidlaw and Foucault, one could argue that the question is not so much whether we can discover ‘aliberal’ freedoms, but rather how best to reveal the various forms ‘reflective freedom’ takes in various cultural and historical settings. Still, ultimately, my project diverges from the ‘anthropology of ethics’ on its most fundamental directive, since I deliberately do what Laidlaw

(2014, 10) wants to avoid: treat freedom as “just a ‘discourse’ that is an object of ideology-critique.”

Past studies have taught us that social form does not automatically align with unfreedom (Douglas 1986), and that surrendering self-sovereignty does not necessarily amount to a self-imposed oppression (Arendt 1961). These are valuable lessons, but while the claim that freedom can be produced, achieved, and experienced through submission might well be characteristically Muslim, this does not make it ‘un-Western.’ Firstly, because it already contained in liberal theory; secondly, because minorities such as Danish Muslims, among others, express and manifest this conception in Western societies. Moreover, the link between freedom and submission is certainly not new, nor is it exclusive to Islam. Khaled Furani (2018) provides examples of several such modalities, echoing the “poetic submission” found in his work on Palestinian poets. He lists things as disparate as Arjuna’s struggle toward freedom and Plato’s praise of those who attain freedom by renouncing themselves for truth’s sake. Without regressing into the use of freedom as a cross-cultural concept, it is safe to say that the idea of freedom *through* and *as* submission is not uniquely Muslim.

Still, when it comes to Islam and freedom, the ‘cultivated relinquishing of the will’ Furani finds in his fieldwork among Palestinian poets is in many respects the culmination of the anthropological conversation. My investigation corroborates his findings. This ‘relinquishing of the will’ is tantamount to a surrender to ‘restrictions,’ but not oppressive powers as commonly conceived. On the contrary, I subscribe to Furani’s (2018, 706) view that “this kind of freedom through cultivated submission may depend on a vigilance absent from a slumbering ethics typically exploited by such powers.” It is true that, as Furani declares, investigations of freedom along these lines can “open opportunities for questioning a liberal dismissal within ethical formations of a surrendering subject.” Yet in a case like Denmark, liberal notions of freedom (and its presuppositions of an independent/autonomous self) cannot be contrasted with the ontology of cultivated submission so easily: the two are entwined (see also Pandolfo 2018; Suhr 2019). At first glance, it might seem like Furani’s (2018, 707) notions of rhythmical and political freedom do not translate well to the Danish context: “Poets surrender to the authority of meter, which, when fully osmosed, enables them to generate a self who can compose with virtuosity and whose sounds can ultimately contest domination.” If we take a closer look, however, there is a sense in which Danish Muslims contest a different kind of domination, and cultivated submission allows for contesting hegemonic narratives of liberation and national identity.

Conclusion

Ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that we build to escape insupportable reality; in its basic dimension it is a fantasy-construction which serves as a support for our 'reality' itself: an 'illusion' which structures our effective, real social relations and thereby masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel. (ŽIŽEK [1989] 2008, 45)



At several points during my fieldwork, some of the interlocutors who had been following my progress hopefully inquired about my spiritual status: “Did anything change for you?” “Did you open your eyes?” “Have you crossed to the other side yet?” To them, I could not have been exposed and pay so much attention to their religion without being affected by it. As I hinted in the introduction, I did in fact come to ‘think differently,’ and develop a sense for the beauty of Islam, but as a sophisticated discursive formation, a resilient ideological edifice, constructed around a kernel of enjoyment, enabling Muslims worldwide to experience reality without contradiction. For some of my interlocutors this means that, all along, I have been investigating discourse and ideology, rather than Islam; that I have been missing the point of the heartfelt statements I collected. Still, several among my conversation partners have found it appropriate to extend an ‘invitation’ to Islam, deeming me ready to ‘testify’ my belief with the *shahādah*. In other words, all conditions were in place for a shift in subject positioning (see Renders 2018). While understanding and even feeling the significance of the ‘invitation,’ my theoretical and methodological framework led me to rather analyse the pull factors themselves, consistently zooming out to the level of discursive dynamics. Was it worth it, insisting on conducting an ethnography of Muslim-talk, concentrating on statements on freedom and subject positions rather than flesh-and-blood individuals? What did this approach yield?

1 Freedom as Submission

Besides providing a descriptive account of the Muslim problematization of freedom in Denmark, I have argued that part of Islam's success is based on a well-oiled mechanism: the meaning it develops is self-confirmatory. Put differently, the master-signifier 'Islam-as-submission' *retroactively* attributes meaning, not only to empty signifiers such as freedom, but to subjecthood itself, constituting the position of 'the submitted'. Islam does not treat individuals as ever-changing, undefinable beings; it hails, mirrors, patiently awaits identification—then seals the deal. It provokes a recognition: 'this is what you are; acknowledge your *fitrah*; become what you are!' (see 3.3). It is a time-tested procedure, one which anticipates, and incorporates, opposition discursively. Danish Muslims provide all kinds of rational reasons meant to substantiate their belief and obedience to divine command, but these can only make sense after a successful interpellation. The key religious experience is that "these reasons reveal themselves only to those who already believe—we find reasons attesting our belief because we already believe; we do not believe because we have found sufficient good reasons to believe" (Žižek [1989] 2008, 35). Believers recognize the meaning flowing from the master-signifier as always-already true, and see themselves as always-already involved in its articulations (the logic of transference, see 2.3).

Lacan ([2005] 2015, 64) once expressed his confidence in the immense power of religious thinking by proclaiming that "religion will triumph." Pressed on his statement, the psychiatrist argued that the faithful hone the skill to impart meaning to anything and everything, including "a meaning to human life." In fact, they are "trained" to do so. The very *function* of religion, stated Lacan ([2005] 2015, 66), is to "find correspondences between everything and everything else," pouring, as Jacques-Alain Miller phrased it, "bucketsful of meaning over the ever more insistent and unbearable real that we, in our times, owe to science" (Lacan [2005] 2015, cover).¹ I do not wish to fully associate myself with this polemical stance, but the eagerness to 'give meaning' to every facet of human life does sound familiar, bringing to mind the significance that something as simple as eating an apple can have (D062).²

1 The 'Real' referred to here is not the external consensual reality but, together with the Imaginary and the Symbolic, part of the three Lacanian 'elementary registers,' linked together in a Borromean knot. The Real is that unconscious order in the personality, associated with the drive, trauma, and dreaming, which resists signification.

2 Waseem Hussain, "De Islamiske Regler (Fard, Sunna, Makruh og Haram)," *Islamsvar.dk*,

There is nothing malicious, unpatriotic, or necessarily problematic about this ‘imparting of meaning’. Surely there is nothing secretive about the effects the processes of meaning-making and interpellation bring about. To see rows on rows of individuals execute a precise prostration in the direction of a building around which billions of pilgrims circle annually is as spectacular as ideology-driven activity gets. Nor is there anything ambiguous about the impact this has on individual lives. The destructive consequences have been amply documented and amplified by sensational reporting; less so the mechanisms of sense-making that precede them, and the benefits for those partaking. As the Danish convert Zandra Berthelsen put it: “Islam gives my life a meaning, in many ways. There is no place where it does not make sense. ... I get something to live for ... it strengthens my identity” (N111).³ I presented this as a case of successful *articulation*: the ‘quilting’ of the signifier’s chain with ‘Islam’ as master-signifier (see 3.3). I did *not* intend to explain away Berthelsen’s ‘recovery’ from sexual child abuse, or diminish in any way my interlocutors’ enthusiasm for her new-found safety in Islam.

In a time when insecurity and ‘spiritual crises’ abound (see Grof and Grof 1989; de Waard 2013), some find in Islam a tower of strength. Kareem, guest at an inter-faith debate in Aarhus, aptly formulated the matter: “I am of the opinion that a human being is ultimately a very fragile creature. That’s my experience. I think *I’m* very fragile, and that’s why, in my life, whenever I fall apart, I need a safety-net. For me, faith is such a safety-net.” Kareem is confident in his choice: “I prefer Islam to other religions because *det* (Islam) *giver mening for mig* (it makes sense to me, it gives meaning). It provides answers to the questions I have about life. Islam works for me, and I find it the most authentic, real religion” (C058). Islam ‘makes sense’ and ‘works’ for Kareem; it is a way of life enabling his ‘safety’ and, at the best of times, his flourishing. To explicate Kareem’s testimonial with academic jargon does not invalidate the depth his experience.

The knowing-belief of Allah’s presence and Qualities confronts the individual with a terrible question about his place and identity. As I have shown in previous chapters, the place is one of complete subjection, and a range of other subject positions are nullified in relation to the Divine. Willingly heeding and surrendering to Allah’s Call means not questioning one’s position as Muslim within the Islamic discursive field, not asking ‘why am I Muslim?’ but

August 30, 2010, accessed August 1, 2019, <http://islamsvar.dk/artikler/islamiske-regler-fard-sunna-makruh-haram/>.

3 Anders Lomholt, “Zandra fra Tøndersagen: Sådan har jeg det i dag.” *TV2*, November 17, 2016.

recognizing oneself as such in the very repetition of active submission. This is what constitutes a successful interpellation of the Muslim subject into Islamic ideology.

Allah's 'why?' brings us back to Lacan's ([1966] 2001, 345–346) '*che vuoi?*' (see 3.3). Žižek ([1989] 2008, 126) explains that, since the Other's symbolic authority is performative—not measurable by any 'real' qualities—the subject whom it hails is rendered insecure. The believer is never sure if she is worthy of her allotted place in the symbolic network, or why she finds herself that position at all. Her answer to the '*Che vuoi?*' of the Other can only be "the hysterical question: 'Why am I what I'm supposed to be, why have I this mandate?'" Or as I mentioned in chapter four: "*Why am I what you [the big Other] are saying that I am?*" In the case of Islam, since the ultimate ethical goal is a sort of closure, the process does not, of course, end here. The point is to get rid of this anxiety-inducing question, to reach catharsis, a deliverance through acceptance of being Muslim in a way "*non-justified by the big Other*" (Žižek [1989] 2008, 126). Crucially, Allah does not confirm the believer's identity; she is ever disoriented—in need of guidance. And yet, she is contentedly resigned with this status, or at least continually strives to be in a spiritual combat: surrender/submission must necessarily be the willing act of a free actor.

In Lacan's terms, a person accepting Allah's Judgment—recognizing herself as submitted to His Will—is an instance of the fulfillment of symbolic identification, the full and unrestrained acceptance of the symbolic mandate. Hysteria, for Žižek and Lacan, is precisely "the effect and testimony of a failed interpellation," which, Islamically, would be a human resisting Allah's Call to surrender. Asking the hysterical question (why am I Muslim?) then "opens the gap of what is 'in the subject more than the subject,' of the *object in subject* which resists interpellation—subordination of the subject, its inclusion in the symbolic network" (Žižek [1989] 2008, 126).

Islam itself can also be conceived of as one of the many systems that allows accessing what Lacan called *jouissance* (enjoyment/gratification). This term denotes a kind of transgressive 'painful pleasure,' resulting from the 'breaking' of the subject. If pleasure results from the mechanism of signification by which the subject normally knows herself, *jouissance* is the orgasmic 'beyond-pleasure' fracturing these structures. Writing about the relation between "the universal struggle for emancipation" and "the plurality of ways of life," Žižek (2018a, 60) defines a 'way of life' as something pointing "beyond all cultural features towards a core of the Real" and "the way in which a certain community organizes its *jouissance*." The topic of 'integration' is sensitive precisely because when a group is under pressure to 'integrate' into a wider community, it tends to resist out of fear that it will lose its mode of accessing this

'beyond-pleasure'. The plurality of these ways of life also creates conflict, limiting participation in a universal emancipatory movement: "Particular struggles obey their own immanent antagonist logic: ... different ethnic-religious 'ways of life' are immanently out-of-sync due to the different mode of regulating collective *jouissance*" (Žižek 2018a, 57).

In other words, the appeal of a religious discourse such as Islam is that it 'sets one up' for a successful interpellation, allowing for a structured and safe access to that unbearable Real which resists signification, in a ritual 'breaking' of the subject. By establishing the presence of a transcendental Other, hailing the individual from an unseen and unknowable location, Islam creates a subject position submitted to a continuous process of closure. Once the individual fully assumes the role and status assigned by Islam, the meaning of every experience and statement is mediated by it.

Freedom (as emancipation, liberation, and iterative choice) plays a key role in the narrative accompanying this 'set up,' to the way the Muslim community organizes its access to the 'Real' kernel, to collective *jouissance*. It is present in statements on the start, end, and progression of the spiritual journey. It is the birthright and privilege of freedom that enables humans to answer Allah's Call and recognize themselves as submitted (3.2 and 3.3). The subsequent 'discovery' of being always-already subjected is contingent upon the idea of *fiṭrah* (2.3), as well as Allah's place as the unseen yet perfect source of Islam (2.1 and 3.1).

In Islam, 'salvation' then conveys the effect of religious interpellation acting on the individual 'captured' by transient desire, thanks to the beyond-pleasure breaking the fixations of worldly concern (5.2 and 5.3). In other words, by re-directing attention and devotion towards the 'unknowable' Allah (4.1 and 2.1), Islam dis-identifies from a limited, self-involved, knowable worldly existence, where freedom is misconstrued as a superficial capacity to do and shape oneself as one pleases (1.1 and 5.1). The immortal soul is thereby liberated and reverted to its proper state of submitted contemplation/adoration of the Creator: freedom through submission.

2 Freedom as Fantasy

In the first chapter, I have given a quick impression of the uses/functions of 'freedom' in the Danish political sphere; the widespread perception of it as core cultural value, essential part of *danskhed*. Most importantly, this understanding of Danishness is institutionally sanctioned, backed by financial and human investment. This status quo makes statements affirming and defending free-

dom sensible to many citizens: “only you can decide over your life, therefore you should have the freedom to” (W060);⁴ “we are faced with a new freedom struggle” (W046);⁵ “Islam is of course in opposition to freedom” (N122),⁶ and so on. Some Danish Muslims see these statements as an opportunity to propose a ‘deeper’ conceptualization in line with the Islamic tradition. In the introduction I stated that a mapping and analysis of religious discourse does not exhaust Muslim-talk as an object of study, but rather paves the road for a Žizekian *symptomatic* reading of the ideological text. In light of the freedom-talk in Danish politics and the Muslim-talk on freedom, one of the directions of such symptomatic reading could involve the status of freedom as an *ideological fantasy*.

Žizek’s influential *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (1989) is key to this perspective. The book is heavily indebted to Lacan’s work in psychoanalytic theory, and in particular his notion of *objet petit a*. This is the ‘little other,’ stimulus of a subject’s desire, as contrasted to radical alterity of the big Other. It is an unconscious and by definition unattainable fantasy, an inherently fragmentary object, taking a different form depending on the individual or group. The very title of Žizek’s work contains his critique of the idea that it is possible to escape ideological fantasy. There is neither choice nor satisfaction independently of it. In psychoanalytic theory, ‘fantasy’ does not denote a fictional construction opposed to reality, but the structure providing the coordinates for the subject’s desire: fantasy “teaches us how to desire” (Žizek 2006, 47). In other words, as a universal structure, fantasy directs our desire towards a particular manifestation that occupies desire. By doing this, fantasy gives reality a fictional consistency and coherence appearing to fulfil the ‘lack’ at the center of social reality, the Other, and the subject itself.

If, in terms of discourse theory, ‘freedom’ can be conceived as an empty signifier, from this angle it can be a ‘fantastic’ ideological universal. It is what gives away the structure of ideology. In fact, what the Žizekian ‘symptomatic’ critique of ideology does, is detecting “a point of breakdown *heterogeneous* to a given ideological field,” and at the same time *necessary* for that field to “achieve its closure” and completed form: “This procedure thus implies a certain logic of exception: every ideological Universal—for example freedom, equality—is

4 “Principprogram,” Liberal Alliance, accessed August 1, 2019, <https://www.liberalalliance.dk/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Liberal-Alliance-Principprogram.pdf>.

5 “Integrationspolitik: Den Nye Frihedskamp,” Udlændingepolitik, Socialdemokratiet, accessed December 1, 2018, <https://www.socialdemokratiet.dk/da/politik/udlaendingepolitik/integrationspolitik-den-nye-frihedskamp/>.

6 Jens Beck Nielsen, “Hvis vi Ikke Får Bugt Med Udlændinge-Udfordringerne, Kan Alt Andet Være Lige gyldigt,” *Berlingske*, September 22, 2016.

'false' in so far as it necessarily includes a specific case which breaks its unity, lays open its falsity" (Žižek [1989] 2008, 16). Freedom functions both as a universal notion composed of various forms (freedom of speech, freedom of religion, freedom of consciousness, and so on), but also a specific freedom subverting the universal notion (e.g. the worker 'freely' selling his own labor and time on the market). In other words, "this freedom is the very opposite of effective freedom: by selling his labour 'freely', the worker loses his freedom—the real content of this free act of sale is the worker's enslavement to capital" (Žižek [1989] 2008, 16).

Ironically, it is precisely this paradoxical freedom, says Žižek, in the form of its very opposite, which closes the circle of the celebrated bourgeois freedoms. In the first chapter, I have mentioned Ruda's (2016a, 1) conception of freedom as a "signifier of disorientation," functioning in repressive ways. I gave the example of how companies granting employees more 'freedom to decide' might cause the emergence of an unbearable self-regulation and exhausting competition. The rhetoric of 'freedom,' in short, can allow veiled interests to appear under the guise of universality, producing its opposite. The discourse of free choice, which in one sense is "a mere alibi of the ego, an illusion of self-determination, an almost irresistible temptation to be seduced by a fantasy of independent agency" (Boothby 2019, 12), *as fantasy* in service of ideology, functions as the linchpin of contemporary political discourse.

Behind all this, is perhaps the lingering ideology of cynicism critiqued by Peter Sloterdijk at the very beginning of his career. In his *Critique of Cynical Reason* ([1983] 1987), building on Marx's axiom of ideology as false consciousness (they do not know it, but they are doing it), Sloterdijk states that present-day cynics "know what they are doing" but "they do it because, in the short run, the force of circumstances and the instinct for self-preservation are speaking the same language, and they are telling them that it has to be so" (Sloterdijk [1983] 1987, 5). Cynicism, says the philosopher, is *enlightened* false consciousness. "Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology; its falseness is already reflexively buffered" (*ibid.*).

Slavoj Žižek ([1989] 2008, 30) pushes the argument further, arguing that in a society that thinks itself beyond ideology, in which people keep an ironical distance from things, blindness for the power of ideological fantasy is more widespread than ever: "they know very well what they are doing, but still, they are doing it." Both companies and employees might know that their idea of 'freedom' masks and even produces new forms of exploitation, but still insist following it. The very idea that 'today people do not take ideological propositions seriously' is rather symptomatic of a prevailing ideology of cynicism.

“Cynical reason, with all its ironic detachment, leaves untouched the fundamental level of ideological fantasy, the level on which ideology structures the social reality itself” (Žižek [1989] 2008, 27). The cynic misses a crucial point: “The fundamental level of ideology ... is not that of an illusion masking the real state of things but that of an (unconscious) fantasy structuring our social reality itself. And at this level, we are ... far from being a post-ideological society.” As Lacan put it: *les non-dupes errent*. Those ‘in the know’ are in error, because they miss the efficiency and structuring power of the symbolic fiction (Žižek 2006, 33).

As Kevin Latham (2009, 202) observes, in Sloterdijk’s formulation the agency the cynical subject is removed such that enlightened false consciousness “knows itself to be without illusions and yet to have been dragged down by the ‘power of things’” (Sloterdijk [1983] 1987, 6). Žižek, on the other hand, is arguing that it is in practice, in the things that people do, that ideology works to structure our effective social relations: “The function of ideology is not to offer us a point of escape from our reality but to offer us the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel” (Žižek [1989] 2008, 45). Ideological fantasy, in Žižek, is a necessary support of reality itself, and continuously covering its own tracks. Whereas in the Marxist perspective the ideological gaze is “a partial gaze overlooking the *totality* of social relations,” in Žižek ideology rather “designates a *totality set on effacing the traces of its own impossibility*” (Žižek [1989] 2008, 50).

The freedom-fantasy leads Lacanian critics of ideology such as Richard Boothby (2019, 12) to suggest that what is hailed as one of the greatest achievements of modernity, the abolition of slavery, “merely inoculates us more securely against recognizing its new reality.” Similarly to Ruda, Boothby argues that congratulating ourselves about the end of chattel servitude “paradoxically allows the exploitation of wage labor to disappear behind the apparently incontrovertible claim that every worker voluntarily contracts for his or her own employment.” Just like the trumpeted ‘abolishment of slavery’ conceals the reality of wage labor—as well as that of 35 million modern slaves (Davidson 2015)—the cardinal value of liberal politics, so deeply rooted in Danish society, ‘you are free, you are your own master,’ conceals the experienced impotence, discrimination, and impaired freedom of many.

Danish Muslims continuously voice out their concerns of the side-effects, intended or not, of the ‘freedom fantasy’ espoused and enforced by government and institutions. The aims seem to differ, ranging from the fight for the *freedom to* wear the niqab, the struggle for *freedom from* state interventions targeting the Muslim community, and a general desire to redefine freedom as a cultural value. Besides the negative social repercussions it has on the commu-

nity, Muslims resist the ruling fantasy of freedom because it occupies a crucial place Islam as ideology aims to occupy itself. On a theoretical level, 'fantasy' functions as a construction, as "an imaginary scenario filling out the void, the opening of the *desire of the Other*: by giving us a definite answer to the question 'What does the Other want?', it enables us to evade the unbearable deadlock in which the Other wants something from us" (Žižek [1989] 2008, 128). Islam seeks precisely to translate the desire of the big Other into a positive interpellation, a mandate with which to identify: being 'Muslim,' submitted to Allah.

There is more to the discussion on 'freedom' than simply a superficially contested meaning. The discourse on freedom, as ideological fantasy, denies the expansion of alternatives in the public sphere, and in a way impairs the 'desire' of Muslim subjects. This study only scratched the surface of the workings and implications of such impairment: an analysis of discourse merely gives us the coordinates to explore a fantasy. A fantasy which is not some simple fairy tale which we can allow ourselves to ignore, but the symbolic support of a 'Real' core. Further research could reveal how the liberal freedom-fantasy interferes with that of Muslim citizens. In other words, how liberal articulations of freedom can fracture the coherence and consistency Islam bestows on reality.

3 Freedom as Promise

The freedom derived from submission, in Danish Muslim-talk, is both a starting point, a drive, a destination; the promise of 'real freedom' accompanies the believer with every step. In this sense, Muslim-talk counteracts a liberal ideology naturalizing freedom as pure capacity and possession. If one always-already *has* freedom, it might need protection as a right, but there is no need to pursue it as an aspiration.

Ruda (2016b) invokes Hegel's 'Stoic slave,' who feels free even when forced to work: "The slave ideology of freedom allows to avoid confronting the actual situation. Freedom is paradoxically the only possession of the slave." This possession takes the form of a capacity, says Ruda, because "a capacity can be actualized, but already has an actuality, even when not actualized." The outcome of this way of thinking is that freedom-as-capacity becomes all about choice: free will. Humans are free, even if they do not realize freedom. My Muslim interlocutors, as we have seen, do not reject this view altogether, but add a major regulatory condition: *al-Qadā' wa al-Qadar*. This is not unique to Islam or even religion; the assumption that one is not (absolutely) free, as Ruda (2016a, 10) has shown, is present in many traditions. Still, it is exemplary of the potential to 'exit the ideology of freedom' which devolves it into a signifier of disorienta-

tion and oppression, to mitigate its identification with capacity, and render it into something one *may* attain.

Each in their own way, my interlocutors contribute to this shift in thinking about freedom, and I believe the previous chapters illustrated the strengths of the Danish Muslim ordinary theology, demonstrating the intellectual sophistication and self-reflexive character of religious authorities, activists, and average mosquegoers alike. Their statements provide a counterpoint to the unflattering mediatization of Danish Muslims and the regular portrayals of their leadership as hostile and uneducated. The reflections on basic Islamic notions also contribute to a growing body of theologically engaged anthropology, in an attempt to compensate for the disciplinary confusion over dealing with religious claims (Willerslev and Suhr 2018). At the same time, it is also possible to find inconsistencies in the Muslim narratives on freedom as I related them. Besides the fact that discourse always allows for contrasting and even opposite statements, it is also clear Muslim-talk is always work in progress, ever adapting and refining.

Three decades ago, Abu-Lughod (1990, 42) lamented that, in earlier work (including her own) there was “a tendency to *romanticize resistance*, to read all forms of resistance as signs of ineffectiveness of systems of power and of *the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated*.” This reading of resistance is hazardous, she argues, for it may “collapse distinctions between forms of resistance and foreclose certain questions about the workings of power.” Mahmood (2005, 10) took note of her colleague’s critique, and added another dimension, arguing that seminal texts fail to problematize “the universality of the desire ... to be free from relations of subordination.” Freedom, says Mahmood, “is normative to feminism, as it is to liberalism, and critical scrutiny is applied to those who want to limit women’s freedom rather than those who want to extend it.”

I emphasized Islam-as-submission, regardless of the caution some Muslims exercise in using precisely this term, but I do not mean to contribute to the romanticization of this dimension, as happened with resistance. I hope my study has opened a new perspective: neither casting Muslim articulations of freedom as being outside liberalism’s purview, nor bringing it back under its wing, but being by now irreversibly entangled with it. One might even say that freedom is normative to Islam as much as it is normative to feminism and liberalism. In Waseem Hussain’s words: “Freedom is the most important thing. And Muslims increasingly feel that the freedom to be a Muslim is taken from them.” (D067).⁷

7 Waseem Hussain, *Imam bag tremmer* (København: Gyldendal, 2017), chap. 16, e-book.

The point of the anthropology of discourse is precisely to account for such an entanglement of discourses, abstaining from trying to nail down what is normative to what. When we depict freedom as either inextricably tied to a particular tradition (e.g., normative to feminism and liberalism) or as a tactical counterpoint (choosing illiberal action as freedom), we risk missing how an empty signifier like freedom moves within the mercurial layers of discourse. It is true that Danish Muslim-talk on freedom knows certain key points of reference—from Destiny to servanthood—but the use of the term is strategic, aimed at creating roads for the mainstreaming of the religious narrative. Freedom is both a peace-offering and a weapon in an ongoing ideological conflict.

Undoubtedly, there has been a certain problematization of freedom in modern European thought, a proliferation of discourse. This has resulted in the elevation of freedom to a national symbol tied to innumerable practices, institutions, and policies, to be defended and enforced. I have argued that the 2018 *maskeringsforbud* is in this sense a hegemonic intervention meant to override a discursive conflict, pinning down the meaning of freedom through political action. The numerous attempts by Danish politicians to associate Islam with unfreedom are part of this movement. Yet it should be clear that if Islam as ‘submission’ evokes ‘unfreedom,’ this has little to do with Islam (and Muslim conceptions) as such, and everything with the place assigned to ‘freedom’ by the hegemonic discourses in (primarily) Euro-American countries. It points toward cultural-specific formulations of exigencies.

This is where anthropology as cultural critique becomes socially relevant. As I mentioned in the prologue, ethnographies of Islam speak to a ‘Western’ creation, fulfilling anthropology’s role as “counter-science” by ceaselessly unmaking “that very man who is creating and re-creating his positivity in the human sciences” (Foucault [1966] 2005, 414). *Western* disciplines set out to dissolve ‘man’ as a *Western* creation. Recent studies of European Islam, such as that of Mayanthi Fernando (2014), demonstrate that both freedom and submission figure as a key notions in Muslim counter-discourses rather than (just) a strictly religious narrative. This was another theme in my own study: the all-pervasiveness of freedom in Danish public discourse has greatly influenced local Muslim articulations, but also instigated a far-reaching challenge to what it means to be free.

What are the consequences? Will the crumbling hegemony of freedom-as-choice restore itself and eclipse Muslim-talk? Will Islamic articulations be able to affirm freedom as liberation through willing submission to a divine authority? Both, and more. In Denmark, the struggle is ongoing. Everything, from a Prime Minister’s tweet, to the uproar created by Islam-skeptic political newcomers (Nye Borgerlige, Stram Kurs) speaks of friction. Freedom is a strate-

gic piece in a game of meaning, but no matter who seems to have the upper hand, the game takes place in a field of 'play' lacking a center which arrests and grounds the infinite substitutions (Derrida [1967] 2001, 365). Liberalism, Islam, Danishness—all continuously assert themselves as this center, establish signifying chains, halt the sliding of meaning. All master-signifiers ultimately *supplement* the missing center, adding some auxiliary significance, performing a vicarious function. Just like the myriad Names attributed to Allah, they cannot contain the discursive field, achieve totalization. They are never final. The very movement of articulation involves an addition, a surplus; there is always more.

I have repeatedly cited Althusser's thought about the process of ideological interpellation, how individuals internalize the symbolic machine of ideology, forming an experience of meaning and truth. However, as Žižek points out, building on Pascal and Marx, this 'internalization' never fully succeeds: there is always a residue, a leftover. "Far from hindering the full submission of the subject to the ideological command, ... it is precisely this non-integrated surplus of senseless traumatism which confers on the Law its unconditional authority." It is precisely this surplus which sustains ideological *jouissance*, the "enjoyment-in-sense (enjoyment) proper to ideology" (Žižek [1989] 2008, 43). It is, in other words, what keeps individuals looking for meaning. While Islam can never obtain an undisputed 'triumph' in this world, and there is always a residue resisting integration, this is precisely what sustains its authority. There is no 'final destination' when it comes to discourse and ideology; closure requires continuous maintenance and, like the 'safety' of the Straight Path, endless deferral. Freedom-through-submission is not about unlimited choice or obstinate defiance, but the ever-slipping promise of deliverance: it is a movement of willing and iterative surrender, in an endless circling around the empty center of the discursive field.

Bibliography

- Abu Khalil, As' ad. 1994. "Al-Jabbryyah in the Political Discourse of Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāṣir and Ṣaddām Ḥusayn: The Rationalization of Defeat." *Muslim World* 84 (July–Oct.): 240–257.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1986. *Veiled Sentiments: Honor and Poetry in a Bedouin Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1990. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Beduin Women." *American Anthropologist* 17 (1): 41–55.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1991. "Writing against Culture." In *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, edited by Richard G. Fox, 137–154. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1993. *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1998. *Remaking Women: Feminism and Modernity in the Middle East*. Princeton Studies in Culture, Power, History. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2002. "Do Muslim Women Really Need Saving? Anthropological Reflections on Cultural Relativism and Its Others." *American Anthropologist* 104 (3): 793–790.
- Abu-Lughod, Lila. 2013. *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Agrama, Hussein Ali. 2012. *Questioning Secularism: Islam, Sovereignty, and the Rule of Law in Modern Egypt*. Chicago Studies in Practices of Meaning. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Ahmed, Akbar. 1988. *Discovering Islam: Making Sense of Muslim History and Society*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Ahmed, Leila. 1992. *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Ahmed, Leila. 2011. *A Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence, from the Middle East to America*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.
- Ahmed, Shahab. 2016. *What Is Islam?: The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Akkari, Ahmed. 2014. *Min afsked med islamismen: Muhammedkrisen, dobbeltspillet og kampen mod Danmark*. Edited by Martin Kjær Jensen. København: Berlingske Media Forlag.
- Akkari, Ahmed. 2018. *Mod til at tvivle: En fortælling om eksil, humanisme og hvilken forskel et bibliotek kan gøre*. København: Gyldendal.
- Allievi, Stefano. 1998. *Les Convertits à l'islam. Les Nouveaux Musulmans d'Europe*. Paris: L'Harmattan.

- Al-Mohammad, Hayder. 2012. "A Kidnapping in Basra: The Struggles and Precariousness of Life in Postinvasion Iraq." *Cultural Anthropology* 27 (4): 597–614.
- Althusser, Louis. 1969. *Lénine et La Philosophie*. Théorie. Paris: François Maspero.
- Althusser, Louis. (1970) 1971. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)." In *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, translated by Ben Brewster, 127–184. 213. London: Monthly Review Press.
- Althusser, Louis. 1971. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. Translated by Ben Brewster. 213. London: Monthly Review Press.
- Althusser, Louis. (1970) 2008. "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)." In *On Ideology*. London: Verso.
- Amir-Moazami, Shirin, and Armando Salvatore. 2003. Gender, Generation, and the Reform of tradition: From Muslim Majority Societies to Western Europe. In Allievi, S. & Nielsen, J. (eds.). *Muslim Networks and Transnational Communities in and Across Europe*. Leiden & Boston: Brill, 52–77.
- Andersen, Lars Erslev. 2008. "Den normaliserede terrorisme og partisanens teori." *Den ny verden* Årg. 41, nr. 1 (2008): 55–72.
- Anderson, Benedict. 1983. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.
- Andreassen, Rikke. 2011. "Burka Og Bryster: Debatter Om Tørklæder, Tilgængelighed, Ligestilling Og Nationalitet." In *Tørklædet Som Tegn: Tilsøring Og Demokrati i En Globaliseret Verden*, edited by Inge Degn and Kirsten Molly Søholm, 80–98. Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag.
- Andreassen, Rikke. 2012. "Gender as a Tool in Danish Debates about Muslims." In *Islam in Denmark: The Challenge of Diversity*, edited by Jørgen Nielsen, 81–94. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.
- Angermüller, Johannes. 2014. *Poststructuralist Discourse Analysis: Subjectivity in Enunciative Pragmatics*. Springer.
- Angermüller, Johannes, Dominique Maingueneau, and Ruth Wodak. 2014. *The Discourse Studies Reader: Main Currents in Theory and Analysis*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company.
- Antoun, Richard. 1989. *Muslim Preacher in the Modern World: A Jordanian Case Study in Comparative Perspective*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Aoude, Safia. 2002. *Hjulspor i sandet: Historien om Ali Ahmed Knud Holmboe 1902–1931*. København: Fateh.
- Arendt, Hannah. 1961. "What Is Freedom?" In *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought*, 143–162. New York: Viking Press.
- Asad, Talal. 1970. *The Kababish Arabs: Power, Authority and Consent in a Nomadic Tribe*. New York, Washington: Praeger.
- Asad, Talal. 1973. *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*. New York: Humanities Press.
- Asad, Talal. 1979. "Anthropology and the Analysis of Ideology." *Man* 14 (4): 607–627.

- Asad, Talal. 1983. "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz." *Man* 18: 237–259.
- Asad, Talal. 1986. "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam." *Center for Arab Studies, Occasional Papers Series*, 22 s.
- Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Cultural Memory in the Present. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Asad, Talal. 2009. "Free Speech, Blasphemy, and Secular Criticism." In *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, edited by Talal Asad, Judith Butler, Saba Mahmood, and Wendy Brown, 20–63. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Asad, Talal, Judith Butler, Saba Mahmood, and Wendy Brown. 2009. *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*. The Townsend Papers in the Humanities, no. 2. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Astley, Jeff. 2002. *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening, and Learning in Theology*. Explorations in Practical, Pastoral, and Empirical Theology. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Austin, John Langshaw. 1962. *How to Do Things with Words: The William James Lectures Delivered at Harvard University in 1955*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Baig, Naveed. 2012. "Counseling in the Health Service." In *Islam in Denmark: The Challenge of Diversity*, edited by Jørgen Schøler Nielsen, 219–231. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Bangstad, Sindre, Irfan Ahmad, John Richard Bowen, Ilana Feldman, Angelique Hauge-rud, David H. Price, Richard Ashby Wilson, and Mayanthi L. Fernando. 2017. "Anthropological Publics, Public Anthropology." *Hau-Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 7 (1): 489–508.
- Barthes, Roland. 1957. *Mythologies*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- Barthes, Roland. 1977. *Image, Music, Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. London: Fontana.
- Bauman, Zygmunt. 1988. *Freedom*. Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Bayat, Asef. 2007a. *Islam and Democracy: What Is the Real Question?* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press.
- Bayat, Asef. 2007b. *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Beck, Ulrich. 2002. "The Terrorist Threat: World Risk Society Revisited." *Theory, Culture & Society* 19 (4): 39–55.
- Benedict, Ruth Fulton. 1942. "Primitive Freedom." *Atlantic Monthly* 169.
- Benedict xvi. 2006. "Faith, Reason and the University: Memories and Reflections." Libreria Editrice Vaticana. September 12, 2006. http://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html.
- Berger, Peter, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner. 1974. *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness*. Harmondsworth and Ringwood: Pelican Books.

- Berlin, Isaiah. (1996) 2002. "Final Retrospects; Excerpts from 'My Intellectual Path.'" In *Liberty*, edited by Henry Hardy, 322–328. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Berlin, Isaiah. 2002. *Liberty*. Edited by Henry Hardy. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Berlin, Isaiah. (1958) 2002. "Two Concepts of Liberty." In *Liberty*, edited by Henry Hardy. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bidney, David. 1963. *The Concept of Freedom in Anthropology*. The Hague: Mouton.
- Bleich, Erik. 2009. "Muslims and the State in the Post-9/11 West: Introduction." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35 (3): 353–360.
- Bleich, Erik. 2013. *Muslims and the State in the Post-9/11 West*. New York: Routledge.
- Blommaert, Jan, and Jef Verschuere. 1998. *Debating Diversity: Analysing the Discourse of Tolerance*. London: Routledge.
- Boas, Franz. 1940. "Liberty among the Primitive." In *Freedom. Its Meaning*, edited by Ruth Nanda Anshen, 50–55. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- Boothby, Richard. 2019. "On Psychoanalysis and Freedom: Lacan vs. Heidegger." *Crisis and Critique* 6 (1): 11–27.
- Borneman, John, and Abdellah Hammoudi. 2009. *Being There: The Fieldwork Encounter and the Making of Truth*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Bowen, John Richard. 2008. *Why the French Don't like Headscarves: Islam, the State, and Public Space*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bowen, John Richard. 2012. *A New Anthropology of Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bowen, John Richard. 2013. "Recognizing Islam in France after 9/11." In *Muslims and the State in the Post-9/11 West*, edited by Erik Bleich. New York: Routledge.
- Bracke, Sarah. 2008. "Conjugating the Modern/ Religious, Conceptualizing Female Religious Agency: Contours of a 'Post-Secular' Conjuncture." *Theory, Culture & Society* 25 (6): 51–67.
- Brandes, Georg. 2000. "Hvad er dansk folkekarakter?" *Antropologi* 42: 101–102.
- Brennan, Tad. 2005. *The Stoic Life: Emotions, Duties, and Fate*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, Callum G. 2001. *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800–2000*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Bubandt, Nils, Mikkel Rytter, and Christian Suhr. 2019. "A Second Look at Invisibility: Al-Ghayb, Islam, Ethnography." *Dynamics of Muslim Life* 13 (1): 1–16.
- Butler, Judith. 1990. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Thinking Gender. New York and London: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 1993. *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex."* New York and London: Routledge.
- Butler, Judith. 2007. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Routledge Classics. New York and London: Routledge.

- Cekic, Özlem. 2017. *Hvorfor hader han dig, mor?* 1. udgave. København: Gyldendal.
- Chittick, William C. 2012. *Ibn 'Arabi: Heir to the Prophets*. London: Oneworld Publications.
- Christoffersen, Lisbet. 2012. "Religion and State: Recognition of Islam and Related Legislation." In *Islam in Denmark: The Challenge of Diversity*, edited by Jørgen Nielsen, 57–81. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.
- Clarence-Smith, William Gervase. 2006. *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery*. London: Hurst & Co.
- Clifford, James, and George Marcus. 1986. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Coleman, David, and Eskil Wadensjö. 1999. *Indvandringen Til Danmark: Internationale Og Nationale Perspektiver*. København: Spektrum.
- Connerton, Paul. 1989. *How Societies Remember*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Coupland, Douglas. 2010. *Marshall McLuhan: You Know Nothing of My Work!* New York: Atlas and Company.
- Crane, Hillary. 2013. "Flirting with Conversion: Negotiating Researcher Non-Belief with Missionaries." In *Missionary Impositions: Conversion, Resistance, and Other Challenges to Objectivity in Religious Ethnography*. HK Crane and DL Weibel, Eds, edited by Hillary Crane and Deana Weibel, 11–23.
- Crapanzano, Vincent. 1973. *The Hamadsha: A Study in Moroccan Ethnopsychiatry*. Berkeley; London: University of California Press.
- Crapanzano, Vincent. 1975. "Saints, Jnun, and Dreams: Essay in Moroccan Ethnopsychology." *Psychiatry-Interpersonal and Biological Processes* 38 (2): 145–159.
- Crapanzano, Vincent. 1980. *Tuhami: Portrait of a Moroccan*. Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press.
- Cruise O'Brien, Donal Brian. 1971. *The Mourides of Senegal: The Political and Economic Organization of an Islamic Brotherhood*. Oxford: Clarendon.
- Cruise O'Brien, Donal Brian. 1975. *Saints & Politicians: Essays in the Organisation of a Senegalese Peasant Society*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Culler, Jonathan. (1981) 2001. *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction*. Rev. ed. London and New York: Routledge.
- Das, Veena. 1984. "For a Folk-Theology and Theological Anthropology of Islam." *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 18 (2): 293–300.
- Das, Veena. 1997. *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Davidson, Julia O'Connell. 2015. *Modern Slavery: The Margins of Freedom*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- De Botton, Alain. 2012. *Religion for Atheists: A Non-Believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion*. London: Hamish Hamilton.

- De Cillis, Maria. 2014. *Free Will and Predestination in Islamic Thought: Theoretical Compromises in the Works of Avicenna, Al-Ghazali and Ibn 'Arabi*. New York: Routledge.
- Deeb, Lara. 2006. *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Deeb, Lara. 2009. "Piety Politics and the Role of a Transnational Feminist Analysis." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15: S112–126.
- Degn, Inge, and Kirsten Molly Søholm. 2011. *Tørklædet som tegn: Tilsøring og demokrati i en globaliseret verden*. Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag.
- Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari. (1980) 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Derrida, Jacques. 1967. *L'écriture et La Différence*. Collection Tel Quel. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- Derrida, Jacques. (1967) 2001. *Writing and Difference*. Translated by Alan Bass. London and New York: Routledge.
- Donslund, Hanna. 2017. "Du får hasanāt for det': udøvelse af da'wa blandt unge muslimer i Aarhus." *Religion i Danmark* Årg. 9, nr. 1 (2017).
- Douglas, Mary. 1986. *How Institutions Think*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Dreyfus, Hubert, and Paul Rabinow. 1983. *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Dupret, Baudouin, Thomas Pierret, Paulo Gabriel Pinto, and Kathryn Spellman-Poots. 2012. *Ethnographies of Islam: Ritual Performances and Everyday Practices*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Eickelman, Dale. 1976. *Moroccan Islam: Tradition and Society in a Pilgrimage Center*. Austin; London: University of Texas Press.
- Eickelman, Dale. 1982. "The Study of Islam in Local Contexts." *Contributions to Asian Studies* January (17).
- Eickelman, Dale. 1985. *Knowledge and Power in Morocco: The Education of a Twentieth-Century Notable*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Eickelman, Dale, and James Piscatori. 1996. *Muslim Politics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- El-Cheikh, Nadia Maria. 1999. "Muḥammad and Heraclius: A Study in Legitimacy." *Studia Islamica*, no. 89: 5–21.
- Elder, Joseph W. 1966. "Fatalism in India: A Comparison between Hindus and Muslims." *Anthropological Quarterly* 39 (3): 227–243.
- Elliot, Alice. 2016. "The Makeup of Destiny: Predestination and the Labor of Hope in a Moroccan Emigrant Town." *American Ethnologist* 43 (3): 488–499.
- Elverdam, Beth. 1991. *Fra tradition til institution: Muslimske indvandrerkvindes møde med dansk hospital og praksislæge*. København: Statens Humanistiske Forskningsråd.

- El-Zein, Abdul Hamid. 1974. *The Sacred Meadows: A Structural Analysis of Religious Symbolism in an East African Town*. [Evanston]: Northwestern University Press.
- El-Zein, Abdul Hamid. 1977. "Beyond Ideology and Theology: The Search for the Anthropology of Islam." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 6: 227–254.
- Erdinc, Mujde. 2010. "Governing Belonging and Identity: A Foucauldian Analysis of Danish Immigration and Subjectification." Limerick: University of Limerick.
- Erdinc, Mujde. 2012. "The Subject and Governmental Action: A Foucauldian Analysis of Subjectification and the 24 Year-Old Rule in Denmark." *Feminist Legal Studies* 20 (1): 21–38.
- Evans-Pritchard, Edward Evan. 1949. *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica*. [S.l.]: Oxford U.P.
- Ewing, Katherine. 1994. "Dreams from a Saint: Anthropological Atheism and the Temptation to Believe." *American Anthropologist* 96 (3): 571–583.
- Fabian, Johannes. 1983. "Time and the Other: How Anthropology Constructs Its Object." Columbia University Press.
- Fabian, Johannes. 1998. *Moments of Freedom: Anthropology and Popular Culture*. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press.
- Fadil, Nadia. 2011. "Not-/Unveiling as an Ethical Practice." *Feminist Review*, no. 98 (July): 83–109.
- Fadil, Nadia. 2019. "The Anthropology of Islam in Europe: A Double Epistemological Impasse." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 48 (1): 117–132.
- Fadil, Nadia, and Mayanthi Fernando. 2015a. "Rediscovering the 'Everyday' Muslim: Notes on an Anthropological Divide." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5 (2): 59.
- Fadil, Nadia, and Mayanthi Fernando. 2015b. "What Is Anthropology's Object of Study? A Counterresponse to Schielke and Deeb." *Hau-Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 5 (2): 97–100.
- Fairclough, Norman. 1992. *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Fassin, Didier. 2017. *If Truth Be Told: The Politics of Public Ethnography*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Faubion, James. 2001. *The Shadows and Lights of Waco: Millennialism Today*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Faubion, James. 2011. *An Anthropology of Ethics*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Faubion, James. 2012. "Foucault and the Genealogy of Ethics." In *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*, edited by Didier Fassin, 67–84. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell.
- Fernando, Mayanthi. 2010. "Reconfiguring Freedom: Muslim Piety and the Limits of Secular Law and Public Discourse in France." *American Ethnologist* 37 (1): 19–35.
- Fernando, Mayanthi. 2014. *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Ferreira, Jamie M. 1998. "Faith and the Kiekegaardian Leap." In *The Cambridge Com-*

- panion to Kierkegaard*, edited by Alastair Hannay and Gordon D. Marino. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Fetzer, Joel S., and J. Christopher Soper. 2005. *Muslims and the State in Britain, France, and Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Filio Degni, Seppo Pöntinen, and Mulki Mölsä. 2006. "Somali Parents' Experiences of Bringing up Children in Finland: Exploring Social-Cultural Change within Migrant Households." *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 7 (3).
- Fischer, Michael. 1980. *Iran: From Religious Dispute to Revolution*. Cambridge, Mass.; London: Harvard University Press.
- Flathman, Richard. 2003. *Freedom and Its Conditions: Discipline, Autonomy, and Resistance*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel. 1966. *Les Mots et Les Choses: Une Archéologie Des Sciences Humaines*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- Foucault, Michel. 1969. *L'archéologie Du Savoir*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- Foucault, Michel. 1975. *Surveiller et Punir: Naissance de La Prison*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- Foucault, Michel. 1976. *Histoire de La Sexualité Vol 1. La Volonté de Savoir*. 1. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- Foucault, Michel. 1977. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage.
- Foucault, Michel. 1983. "The Subject and Power." In *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, by Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, 2nd ed, 208–226. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, Michel. 1984. *Histoire de La Sexualité Vol II. L'usage Des Plaisirs*. Paris: Éditions Gallimard.
- Foucault, Michel. (1984) 1990. *The History of Sexuality Vol. 2: The Use of Pleasure*. Translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, Michel. 1997. *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*. Edited by Paul Rabinow. Translated by Robert Hurley. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984 1. New York: New Press.
- Foucault, Michel. (1984a) 1997. "Preface to the History of Sexuality, Volume Two." In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow, translated by Robert Hurley, xlv, 334 p. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984 1. New York: New Press.
- Foucault, Michel. (1982) 1997. "Technologies of the Self." In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow, translated by Robert Hurley, 223–253. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984 1. New York: New Press.
- Foucault, Michel. (1984b) 1997. "The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom." In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow, translated by Robert Hurley, 281–301. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984 1. New York: New Press.

- Foucault, Michel. (1976) 1998. *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: The Will to Knowledge*. London: Penguin Books Limited.
- Foucault, Michel. 2000. *Power*. Edited by James Faubion. Translated by Robert Hurley. Essential Works of Michel Foucault 1954–1984, Vol. 3. London: Allen Lane.
- Foucault, Michel. (1969) 2002. *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith. London: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel. (1966) 2005. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Foucault, Michel. 2007. *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1977–78*. Edited by Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana. Translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Picador.
- Foucault, Michel. 2008. *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–1979*. Edited by Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana. Translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Picador.
- Foucault, Michel. 2014. *On the Government of the Living: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1979–1980*. Edited by Michel Senellart, François Ewald, and Alessandro Fontana. Translated by Graham Burchell. New York: Picador.
- Foucault, Michel, Graham Burchell, Peter Miller, and Colin Gordon. 1991. *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*. Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, Michel, and Paul Rabinow. (1984) 1997. “Polemics, Politics, and Problematizations: An Interview with Michel Foucault.” In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow, translated by Robert Hurley, 111–119. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984 1. New York: New Press.
- Fox, Jonathan, and Yasemin Akbaba. 2015. “Securitization of Islam and Religious Discrimination: Religious Minorities in Western Democracies, 1990–2008.” *Comparative European Politics* 13 (2): 175–197.
- Francisco, Adam S. 2007. *Martin Luther and Islam*. Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill. <https://brill.com/view/title/13756>.
- Frank, Richard. 1992. *Creation and the Cosmic System: Al-Ghazālī and Avicenna*. Abhandlungen Der Heidelberger Akademie Der Wissenschaften. Heidelberg: Carl Winter Universitätsverlag.
- Freiesleben, Anna Mikaela v. 2016. “Et Danmark af parallelsamfund: Segregering, ghettoisering og social sammenhængskraft: Parallelsamfundet i dansk diskurs 1968–2013—fra utopi til dystopi.” København: Københavns Universitet.
- Fromm, Erich. 1941. *Escape from Freedom*. New York: Farrar & Rinehart.
- Furani, Khaled. 2018. “Mastering Submission: Palestinian Poets Measuring Sounds of ‘Freedom.’” *American Anthropologist* 120 (4).
- Fussell, Susan R., and Robert M. Krauss. 1992. “Coordination of Knowledge in Communication: Effects of Speakers’ Assumptions About What Others Know.” *Journal of*

- Personality and Social Psychology* 62 (3): 378–391. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.62.3.378>.
- Gad, Ulrik Pram. 2011. "Muslimer som trussel: Identitet, sikkerhed og modforanstaltninger." In *Islam og Muslimer i Danmark: Religion, identitet og sikkerhed efter 11. september 2001*, edited by Marianne Holm Pedersen and Mikkel Rytter, 115–142. København: Museum Tusulanum.
- Gaffney, Patrick. 1994. *The Prophet's Pulpit: Islamic Preaching in Contemporary Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gaibazzi, Paolo. 2012. "'God's Time Is the Best': Religious Imagination and the Wait for Emigration in the Gambia." In *Global Horizon: Expectation of Migration in Africa the Middle East*, edited by K. Graw and S. Schielke, 121–135. Leuven: University Press.
- Galal, Lise Paulsen, and Inge Liengaard. 2003. *At være muslim i Danmark*. Frederiksberg: Anis.
- Gallie, Walter Bryce. 1956. "Essentially Contested Concepts." *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 56 (New Series, 1955–1956): 167–198.
- Garden, Kenneth. 2014. *The First Islamic Reviver: Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī and His Revival of the Religious Sciences*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Gardet, Louise. 2012. "Ikhtiyār." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, 111: 1062b. Brill.
- Gardet, Louise. 2019. "Al-Ḳaḍā' Wa 'l-Ḳadar." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs, 111:1062b. Brill.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1968. *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*. New Haven; London: Yale University Press.
- Geertz, Clifford. 2002. "An Inconstant Profession: The Anthropological Life in Interesting Times." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 31 (1): 1–19.
- Gellner, Ernest. 1969. *Saints of the Atlas*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Gellner, Ernest. 1981. *Muslim Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- George, Kenneth. 2009. "Ethics, Iconoclasm, and Qur'anic Art in Indonesia." *Cultural Anthropology* 24 (4): 589–621.
- Gezen, Dilansev. 2014. "Homoseksuelle muslimer i Danmark." Københavns: Københavns Universitet.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Muhammad al-. 1993. *Revival of Religious Learnings (Ihya'ulum al-Din)*. Translated by Fazl-ul Karim. Karachi: Darul-Ishaat.
- Ghazali, Abu Hamid Muhammad al-. 2010. *The Alchemy of Happiness*. Translated by Claud Field. Revised ed. London: J. Murray.
- Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of a Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

- Gilsenan, Michael. 1973. *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt: An Essay in the Sociology of Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Gilsenan, Michael. 1982. *Recognizing Islam: An Anthropologist's Introduction*. London: Croom Helm.
- Gilsenan, Michael. 2008. *Recognizing Islam: An Anthropologist's Introduction*. London: I.B. Tauris.
- Goldstein, Daniel M., and Keisha-Khan Y. Perry. 2017. "Activist Anthropology: A Conversation between Daniel M. Goldstein and Keisha-Khan Y. Perry." *American Anthropologist* website, March 27.
- Gramsci, Antonio. (1949) 2007. *Prison Notebooks, Volume III*. Edited and translated by Joseph A. Buttigieg. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gramsci, Antonio, and David Forgacs. 1988. *A Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916–1935*. Translated by Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith. London: Lawrence and Wishart.
- Granholm, Kennet. 2005. *Embracing the Dark: The Magic Order of Dragon Rouge: Its Practice in Dark Magic and Meaning Making*. Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press.
- Greenberg, Joseph H. 1947. "Islam and Clan Organization among the Hausa." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 3 (3): 193–211.
- Grillo, Ralph. 2003. "Cultural Essentialism and Cultural Anxiety." *Anthropological Theory* 3 (2): 157–173.
- Grof, Stanislav, and Christina Grof. 1989. *Spiritual Emergency: When Personal Transformation Becomes a Crisis*. Los Angeles: Jeremy P. Tarcher.
- Gumperz, John, and Dell Hymes. 1972. *Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication*. New York and London: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Gundelach, Peter. 2002. *Det er dansk*. København: Hans Reitzel.
- Haddad, Yvonne Yazbeck. 2002. *Muslims in the West: From Sojourners to Citizens*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hadetoft, U. 2006. "Divergens Eller Konvergens? Perspektiver i Den Dansk-Svenske Sammenstilling." In *Invandrare Och Integration i Danmark Och Sveriger*, edited by U. Hedetoft, B. Petersson, and S. Sturfelt, 390–407. Lund: Centrum for Danmarkstudier/Madadam.
- Haga, Rannveig. 2015. "'Freedom Has Destroyed the Somali Family': Somali Parents' Experiences of Epistemic Injustice and Its Influence on Their Raising of Swedish Muslims." In *Making European Muslims*, edited by Mark Sedgwick, 39–55. New York: Routledge.
- Hamdy, Sherine F. 2009. "Islam, Fatalism, and Medical Intervention: Lessons from Egypt on the Cultivation of Forbearance (Sabr) and Reliance on God (Tawakkul)." *Anthropological Quarterly* 82 (1): 173–196.
- Hammersley, Martyn. 2005. "Ethnography and Discourse Analysis: Incompatible or Complementary?" *Polifonia* 10 (10).

- Hammoudi, Abdellah. 1988. *La Victime et Ses Masques: Essai Sur Le Sacrifice et La Mas-carade Au Maghreb*. Paris: Seuil.
- Hammoudi, Abdellah. 1997. *Master and Disciple: The Cultural Foundations of Moroccan Authoritarianism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Haniffa, Farzana. 2008. "Piety as Politics amongst Muslim Women in Contemporary Sri Lanka." *Modern Asian Studies* 42 (May): 347–375.
- Hansen, Torben, Helle Merete Brix, and Lars Hedegaard. 2006. *I krigens hus: Islams kolonisering af Vesten*. 1. udgave. Højbjerg: Hovedland.
- Haug, Sonja, Stephanie Meussig, and Anja Stichs. 2009. *Deutsche Islam Konferenz: A Study Conducted on Behalf of The German Conference on Islam*. Berlin: Deutsche Islam Konferenz.
- Hauge, Hans. 2013. *Danmark*. Tænkepauser 8. Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag.
- Hayek, Friedrich August. 2013. *The Constitution of Liberty*. Chicago: University Of Chicago Press.
- Heather, Noel. 2000. *Religious Language and Critical Discourse Analysis: Ideology and Identity in Christian Discourse Today*. Vol. 5. Peter Lang Pub Inc.
- Henkel, Heiko. 2010. "Fundamentally Danish? The Muhammad Cartoon Crisis as Transitional Drama." *Human Architecture* 8 (2): 67.
- Henkel, Heiko. 2012. "The Political Anthropology of Scandinavia after July 22, 2011." *American Anthropologist* 114 (2): 353–355.
- Herbert, David, and Janna Hansen. 2018. "'You Are No Longer My Flesh and Blood': Social Media and the Negotiation of a Hostile Media Frame by Danish Converts to Islam." *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, no. 1: 4–21.
- Hervik, Peter. 1999. *Den generende forskellighed: Danske svar på den stigende multikulturalisme*. København: Hans Reitzel.
- Hervik, Peter. 2002. *Mediernes muslimer: En antropologisk undersøgelse af mediernes dækning af religioner i Danmark*. Kbh.: Nævnet for Etnisk Ligestilling.
- Hervik, Peter. 2004. "The Danish Cultural World of Unbridgeable Differences." *Ethnos* 69 (2): 247–267.
- Hervik, Peter. 2006a. "The Emergence of Neo-Nationalism in Denmark, 1992–2001." In *Neo-Nationalism in Europe and beyond: Perspectives from Social Anthropology*, edited by Marcus Banks and André Gingrich, 136–161. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Hervik, Peter. 2006b. "The Predictable Responses to the Danish Cartoons." *Global Media and Communication* 2 (2): 225–230.
- Hervik, Peter. 2011. *The Annoying Difference: The Emergence of Danish Neonationalism, Neoracism, and Populism in the Post-1989 World*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Hervik, Peter. 2012. "Ending Tolerance as a Solution to Incompatibility: The Danish 'Crisis of Multiculturalism.'" *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 15 (2): 211–225.
- Hervik, Peter. 2018. "Ten Years after the Danish Muhammad Cartoon News Stories: Ter-

- ror and Radicalization as Predictable Media Events." *Television & New Media* 19 (2): 146–154.
- Highmore, Ben. 2002. *The Everyday Life Reader*. London: Routledge.
- Hirschkind, Charles. 1996. "Heresy or Hermeneutics: The Case of Nasr Hamid Abu Zayd." *American Journal of Islamic Social Sciences* 12 (4): 463–477.
- Hirschkind, Charles. 2001. "The Ethics of Listening: Cassette-Sermon Audition in Contemporary Egypt." *American Ethnologist* 28 (3): 623–649. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2001.28.3.623>.
- Hirschkind, Charles. 2003. "Popular Preaching and Religious Authority in the Medieval Islamic Near East." *History of Religions* 42 (3): 255–256.
- Hirschkind, Charles. 2006. *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hirschkind, Charles. 2010. "Secularism Confronts Islam." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 42 (1): 145–147.
- Hirschkind, Charles. 2011. "Is There a Secular Body?" *Cultural Anthropology* 26 (4): 633–647.
- Hjarvard, Stig. 2011. "The Mediatization of Religion: Theorising Religion, Media and Social Change." *Culture and Religion* 12 (2): 119–135.
- Hjarvard, Stig. 2016. "Mediatization and the Changing Authority of Religion." *Media Culture & Society* 38 (1): 8–17.
- Hjelm, Titus. 2014. "Religion, Discourse and Power: A Contribution towards a Critical Sociology of Religion." *Critical Sociology* 40 (6): 855–872.
- Ho, Engseng. 2006. *The Graves of Tarim: Genealogy and Mobility across the Indian Ocean*. Berkeley, CA; London: University of California Press.
- Holbraad, Martin, and Morten Axel Pedersen. 2017. *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition*. New Departures in Anthropology. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Holmboe, Knud. 1931. *Ørkenen Brænder: Oplevelser Blandt Saharas Og Libyens Beduiner*.
- Holmboe, Knud. 1937. *Desert Encounter: An Adventurous Journey Through Italian Africa*. New York: Putnam.
- Houston, Christopher. 2009. "The Islam of Anthropology." *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 20 (2): 198–212.
- Humphrey, Caroline. 2005. "Alternative Freedoms." *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 151 (1): 1–10.
- Hussain, Waseem. 2017. *Imam bag tremmer*. København: Gyldendal.
- Hussein, Tarek Ziad. 2018. *Det sorte skæg: om at være dansk muslim*. København: Gyldendal.
- Hymes, Dell. 1964. "Introduction: Toward Ethnographies of Communication." *American Anthropologist* 66 (6): 1–34.
- Hymes, Dell. 1972. "Models of Interaction of Language and Social Life." In *Directions*

- in Sociolinguistics*, by Dell Hymes and John Gumperz. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
- Ihle, Annette Haaber. 2007. *Magt, Medborgerskab Og Muslimske Friskoler: Traditioner, Idealer Og Politikker*. København: Institut for Tværkulturelle og Regionale Studier, Københavns Universitet.
- Ingold, Tim. 2011. *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Ismail, Abir M. 2017. "Muḥajababes. Meet the new fashionable, attractive and extrovert Muslim woman. A study of the hijābpractice among individualized young Muslim women in Denmark." *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning*.
- Iversen, Hans Raun, Peter Gundelach, and Margit Warburg. 2008. *I hjertet af Danmark: institutioner og mentaliteter*. 1. udgave. Religion i det 21. århundrede 22. København: Hans Reitzel.
- Izutsu, Toshihiko. 2002. *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*. Montreal & Kingston; London; Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press.
- Jacobsen, Brian Arly. 2012. "Muslims in Denmark: A Critical Evaluation of Estimations." In *Islam in Denmark: The Challenge of Diversity*, edited by Jørgen Nielsen, 31–56. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.
- Jacobsen, Brian Arly, and Niels Valdemar. 2019. "Denmark." In *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe, Volume 11*, 199–217. Leiden: Brill.
- Jäger, Siegfried. 2004. *Kritische Diskursanalyse: Eine Einführung*. 4th ed. Münster: UNRAST-Verlag.
- Jakobsen, Jens Steensgaard. 2011. "Præmisser for dialog efter 11. september 2001: Gülenbevægelsen I danske offentlige sfærer." In *Islam og Muslimer i Danmark: Religion, identitet og sikkerhed efter 11. september 2001*, edited by Marianne Holm Pedersen and Mikkel Rytter, 245–264. København: Museum Tusulanum.
- Jenkins, Richard. 2008. *Social Identity*. 3. ed. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Jenkins, Richard. 2011. *Being Danish: Paradoxes of Identity in Everyday Life*. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum.
- Jensen, Tina Gudrun. 2006. "Religious Authority and Autonomy Intertwined: The Case of Converts to Islam in Denmark." *The Muslim World* 96 (4): 643–660.
- Jensen, Tina Gudrun. 2008. "To Be 'Danish', Becoming 'Muslim': Contestations of National Identity?" *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 34 (3): 389–409.
- Johansen, Karen-Lise. 2002. *Muslimske stemmer: Religøst forandring blandt unge muslimer i Danmark*. København: Akademisk Forlag.
- Johansen, Mette-Louise. 2018. "Navigating the Politics of Anxiety: Moral Outrage, Responsiveness and State Accountability in Denmark." *Conflict and Society* 4: 9–22.
- Johansen, Mette-Louise, and Steffen Jensen. 2017. "'They Want Us out': Urban Regeneration and the Limits of Integration in the Danish Welfare State." *Critique of Anthropology* 37 (3): 297.

- Jöhncke, Steffen. 2011. "Integrating Denmark: The Welfare State as National(Ist) Accomplishment." In *The Question of Integration: Immigration, Exclusion and the Danish Nation State*, edited by Karen Fog Olwig and Karsten Paerregaard, 30–53. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars.
- Jones, Alan. 2005. *Arabic through the Qur'an*. Cambridge, UK: The Islamic Texts Society.
- Jones, Carla. 2010. "Materializing Piety: Gendered Anxieties about Faithful Consumption in Contemporary Urban Indonesia." *American Ethnologist* 37 (4): 617–637. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-1425.2010.01275.x>.
- Joppke, Christian. 2013. "Limits of Integration Policy: Britain and Her Muslims." In *Muslims and the State in the Post-9/11 West*, edited by Erik Bleich. New York: Routledge.
- Jørgensen, Marianne, and Louise Phillips. 2002. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London: SAGE.
- Jørgensen, Signe. 2011. "Sharia of dødsstraf: Et indblik i komplekse troværdighedsbetingelser." In *Islam og Muslimer i Danmark: Religion, identitet og sikkerhed efter 11. september 2001*, edited by Marianne Holm Pedersen and Mikkel Rytter, 189–218. København: Museum Tusulanum.
- Jung, Dietrich. 2011. *Orientalists, Islamists and the Global Public Sphere: A Genealogy of the Modern Essentialist Image of Islam*. London: Equinox.
- Kærgård, Niels. 2010. "Social Cohesion and the Transformation from Ethnic to Multicultural Society: The Case of Denmark." *Ethnicities* 10 (4): 470–487.
- Kashi, Iman M. 2012. *Shī'isme: Oprindelse, tro & praksis*. Gentofte: Hjelm.
- Katz, Jack, and Thomas Csordas. 2003. "Phenomenological Ethnography in Sociology and Anthropology." *Ethnography* 4 (3): 275–288.
- Kaya, Ayhan. 2010. "Individualization and Institutionalization of Islam in Europe in the Age of Securitization." *Insight Turkey* 12 (1): 47.
- Keller, Reiner. 2013. *Doing Discourse Research: An Introduction for Social Scientists*. Los Angeles and London: SAGE.
- Khader, Naser. 2013. *Bekendelser Fra En Kulturkristen Muslim*. København: Kristeligt Dagblad.
- Khan, Mariam. 2019. *It's Not about the Burqa: Muslim Women on Faith, Feminism, Sexuality and Race*. London: Picador.
- Khan, Naveeda Ahmed. 2006. "Of Children and Jinn: An Inquiry into an Unexpected Friendship during Uncertain Times." *Cultural Anthropology* 21 (2): 234–264.
- Khan, Naveeda Ahmed. 2012. *Muslim Becoming: Aspiration and Skepticism in Pakistan*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Khankan, Sherin. 2018. *Women Are the Future of Islam: A Memoir of Hope*. London: Rider.
- Khawaja, Iram. 2011. "Blikkene: Muslimskhedens synlighed, kropsliggørelse og forhandling." In *Islam og Muslimer i Danmark: Religion, identitet og sikkerhed efter 11. september 2001*, edited by Marianne Holm Pedersen and Mikkel Rytter, 269–291. København: Museum Tusulanum.

- Klausen, Jytte. 2009. *The Cartoons That Shook the World*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Klausen, Jytte. 2013. "British Counter-Terrorism After 7/7: Adapting Community Policing to the Fight Against Domestic Terrorism." In *Muslims and the State in the Post-9/11 West*, edited by Erik Bleich. New York: Routledge.
- Knudsen, Britta Timm, and Carsten Stage. 2015. *Affective Methodologies: Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affect*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, Hampshire.
- Köse, Ali. 1996. *Conversion to Islam. A Study of Native British Converts*. London: Keagan Paul.
- Kottak, Conrad Phillip. 2000. *Cultural Anthropology: Appreciating Cultural Diversity (8th Edition)*. 8th ed. Boston; London: McGraw-Hill.
- Krarup, Søren. 2001. *Kristendom og danskhed: Prædikener og foredrag*. Høbjerg: Hovedland.
- Kroeber, Alfred Louis. 1923. *Anthropology*. New York: Harcourt Brace and Company.
- Kublitz, Anja. 2010. "The Cartoon Controversy: Creating Muslims in a Danish Setting." *Social Analysis: The International Journal of Social and Cultural Practice* 54 (3): 107–125.
- Kühle, Lene. 2006. *Moskeer i Danmark: Islam Og Muslimske Bedesteder*. Høbjerg: Forlaget Univers.
- Kühle, Lene. 2011a. "Concluding Remarks on Religion and State in the Nordic Countries." *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 24 (2): 205–213.
- Kühle, Lene. 2011b. "Excuse Me, Which Radical Organization Are You a Member of? Reflections on Methods to Study Highly Religious but Non-Organized Muslims." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 34 (7): 1186–1200.
- Kühle, Lene. 2011c. "Radikalisering: Ekstremisme eller vækkelse? En undersøgelse af aarhusianske muslimers holdninger." In *Islam og Muslimer i Danmark: Religion, identitet og sikkerhed efter 11. september 2001*, edited by Marianne Holm Pedersen and Mikkel Rytter, 115–142. København: Museum Tusulanum.
- Kühle, Lene. 2012. "Mosques and Organizations." In *Islam in Denmark: The Challenge of Diversity*, edited by Jørgen Nielsen, 81–94. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.
- Kühle, Lene. 2016. "Moskeer i Danmark som aktører i det islamiske felt: Teoretiske og metodiske overvejelser." *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning*.
- Kühle, Lene, and Malik Larsen. 2019. *Danmarks moskéer: Mangfoldighed og samspil*. Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag.
- Kühle, Lene, and Lasse Lindekilde. 2010. *Radicalization among Young Muslims in Aarhus*. The Centre for Studies in Islamism and Radicalisation & Department of Political Science, Aarhus University.
- Kühle, Lene, and Lasse Lindekilde. 2012. "Radicalisation and the Limits of Tolerance: A Danish Case-Study." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 38 (10): 1607–1623.

- Kundnani, Arun. 2012. "Radicalisation: The Journey of a Concept." *Race & Class* 54 (2): 3–25.
- Kvaale, Katja. 2011. "Something Begotten in the State of Denmark? Immigrants, Territorialized Culture, and the Danes as an Indigenous People." *Anthropological Theory* 11 (2): 223–255.
- Lacan, Jacques. 1966. *Écrits*. Paris: Éditions de Seuil.
- Lacan, Jacques. 1981. *Le Séminaire de Jacques Lacan. Livre 3, Les Psychoses*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil.
- Lacan, Jacques. (1966) 2001. *Écrits: A Selection*. Translated by Alan Scheridan. Routledge Classics. London and New York: Routledge.
- Lacan, Jacques. (2005) 2015. *The Triumph of Religion, Preceded by Discourse to Catholics*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Laclau, Ernesto. 1993. "Discourse." In *A Companion to Contemporary Political Philosophy*, edited by Robert Goodin, Philip Pettit, and Thomas Pogge. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Laclau, Ernesto. 1996. *Emancipation(s)*. London and New York: Verso.
- Laclau, Ernesto. 2006. "On the Names of God." In *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, edited by Hent de Vries and Lawrence Eugene Sullivan.
- Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.
- Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. (1985) 2001. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. 2nd. ed. London: Verso.
- Lægaard, Sune. 2010. "Religiøse symboler, religionsfrihed og det offentlige rum: "Stor-moskeer" i København." *Politik*.
- Laidlaw, James. 2002. "For An Anthropology Of Ethics And Freedom." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 8 (2): 311–332.
- Laidlaw, James. 2014. *The Subject of Virtue: An Anthropology of Ethics and Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Lakoff, George. 2006. *Whose Freedom? The Battle over America's Most Important Idea*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Lambek, Michael. 1993. *Knowledge and Practice in Mayotte: Local Discourses of Islam, Sorcery and Spirit Possession*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Lambek, Michael. 2010. *Ordinary Ethics: Anthropology, Language, and Action*. Fordham University Press.
- Larsen, Birgitte Romme. 2011. "Becoming Part of Welfare Scandinavia: Integration through the Spatial Dispersal of Newly Arrived Refugees in Denmark." *Journal of Ethnic Migration Studies* 37 (2): 333–350.
- Larsson, Göran, and Lasse Lindekilde. 2009. "Muslim Claims-Making in Context: Comparing the Danish and the Swedish Muhammad Cartoons Controversies." *Ethnicities* 9 (3): 361–382.
- Latham, Kevin. 2009. "Media and the Limits of Cynicism in Postsocialist China." In

- Enduring Socialism: Explorations of Revolution and Transformation, Restoration and Continuation*, edited by Harry G. West and Parvathi Raman, 190–213. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Leach, Edmund Ronald. 1963. "Law as a Condition of Freedom." In *The Concept of Freedom in Anthropology*, edited by David Bidney. The Hague: Mouton.
- Lee, Dorothy. 1959. *Freedom and Culture*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Spectrum Book / Prentice-Hall.
- Lempert, Michael. 2013. "No Ordinary Ethics." *Anthropological Theory* 13 (4): 370–393.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1950. *Introduction à l'oeuvre de Marcel Mauss*. Paris: Presses universitaires de France.
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude. 1958. *Anthropologie Structurale*. Paris: Plon.
- Lewis, Iain. 1984. *Sufism in Somaliland: A Study in Tribal Islam*. Islam in Tribal Societies: From the Atlas to the Indus, 127–168. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Lincoln, Bruce. 1989. *Discourse and the Construction of Society: Comparative Studies of Myth, Ritual, and Classification*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lindekilde, Lasse. 2008. "Contested Caricatures: Dynamics of Muslim Claims-Making during the Muhammad Caricatures Controversy." Ph-D afhandling, Florence: European University Institute, Department of Political and Social Sciences.
- Lindekilde, Lasse. 2012. "Neo-Liberal Governing of 'Radicals': Danish Radicalization Prevention Policies and Potential Iatrogenic Effects." *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 6 (1): 109.
- Lindekilde, Lasse. 2014. "The Mainstreaming of Far-Right Discourse in Denmark." *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies* 12 (4): 363–382.
- Lindekilde, Lasse, Per Mouritsen, and Ricard Zapata-Barrero. 2009. "The Muhammad Cartoons Controversy in Comparative Perspective." *Ethnicities* 9 (3): 291–313.
- Lindsay, James. 2005. *Daily Life in the Medieval Islamic World*. London: Greenwood Press.
- Lizzio, Ken. 2009. "Islam Avoided: A Review of Islam Obscured: The Thetoric of Anthropological Representation by Daniel Martin Varisco." *The Journal of North African Studies* 14 (2): 309–316.
- Louw, Maria Elisabeth. 2007. *Everyday Islam in Post-Soviet Central Asia*. Central Asian Studies Series 7. London; New York: Routledge.
- Lukens-Bull, Ronald. 2007. "Lost in a Sea of Subjectivity: The Subject Position of the Researcher in the Anthropology of Islam." *Contemporary Islam* 1 (2): 173–192.
- Macdonell, Diane. 1986. *Theories of Discourse: An Introduction*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Madsen, Abdus Salam. (1967) 2009. *Koranen, Med Dansk Oversættelse Og Noter*. København: Borgens Forlag.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2001. "Rehearsed Spontaneity and the Conventionality of Ritual: Disciplines of Šalat." *American Ethnologist* 28 (4): 827–853. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2001.28.4.827>.

- Mahmood, Saba. 2005. *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*. Princeton, N.J.; Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2006. "Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation." *Public Culture* 18 (2): 323–347.
- Mahmood, Saba. 2012. "Ethics and Piety." In *A Companion to Moral Anthropology*, edited by Didier Fassin, 223–241. Blackwell Companions to Anthropology. Hoboken: Wiley Blackwell.
- Mahmoud, Abdel Aziz. 2016. *Hvor taler du flot dansk!* København: Politiken.
- Mahmoud, Ahmad. 2015. *Sort Land: Fortællinger Fra Ghettoen*. København: People's Press.
- Majid, Amér. 2015. *Den Klare Koran: Koranen i Ny Dansk Oversættelse*. København: Forlaget Tronen.
- Makris, Gerasimos. 2007. *Islam in the Middle East: A Living Tradition*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Malinowski, Bronisław Kasper. 1944. *Freedom and Civilization*. New York: Roy Publishers.
- Malinowski, Bronisław Kasper. 1947. *Freedom and Civilization*. London: George Allen & Unwin.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. 2002. "Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: A Political Perspective on Culture and Terrorism." *American Anthropologist* 104 (3): 766–775.
- Mamdani, Mahmood. 2004. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. 1. ed. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Mandel, David. 2010. "Radicalization: What Does It Mean?" In *Home-Grown Terrorism: Understanding and Addressing the Root Causes of Radicalisation Among Groups with an Immigrant Heritage in Europe.*, edited by T.M. Pick, A. Speckhard, and B. Jacuch, 101–113. Amsterdam: IOS Press.
- Mánnsson, Anna. 2002. *Becoming Muslim*. Lund: Etnologiska Institutionen.
- Marranci, Gabriele. 2008. *The Anthropology of Islam*. Oxford: Berg.
- Marshall, Ruth. 2014. "Christianity, Anthropology, Politics." *Current Anthropology* 55 (S10): S344–356.
- Mårtensson, Ulrika. 2014. "Introduction: 'Public Islam' and the Nordic Welfare State: Changing Realities?" *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning* 8 (1): 4–55.
- Martin, Craig. 2017. *A Critical Introduction to the Study of Religion*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Routledge.
- Massignon, Louis, and Louis Gardet. 2012. "Al-Ḥallādī." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by P. Bearman, Th Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, and W.P. Heinrichs. Brill. http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_COM_0256.
- Masuzawa, Tomoko. 1993. *In Search of Dreamtime: The Quest for the Origin of Religion*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.
- McCutcheon, Russell T. 2007. *Studying Religion: An Introduction*. London: Equinox.

- McLuhan, Marshall. 1964. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. 1st ed. New York and London: McGraw-Hill.
- McLuhan, Marshall. 1999. *The Medium and the Light: Reflections on Religion and Media*. Edited by Eric McLuhan and Jacek Szklarek. Toronto: Stoddart.
- Mead, Margaret. 1964. "The Concept of Freedom in Anthropology, by David Bidney." *American Anthropologist* 66 (6): 1402–1403.
- Menin, Laura. 2015. "The Impasse of Modernity: Personal Agency, Divine Destiny, and the Unpredictability of Intimate Relationships in Morocco." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 21 (4): 892–910.
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. (1945) 2005. *Phenomenology of Perception*. Translated by Colin Smith. London and New York: Routledge.
- Mernissi, Fatima. 1975. *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in a Modern Muslim Society*. Cambridge: Schenkman.
- Michot, Yahya. 2005. "The Image of God in Humanity from a Muslim Perspective." In *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians, Muslims in Conversation*, edited by N. Solomon, R. Harries, and T. Winter, 163–174. London: T&T Clark.
- Mittermaier, Amira. 2019. "The Unknown in the Egyptian Uprising: Towards an Anthropology of al-Ghayb." *Contemporary Islam* 13 (1): 17–31.
- Moors, Annelies, and Emma Tarlo. 2007. "Introduction: Muslim Fashions." *Fashion Theory* 2 (Special Issue, June/September 3): 133–142.
- Mourad, Suleima A. 2017. "Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī." In *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Third Edition*, edited by Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson. Brill.
- Mumisa, Michal, and Mahmood Dhalla. 2013. *Shaykh Al-Ṣadūq's Kitāb al-Tawḥīd: The Book of Divine Unity, with Select Commentary by Ḥāshim al-Ḥusaynī al-Ṭihirānī*. Translated by Ali Adam. Birmingham: AMI Press.
- Munro, Ealasaid. 2013. "Feminism: A Fourth Wave?" *Political Insight* 4 (2): 22–25.
- Murata, Sachiko, and William C. Chittick. 2006. *The Vision of Islam: The Foundations of Muslim Faith and Practice*. London: Tauris.
- Murphy, T. 2000. "Discourse." In *Guide to the Study of Religion*, edited by Willi Braun and Russell McCutcheon. London and New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Navaro-Yashin, Y. 2002. "The Market for Identities: Secularism, Islamism, Commodities." In *Fragments of Culture: The Everyday in Modern Turkey*, edited by D. Kandiyoti and A. Saktanber, 221–253. London: Tauris.
- Netton, Ian Richard. 2016. *A Popular Dictionary of Islam*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.
- Nielsen, Jørgen Schøler. 2012. *Islam in Denmark: The Challenge of Diversity*. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Nielsen, Jørgen Schøler, and Jonas Otterbeck. 2016. *Muslims in Western Europe*. Fourth. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

- Nielsen, Marie Vejrup, and Lene Kühle. 2011. "Religion and State in Denmark: Exception among Exceptions?" *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society* 24 (2): 173–188.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. 1986. *The Fragility of Goodness: Luck and Ethics in Greek Tragedy and Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Okin, Susan Moller. 1999. *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Olwig, Karen Fog, and Karsten Pærregaard. 2011. *The Question of Integration: Immigration, Exclusion and the Danish Welfare State*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Omar, Sara. 2017. *Dødevaskeren*. 2. udgave. København: Politiken.
- Osella, Filippo, and Benjamin Soares. 2010. *Islam, Politics, Anthropology*. Special Issue Book Series. Chichester, U.K.: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Østergaard, Bent. 2007. *Indvandrerne i Danmarks Historie: Kultur-Og Religionsmøder*. 7. Odense: Syddansk Universitetsforlag.
- Pærregaard, Karsten, and Karen Fog Olwig. 2007. *Integration: Antropologiske perspektiver*. Migration & integration. København: Museum Tusculanum (Narayana Press).
- Paine, Robert, ed. 1981a. *Politically Speaking: Cross-Cultural Studies of Rhetoric*. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Paine, Robert. 1981b. "When Saying Is Doing." In *Politically Speaking*, edited by Robert Paine. Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.
- Pandolfo, Stefania. 2018. *Knot of the Soul: Madness, Psychoanalysis, Islam*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Pêcheux, Michel. 1975. *Les Vérités de La Palice: Linguistique, Sémantique, Philosophie*. Paris: F. Maspero.
- Pêcheux, Michel. (1975) 1982. *Language, Semantics and Ideology: Stating the Obvious*. Translated by Nagpal Harbans. London: Macmillan.
- Pedersen, Abdul Wahid. 2012. "Towards a European Understanding of Islam." In *Islam in Denmark: The Challenge of Diversity*, edited by Jørgen Nielsen, 81–94. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.
- Pedersen, Marianne Holm, and Mikkel Rytter. 2011. *Islam og Muslimer i Danmark: Religion, identitet og sikkerhed efter 11. september 2001*. København: Museum Tusculanum.
- Pedersen, Marianne Holm, and Mikkel Rytter. 2012. "Fra Integration Til Sikkerhed—Med Danmark Som Case." *Internasjonal Politikk* 70 (1): 97–104.
- Pedersen, Marianne Holm, and Mikkel Rytter. 2014. "A Decade of Suspicion: Islam and Muslims in Denmark after 9/11." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37 (13): 2303–2321.
- Petersen, Jesper. 2016. *Kvinderne i Medina: Imamer, lærde og krigere*. Rødovre: Magistrenes Forlag.
- Petersen, Jesper. 2018. "Frihed Og Rollemodeller." *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning* 12 (1): 29–

- Petersen, Jesper. 2019. "Media and the Female Imam." *Religions* 10 (3): 159.
- Pipes, Daniel. 2015. "Are Muslims Fatalists?" *Middle East Quarterly*, no. Fall 2015.
- Pittelkow, Ralf. 2003. *Efter 11. september: Vesten og islam*. 3. udgave. Kbh.: Lindhardt og Ringhof.
- Powdermaker, Hortense. 1939. *After Freedom: A Cultural Study in the Deep South*. New York: Russell and Russell.
- Rabinow, Paul. (1984) 1997. "Introduction: The History of Systems of Thought." In *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, edited by Paul Rabinow, xi–xlii. The Essential Works of Michel Foucault, 1954–1984 1. New York: New Press.
- Rampton, Martha. 2015. "Four Waves of Feminism." *Pacific University Oregon* 25 (October).
- Rapport, Nigel, and Joanna Overing. 2014. *Social and Cultural Anthropology: The Key Concepts*. 3rd ed. London and New York: Routledge.
- Razack, Sherene. 2007. *Casting out: The Eviction of Muslims from Western Law and Politics*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Renders, Johannes. 2018. "I want you to be a Muslim: Religious subjectivity, proselytization, and discursive conversion in an ethnography of Islam." *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning* 1 (12): 55–77.
- Riesman, Paul. 1974. *Freedom in Fulani Social Life: An Introspective Ethnography*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Roald, Anne Sofie. 2004. *New Muslims in the European Context: The Experience of Scandinavian Converts*. Leiden: Brill.
- Robbins, Joel. 2004. *Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment in a Papua New Guinea Society*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Robbins, Joel. 2007. "Between Reproduction and Freedom: Morality, Value, and Radical Cultural Change." *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology* 72 (3): 293–314.
- Robbins, Joel. 2012. "On Becoming Ethical Subjects: Freedom, Constraint, and the Anthropology of Morality." *Anthropology of This Century* 5.
- Rohe, Mathias. 2016. *Der Islam in Deutschland: Eine Bestandsaufnahme*. München: C.H. Beck.
- Rose, Flemming. 2005. "Ytringsfrihed: Muhammeds Ansigt." *Weekendavisen*, September 30, 2005.
- Rose, Flemming. 2015. *Hymne til friheden*. København: Jyllands-Postens Forlag.
- Rosen, Lawrence. 1984. *Bargaining for Reality: The Construction of Social Relations in a Muslim Community*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Rosen, Lawrence. 1989. *The Anthropology of Justice: Law as Culture in Islamic Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Rosenthal, Franz. (1970) 2007. *Knowledge Triumphant: The Concept of Knowledge in Medieval Islam*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
- Rouse, Carolyn, and Janet Hoskins. 2004. "Purity, Soul Food, and Sunni Islam: Explo-

- rations at the Intersection of Consumption and Resistance." *Cultural Anthropology* 19 (2): 226–249.
- Ruda, Frank. 2016a. *Abolishing Freedom: A Plea for a Contemporary Use of Fatalism*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.
- Ruda, Frank. 2016b. "HKRB Interviews: Frank Ruda." Edited by Alfie Brown, September.
- Rytter, Mikkel. 2007. "“Familien Danmark” Og “De Fremmede”": Slægtsskabsbilleder i Dansk Integrationspolitik." In *Integration: Antropologiske Perspektiver*, edited by Karen Fog Olwig and Karsten Pærregaard, 63–86. Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanums forlag.
- Rytter, Mikkel. 2015. "The Scent of a Rose: Imitating Imitators as They Learn to Love the Prophet." In *Affective Methodologies: Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affect*, edited by Britta Timm Knudsen and Carsten Stage, 140–160. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
- Rytter, Mikkel. 2016. "By the Beard of the Prophet: Imitation, Reflection and World Transformation among Sufis in Denmark." *Ethnography* 17 (2): 229–249.
- Rytter, Mikkel. 2018. "Back to the Future: Religious Mobility among Danish Pakistani Sufi Muslims." *Journal of Ethnic Migration Studies* 44 (16): 2667–2683.
- Sahlins, Marshall David. 1993. *Waiting for Foucault*. Cambridge: Prickly Pear.
- Sahlins, Marshall David. 2002. *Waiting for Foucault, Still*. Chicago: Prickly Paradigm Press.
- Salvatore, Armando. 2007. *The Public Sphere: Liberal Modernity, Catholicism, Islam*. Culture and Religion in International Relations. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sapir, Edward. 1921. *Language: An Introduction to the Study of Speech*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.
- Saussure, Ferdinand de. (1916) 2011. *Course in General Linguistics*. Edited by Perry Meisel and Haun Saussy. Translated by Wade Baskin. New York and Chichester: Columbia University Press.
- Saville-Trocke, Muriel. 2003. *The Ethnography of Communication: An Introduction*. Third. Malden, Mass.; Oxford: Blackwell.
- Schanz, Hans-Jørgen. 2012. *Frihed (Tænkepauser)*. Aarhus University Press.
- Schielke, Joska Samuli. 2009. "Being Good in Ramadan: Ambivalence, Fragmentation, and the Moral Self in the Lives of Young Egyptians." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 15 (Special Issue): 24–40.
- Schielke, Joska Samuli, and Liza Debevec. 2012. *Ordinary Lives and Grand Schemes: An Anthropology of Everyday Religion*. Vol. 18. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Schmidt, Garbi. 2007. *Muslim i Danmark—muslim i verden: en analyse af muslimske ungdomsforeninger og muslimsk identitet i årene op til Muhammad-krisen*. Studier av inter-religiösa relationer; 37. Uppsala: Swedish Science Press.
- Schmidt, Garbi. 2011. "Law and Identity: Transnational Arranged Marriages and the

- Boundaries of Danishness." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 37 (2): 257–275.
- Schoen, Ulrich. 1976. *Determination Und Freiheit Im Arabischen Denken Heute. Eine Christliche Reflexion Im Gespräch Mit Naturwissenschaften Und Islam*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.
- Sealy, Thomas. 2017. "Making the 'Other' from 'Us': The Representation of British Converts to Islam in Mainstream British Newspapers." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 37 (2): 196–210.
- Sedgwick, Mark. 2010. "The Concept of Radicalization as a Source of Confusion." *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22 (4): 479–494.
- Sedgwick, Mark. 2015. *Making European Muslims: Religious Socialization among Young Muslims in Scandinavia and Western Europe*. New York: Routledge.
- Shakoor, Tallat. 2008. "Formål for muslimske friskoler i Danmark—udviklinger i formåls erklæringer og vedtægter i danske friskoler for muslimske børn." *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning*.
- Sheikh, Mona Kanwal, and Manni Crone. 2012. "Muslims as a Danish Security Issue." In *Islam in Denmark: The Challenge of Diversity*, edited by Jørgen Nielsen, 173–196. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.
- Siegel, James Theodore. 1969. *The Rope of God*. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Silva, Moises Lino e, and Huon Wardle. 2017a. *Freedom in Practice: Governance, Autonomy and Liberty in the Everyday*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Silva, Moises Lino e, and Huon Wardle. 2017b. "Testing Freedom: Ontological Considerations." *Etnofoor* 29 (1): 11–27.
- Silverstein, Paul. 2004. *Algeria in France: Transpolitics, Race, and Nation*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Simon, Gregory. 2009. "The Soul Freed of Cares? Islamic Prayer, Subjectivity, and the Contradictions of Moral Selfhood in Minangkabau, Indonesia." *American Ethnologist* 36 (2): 258–275.
- Simonsen, Jørgen Bæk. 1990. *Islam i Danmark: Muslimske institutioner i Danmark 1970–1989*. København: Statens Humanistiske Forskningsråd.
- Simonsen, Jørgen Bæk. 2004. *Islam med danske øjne: Danskeres syn på islam gennem 1000 år*. København: Akademisk Forlag.
- Simonsen, Jørgen Bæk. 2006. "Islam and Muslims in Denmark and Europe." In *East Is East and West Is West?*, 123–136. Ergon Verlag.
- Simonsen, Jørgen Bæk. 2008. *Hvad er islam*. 2. udgave. Hvad er. Kbh.: Akademisk.
- Simonsen, Jørgen Bæk. 2011. "Fortolkningen af islam i Danmark og dialektikken mellem majoritet og minoritet." In *Islam og Muslimer i Danmark: Religion, identitet og sikkerhed efter 11. september 2001*, edited by Marianne Holm Pedersen and Mikkel Rytter, 325. København: Museum Tusulanum.

- Simonsen, Jørgen Bæk. 2012. "Denmark, Islam and Muslims: Socioeconomic Dynamics and the Art of Becoming." In *Islam in Denmark: The Challenge of Diversity*, edited by Jørgen Schøler Nielsen, 13–31. Lanham: Lexington Books.
- Simpson, Edward, and Kai Kresse. 2008. *Struggling with History: Islam and Cosmopolitanism in the Western Indian Ocean*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Sinclair, Kirstine. 2012. "Hizb ut-Tahrir i Danmark og Storbritannien: Samtidige transnationale og nationale tendenser." *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning* 2012, nr. 1: 37–53.
- Skovgaard-Petersen, Jakob, and Thomas Hoffmann. 2018. "Er islam ufredens religion?" *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning* 12 (1).
- Sloterdijk, Peter. (1983) 1987. *Critique of Cynical Reason*. Translated by Michael Eldred. Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press.
- Smith, Christian. 2014. *The sacred project of American sociology*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Margaret. 2010. *Rabi'a The Mystic and Her Fellow-Saints in Islam*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Soares, Benjamin, and René Otaýek. 2007. *Islam and Muslim Politics in Africa*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sobhani, Ayatollah Ja'far. 2001. *Doctrines of Shi 'i Islam: A Compendium of Imami Beliefs and Practices*. Translated by Reza Shah-Kazemi. New York: IB Tauris & Co. Ltd.
- Starrett, Gregory. 1998. *Putting Islam to Work: Education, Politics, and Religious Transformation in Egypt*. Comparative Studies on Muslim Societies; 25. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Stenius, H. 1997. "The Good Life Is a Life of Conformity: The Impact of the Lutheran Tradition on Nordic Political Culture." In *The Cultural Construction of Norden*, edited by S. Øystein and S. Stråth, 161–171. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- Suhr, Christian. 2016. "Vi Vil Jo Ikke Gøre Satan Glad." *Politiken*, March 10, 2016, sec. Kroniken.
- Suhr, Christian. 2019. *Descending with Angels: Cover Descending with Angels Descending with Angels Islamic Exorcism and Psychiatry: A Film Monograph*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Taussig, Michael. 1993. *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses*. New York: Routledge.
- Taylor, Charles. 1998. "Modes of Secularism." In *Secularism and Its Critics*, edited by Rajeev Bhargava. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Tiilikainen, Marja. 2003. "Somali Women and Daily Islam in the Diaspora." *Social Compass* 50 (1): 59–69.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. 1977. *Théories Du Symbole*. Paris: Le Seuil.
- Torfin, Jacob. 2003. *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Žižek*. Repr. Oxford: Blackwell.

- Trouillot, Michel-Rolph. 2003. *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World*. 1. ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Valentine, Simon Ross. 2008. *Islam and the Ahmadiyya Jama'at, History, Belief, Practice*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Varisco, Daniel Martin. 2005. *Islam Obscured: The Rhetoric of Anthropological Representation*. 1st ed. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Waard, Fransje de. 2013. *Spiritual Crisis: Varieties and Perspectives of a Transpersonal Phenomenon*. Exeter: Imprint Academic.
- Watt, William Montgomery. 1946. "Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam." *The Muslim World* 36 (2): 124–152.
- Watt, William Montgomery. 1948. *Free Will and Predestination in Early Islam*. London: Luzac & Company.
- Weber, Max. (1921) 1978. *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. Edited by Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich. Vol. 1. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Weber, Max. (1905) 2001. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. Translated by Talcott Parsons. London and New York: Routledge.
- Werbner, Pnina. 1990. *The Migration Process: Capital, Gifts and Offerings among British Pakistanis*. New York; Oxford: Berg.
- Werbner, Pnina. 2002. *Pilgrims of Love: The Anthropology of a Global Sufi Cult*. London: C. Hurst.
- Wetherell, Margaret, Stephanie Taylor, and Simeon Yates. 2001. *Discourse Theory and Practice: A Reader*. London: SAGE.
- Whyte, Zachary. 2011. "Asyl, insh'allah: Tro of mistro i det danske asylsystem." In *Islam og Muslimer i Danmark: Religion, identitet og sikkerhed efter 11. september 2001*, edited by Marianne Holm Pedersen and Mikkel Rytter, 115–142. København: Museum Tusulanum.
- Wijzen, Frans. 2013. "'There Are Radical Muslims and Normal Muslims': An Analysis of the Discourse on Islamic Extremism." *Religion* 43 (1): 70–88.
- Willerslev, Rane, and Christian Suhr. 2018. "Is There a Place for Faith in Anthropology? Religion, Reason, and the Ethnographer's Divine Revelation." *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 8 (1–2): 65–78.
- Williams, Ryan J. 2017. "Finding Freedom and Rethinking Power: Islamic Piety in English High Security Prisons." *The British Journal of Criminology* 58 (3): 730–748.
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1953. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.
- Wolf, Eric Robert. 1951. "The Social Organization of Mecca and the Origins of Islam." *Southwestern Journal of Anthropology* 7 (4): 329–356.
- Wolf, Eric Robert. 1990. *Freedom and Freedoms: Anthropological Perspectives*. T.B. Davie Memorial Lecture, 29th. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

- Wrye, Harriet Kimble. 2009. "The Fourth Wave of Feminism: Psychoanalytic Perspectives Introductory Remarks." *Studies in Gender and Sexuality* 10 (4): 185–189.
- Zigon, Jarrett. 2007. "Moral Breakdown and the Ethical Demand: A Theoretical Framework for an Anthropology of Moralities." *Anthropological Theory* 7 (2): 131–150.
- Zigon, Jarrett. 2008. *Morality: An Anthropological Perspective*. Oxford; New York: Berg.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 1989. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. London: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 1997. "The Big Other Doesn't Exist." *Journal of European Psychoanalysis* 5 (Spring-Fall).
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2000. *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?* London and New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2006. *How to read Lacan*. London: Granta Books.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2008. "Preface to the Second Edition: A Glance into the Archives of Islam." In *The Fragile Absolute: Or, Why Is the Christian Legacy Worth Fighting For?*, 2nd ed., vii–xxvii. Essential Žižek. London and New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj. (1989) 2008. *The Sublime Object of Ideology*. 2nd ed. London and New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2012. *Less than Nothing: Hegel and the Shadow of Dialectical Materialism*. London; New York: Verso.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2018a. *Like A Thief In Broad Daylight: Power in the Era of Post-Humanity*. London: Penguin and Allen Lane.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2018b. "Are Liberals and Populists Just Searching for a New Master?" Edited by N. B. *Open Future*, October.
- Žižek, Slavoj. 2019. *Sex and the Failed Absolute*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Žižek, Slavoj, and Boris Gunjević. 2012. *God in Pain: Inversions of Apocalypse*. New York: Seven Stories Press.

Index

9/11 30–33, 50–51, 65, 142

Abu-Lughod, Lila 11, 52, 131, 165, 221–222, 265

Activism, activist 47–48, 48–52, 62–68, 68–71, 210–212, 221–226, 265

Agency 11, 135, 176, 184, 215, 219, 252–253
and power 15, 95, 98, 120, 121–125, 159, 165–166, 169, 176, 184, 191–195, 219, 229, 252–253

and submission 119–121, 148–149, 210, 214, 229

divine 77–79, 80–82, 97, 191–192

human 15, 60–62, 95, 122–129, 143, 159, 166, 169, 191–192, 205–206, 216, 223, 229

Akkari, Ahmed 50, 67–68, 217

al-Lauh al-Mahfūz, *see* Book of Destiny
al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar (Allah's Decree and Destiny) 21, 78, 88–106, 121–129, 135, 138–139, 158–160, 189, 199, 203–205, 210

Allah, God, Gud 6, 72, 77–118, 87, 119–135, 147–160, 161–206, 230–250

as big Other 17, 116–118, 152, 259, 261, 264

as Creator 21–22, 80–81, 93–94, 111–112, 119–125, 140, 174, 197, 208, 240–243

as Free 77–79

as giving freedom 118, 122–124, 146, 235, 241

as Guarantee of Truth 17, 75–76

as Ineffable 79–82, 85–88

as One, *see also* Tawḥīd 66, 78, 78–80, 81, 84–88, 107, 146, 172–173

as Self-Sufficient 78, 140–142, 151, 167

as Ultimate Master 116–118, 168

closeness to, *see* Qarīb

His Attributes, *see* Beautiful Names of Allah

His Call 107–116, 140–142, 148, 150–153, 160, 172, 258–260

His Commandments, *see* Haram and Halal

His Grace and Guidance 99, 102, 106, 111–112, 158, 187, 191, 199, 209, 236, 243–244

His Judgment and Punishment 14, 89–90, 120, 124, 170, 213, 231–232, 237, 248–249

His Knowledge, Omiscience 88–102, 91–99, 119–143, 158–159, 169, 158–159

His Mercy, Forgiveness, Benevolence 81, 84–85, 94, 105, 123, 160, 162, 187, 190, 236–240

His Perfection 83–85, 87, 140, 241

His Plan 78, 102, 107–118, 124, 137, 143, 167, 204, 220, 229

His Will, *see* al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar
human understanding of 6, 85–88, 91–95, 125, 163, 185, 202–205, 206, 243

Althusser, Louis 2, 5, 18, 116, 140, 150–153, 160, 212, 259–260, 267

Anthropocentrism 12, 112–166

Anthropology 4–5, 11, 52, 114, 129, 164, 251, 253–254

of discourse 8–9, 11–20, 166, 181, 264, 266

of ethics and piety 159, 164–166, 172, 180, 194–195, 254–255

of freedom 251–255

of Islam 11, 129–134, 164–166, 192

of religion 11, 18, 129–134

Articulation 13, 16–18, 55, 76, 97, 126, 152, 257–258, 267

Aṣ-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm, *see* Straight Path

Asad, Talal 16, 41–42, 44, 69, 125, 130–131, 165, 193, 216

Audience design 10–11, 53–55, 138, 217, 248, 236

Beautiful Names of Allah, the (ʿasmāʾu allāhi al-ḥusnā) 77–88, 97–98, 139, 204, 232, 267

Belief, *see* ʾīmān

Berlin, Isaiah 159, 195, 210, 227–229

Book of Destiny, Preserved Tablets (al-Lauh al-Mahfūz) 91–95, 95–99, 107, 127, 139

Burka-ban, *see* Covering-ban

Cartoons crisis, Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons controversy 2, 6, 38, 49–50,

- Coherence 4, 7, 9, 13, 14–15, 16, 25, 36, 58,
114–115, 131, 138, 166, 173, 236, 261, 264,
265
as including contradiction 13, 131, 166,
173
discursive 4, 13, 214
expecting 9, 57–58
fantasy and 260–264
Muslim striving for 7, 9, 13, 14–15, 16, 36,
58, 115, 131, 138, 173, 236, 261, 264, 265
- Conversion, *see* Reversion
- Covering-ban 1, 3, 10, 38, 42–44, 47–48, 51,
56–58, 70, 208–221, 266
- Danish Muslims 1–5, 7, 9–10, 26–29, 32, 55,
67–68, 115, 135, 189, 200, 205, 217, 221,
234, 236, 255, 257, 261
as heterogeneous group 9, 25, 115–116,
166
as object of debate 1–3, 25–44, 55, 210–
226
as radical 32, 64–66, 156
as resisting 23, 48, 76, 184, 210, 216, 255
audience design 10–11, 53–55, 72, 94, 138,
169, 217, 248, 236
debates among 124, 200, 225, 249, 250
internal interventons among 129, 250
intervening in public debates 19, 21–22,
50, 55, 68, 71, 76, 94, 122, 221, 221–226
media-savvy 137, 198–199, 200, 201
mediatization of 1–3, 50–51, 186, 265
moderate 46, 60, 66, 96, 221
young 36–37, 50, 49, 61, 64, 96, 99, 119,
161, 169
- Danishness 1, 3, 19, 31, 33, 33–39, 39, 62
- Dansk Islamisk Center (DIC) 3, 111, 219–
220
- Danskhed, *see* Danishness
- Daʿwah (invitation) 83, 256
- Democracy 32, 39–44, 223
- Derrida, Jacques 12, 75, 267
- Discourse 1, 4, 5–6, 11–13, 15–16, 23, 45–47,
69–70, 75–76, 114–115, 254–255
analysis 5, 8, 9, 17–18, 134, 181, 264
theory 12, 16–18, 75–76, 117, 134, 261
Christian 26, 51, 72–73, 83, 86, 152–153,
158, 234
freedom 7, 48, 39–44, 56, 63, 67–68, 71,
251, 264
hegemonic, established 22–23, 36, 68–
71, 211, 215–217, 266
Muslim, Islamic 11, 15, 105, 116–117, 126,
130–131, 140–141, 157, 162, 191, 234, 254,
266
political 30, 38, 39–44, 54–55, 63–65,
262
public 48, 56, 67, 76, 216–218, 266
religious 23, 36, 44, 67, 73, 86, 154, 163,
166, 180, 242, 248, 260–261
secular and liberal 6, 7, 46, 76, 243–244,
251–252, 254, 255
- Disempowerment 51, 62–68, 210, 216–217
- Emancipation 58, 155, 207–250, 259–260
and disempowerment 217, 223
from worldly authority 75, 209–229, 230,
249–250
of Muslim women 221–226
spiritual 58, 154–155, 183, 226–229
- Empowerment 50, 215, 219, 221–226
- Empty and floating signifier 5, 8, 16–17, 23,
44–46, 76, 86, 117–118, 222, 257, 261, 266
- Ethics 104, 162–163, 209, 230, 253–255
Foucauldian 104–105, 159, 162–163, 173,
181, 191–195, 209–210, 230, 254–255
Muslim 104–105, 161–206, 210
- Ethnography of Muslim-talk on freedom
6–11, 18, 114–115, 256
- Fadil, Nadia 25, 133–134, 166, 215
- Faith, belief (*īmān*) 6, 89–90, 110, 142, 147,
149, 163, 186, 195–196, 197, 205–206,
258
- Feminism 210–215, 220, 221–226, 265
- Fernando, Mayanthi 69–71, 114, 133–134, 165,
223, 266
- Fiṭrah (primordial nature) 107, 111–112, 116,
150, 183, 209, 233, 241, 248, 257, 260
- Foucault, Michel 1, 4, 5, 13, 15, 18, 44, 71, 72,
113–114, 159, 162–163, 172–173, 181, 182–
183, 191–195, 208–209, 209–210, 230,
244, 253–254, 266
- Freedom 1–6, 24–25, 44–46, 251–255, 256–
263
anthropology, *see* Anthropology of free-
dom
and oppression 44–46, 52–56, 62–67,
210–225

- and power 46, 104, 106, 159, 184, 191–195, 208, 209–210
- as cultural marker 24–25, 39–46
- as empty signifier 4–5, 8, 16–17, 45–47, 117–118, 257, 261, 266
- as fantasy 260–263
- as limited 39, 89–91, 107–111, 117, 123, 122–129, 213, 267
- as political tool 1, 39–44, 62–68, 209–225
- as promise 230–236, 264–267
- as received 122–128, 207–209
- negotiation of 8, 57, 65, 69–70
- of religion 37–38, 45, 69–70, 155, 247–251
- of speech 45, 49–50, 57, 63
- public debate on 1–2, 6, 21–23, 24–25, 52–56, 68, 73–75, 121–122
- real, true, ultimate (Muslim) 21–23, 24, 45, 59, 207–250, 264–267
- See also* Submission and freedom 119–121, 148–149, 209–210, 214, 229, 255, 257–260, 264, 266–267
- to be Muslim 3–4, 227, 265
- values 1, 3, 6, 24, 52–68, 219
- Frihed, *see* Freedom
- Frihedsværdier, *see* Freedom-values
- Geertz, Clifford 4, 129–130
- Governmentality 24–25, 31–32, 43–44, 159
- Haram and Halal 55–56, 59–60, 104, 120, 128, 147, 154, 156, 186–187, 214, 220, 232, 234, 257
- Hervik, Peter 32, 38, 50
- Hijab, *see* Veiling
- Hizb ut-Tahrir 46, 57, 60–68, 115, 247
- Homogeneity, ethno-cultural 9, 28, 35–36, 51–52
- Hussain, Waseem 3–4, 6, 14, 49, 265
- Hymes, Dell 7, 9, 11, 116
- Iblis, al-Shaitan, the devil 142–145, 183–184, 190–191, 233
- Ideological fantasy 260–264
- Ideology 5, 9, 18, 116, 121, 150–153, 163, 227, 256, 264–267
- ideological commitment 6, 71, 114, 138, 141, 157, 193–194, 233
- ideological warfare and struggle in 1–2, 6, 61–62, 62–68, 105, 215, 222–223, 264–267
- Islamic 118, 138, 141, 157, 223, 229, 236, 258–259
- liberal 39–44, 54, 65, 74–75, 159, 165, 214, 252, 264–267
- secular 44, 69, 223–224, 226–229
- study and critique of 5, 18–19, 134, 253–255
- symptomatic reading of 5, 18–19, 261–262
- Incoherence, inconsistency 9, 13, 16, 34, 36, 46, 54, 68, 127, 133, 166, 214, 265
- Islam 5, 8, 10, 13–15, 25–29, 129–134, 136–139
- as category of analysis 5–6, 129–134
- as discursive tradition 125, 129–131, 193
- as master-signifier, producing meaning 5–6, 8, 10, 14, 17, 117, 135–136, 154, 222, 257–258
- as peace 10, 15, 104, 135, 136–140, 152, 154, 173, 236
- as submission 8, 10, 135–136, 136, 257, 257–260, 265
- Islamic discourse, *see* Discourse, Islamic
- Islamic tradition 2, 5, 7, 16, 122, 125, 129, 143, 159, 172, 215, 240, 261
- Jesus (ʿĪsā) 83, 136, 164, 211, 234
- Jouissance (Lacanian Enjoyment) 5, 259–260, 267
- Jyllands-Posten (Newspaper) 2, 6, 48–50
- Khankan, Sherin 108–109, 137, 168, 171–173, 175, 184, 186, 197–199, 201, 224–225, 231–231, 239–240
- Knowledge 8–9, 10, 45, 47, 113–114, 127, 134
- Divine, *see* Allah, His Knowledge
- human 96–97, 99–102, 111–112
- spiritual, religious 6–7, 77–78, 79, 111, 120, 125, 127–129, 142, 144–145, 147–149, 157, 160, 162, 163–164, 171, 176–179, 181, 185, 195–205, 208, 242
- tacit, implicit 7, 15, 39, 168, 248
- Kühle, Lene 27–29, 31–32, 50–51, 65, 115
- Kvinder I Dialog 23, 47–48, 52–56, 76, 210–215

- Lacan, Jacques 16, 17, 76, 116, 151–152, 257, 259, 261–264
- Laclau, Ernesto 5, 12, 16, 45, 55, 68–71, 76, 85–88, 117, 212
- Laidlaw, James 193–195, 252–255
- Language-game 13, 41–41
- Liberal hypocrisy 1, 47–48, 52–56, 56–60, 62, 96, 210–212, 214
- Liberal-talk 1, 6, 7, 46, 159, 194–195, 227–229, 252–255
- Liberalism 1, 6–7, 22, 39–44, 54, 65, 74–75, 159, 165, 214, 252, 264–267, 267
- Liberal talk, *see* Liberal hypocrisy
- Liberation 207–250, 264–268
 from oneself 21–23, 183–186
 from worldly authority 66–67, 75, 139, 167–168, 169, 174–176, 209–229, 241, 247–251, 260
 through divine authority 21–23, 174–176, 230–242, 243–250, 264–268
- Liberty 194–195, 226–229, 251–253
- Mahmood, Saba 159, 163, 165, 172–176, 180–181, 182, 193–195, 252–254, 265
- Marranci, Gabriele 14–15, 132–133
- Maskeringsforbud, *see* Covering-ban
- Master-signifier 5, 16–17, 45, 76, 117, 135–136, 151, 214, 222, 257, 267
- Media 1–6, 8–10
 criticism of the 21, 51, 96, 137, 186, 221
 social 8, 36–37, 58–59, 124, 177–178, 186, 200–201, 249
 traditional 21–22, 27, 38, 48, 51, 53–55, 62, 67–68, 199
- Moskeerne Bag Sløret, *see* Mosques Behind the Veil
- Mosques Behind the Veil 1, 10, 38
- Mouffe, Chantal 5, 16, 55, 68–71, 76, 212
- Muhammed, the Messenger, the Prophet 25, 89, 136, 140–143, 145, 146, 156–157, 170, 178–180, 203, 208, 224, 233, 236
- Muslim-talk 6, 6–10, 16, 73, 84, 87, 95, 113–115, 218, 236, 261, 264–266
 external interventions, influence 67–68, 158, 249–250, 251–255
 inconsistencies 16, 92, 121–122, 146, 231
 internal interventions, corrections 16, 36, 59, 67, 99–102, 108, 128–129, 137, 170–173, 186, 250, 265
 on democracy 37, 58, 61, 62–68, 219, 249, 250
 on freedom 6, 6–11, 52–68, 73–75, 88–104, 119–134, 147–149, 153–160, 173–176, 195–205, 207–250
- Najāt, *see* Salvation
- National belonging 25, 33–39, 39–44, 50, 215
- Neoliberalism 7, 39–44, 74
- Niqab, *see* Veiling
- Nodal points 2, 5, 15–16, 18, 23, 74–76, 135, 191
- Obedience 135–136, 138, 142–143, 163–164, 167–168, 187, 195, 234, 257
- Patience (Ṣabr) 99–105, 161–163, 182
- Patience, *see* Ṣabr
- Peace, *see* Islam as peace
- Pêcheux, Michel 14, 18
- Pedersen, Abdul Wahid 21–23, 49, 71–73, 111, 185, 240–243
- Piety 159, 164–166, 172, 180, 183, 209, 222, 235, 240, 247
- Point de capiton, quilting point 16, 76, 117, 151, 154, 258
- Power 15, 44–45, 46, 67, 68–71, 93, 104, 130, 131, 159, 163, 166, 216
 Allah's 81, 84–85, 90, 98, 116–118, 141, 158, 160, 190, 209–210, 229
 and agency 15, 95, 98, 120, 121–125, 159, 165–166, 169, 176, 184, 191–195, 219, 229, 252–253
 and freedom 46, 104, 106, 159, 184, 191–195, 208, 209–210
 and knowledge 113–114, 115, 129
 and resistance 15, 22, 46–48, 68–71, 265
 and struggle 46, 68–71, 255
 and submission 148–149, 210, 214, 229
 institutional 22, 39–44, 44–45, 95, 255
 linguistic 45–46, 67, 115
 religious 67, 129, 130, 257
- Prayer 21, 167–170, 173–176, 176–182, 186–189
- Predestination, *see* al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar

- Prostration, *see* Sujūd
- Psychoanalytic theory 5, 17, 114, 116–118, 150–152, 257, 259–260, 260–264
- Public debate 1–2, 7, 19, 21, 31–32, 38, 50, 55, 68, 76, 122, 221
- Qarib (nearness, closeness to Allah) 104, 139, 167, 171–172, 174, 183, 186–189, 244, 244–247
- Quadar, *see* al-Qaḍā' wa al-Qadar
- Quilting point, *see* Point de capiton
- Quran 8, 67, 79–82, 87, 93, 95, 112, 121, 137, 139, 141, 145, 160, 169–170, 190, 196–202, 205, 237
- Radicalization 31–32, 64–66
- Ramadan 1, 103, 105, 186, 237–238
- Rasmussen, Lars Løkke 1, 6, 35
- Resistance 6, 15, 22, 38, 47–71, 48, 74, 166, 210, 216–217, 221–226, 265
- Reversion 146–160, 153–154, 158, 181, 207–208, 221, 234, 248
- Rose, Flemming 6, 49–50
- Ruda, Frank 44–47, 73, 105–106, 118, 235, 262, 264–265
- Rytter, Mikkel 28, 30–31, 203, 242
- Ṣabr, *see* Patience
- Salvation (najāt) and success (falāḥ) 209, 230–236
- Satan, *see* Iblis
- Securitization response 30–33, 50
- Self-definition 33–38, 247–251
- Shahādah (profession of faith) 80, 85, 113, 129, 136, 146–160, 202–205, 239, 243, 246, 256
- Shirk and ṭāġūt (associating partners with and worshipping other than Allah) 66, 80, 87, 164, 167
- Signifying chain, signifying sequences 12, 16–17, 75, 80–82, 117, 267
- Sin 81, 87, 103–104, 107, 120, 122, 127, 129, 167–168, 186–190, 233, 246
- Sincerity (ʾikhlāṣ) 155, 164, 182, 237
- Slavery (to Allah) 81, 89, 154, 157, 168–170, 264
- Straight Path (aṣ-Ṣirāt al-Mustaqīm) 112, 150, 171, 191, 229, 230, 239–240, 250, 267
- Subject positions 10, 15–17, 22, 46, 114–115, 140, 144, 156–157, 172, 190, 217, 243, 260
- Submission 66, 72, 119–160, 135, 136–138, 140, 152, 157, 160, 162, 164, 175, 189, 191, 193, 195, 203, 209, 240–243, 246, 250, 255, 257–260, 265, 266, 240–241
- active and willing 135–136, 140–142, 157–160, 205–206, 240–241, 243–244, 258–259
- always-already in 121, 146, 157–160
- and freedom 119–121, 148–149, 193, 209, 209–210, 214, 229, 230, 255, 257–260, 264, 266–267, 240–243
- and peace 10, 15, 104, 135, 136–140, 152, 154, 173, 236
- and prostration 21–23, 157, 173–176, 176–182, 247
- and salvation 21, 22, 234–236, 257–260
- and worship 163–164, 167–170, 176
- as human purpose 148–149, 257–260
- as surrender 10–11, 104, 115, 135–136, 136–139, 140–142, 146, 147–149, 157–158, 168, 195, 206, 209
- cultivated and iterative 112, 157, 161–164, 189, 206, 223, 243–255
- resisting or rejecting 142–145, 158, 196
- See also* Islam as submission
- to Allah's Will 21–22, 72, 112, 161–162
- to worldly authority 44, 139, 187–188, 209–229, 223, 247–251, 260
- Suhr, Christian 113, 117, 134, 190–191, 216–217, 235–236, 246–247, 265
- Sujūd (prostration) 21–22, 173–176, 176–182
- Surrender, *see* Submission as surrender
- Tawḥīd (Allah's Oneness, Incomparability) 66, 81, 84, 86, 107, 147
- Torfig, Jacob 12–13, 17, 75–76, 212
- Veiling 41–43, 51, 52–59, 68–71, 180, 182, 193–194, 205, 210, 210–215, 215–226
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig 13, 40–41, 47
- Worldly authority 44, 66–67, 73–75, 139, 169, 175, 187–188, 209–229, 223, 241, 247–251, 260
- Worship-subjection (ʾibādah) 164, 167–170

Žižek, Slavoj 5, 17–19, 116–118, 151–152, 158,
256–257, 259–260, 261–264, 267

'asmā'u allahi al-ḥusnā, *see* Beautiful Names
of Allah

'ikhlās, *see* Sincerity

'imān, *see* Faith, belief

'ibādah, *see* Worship-subjection