INTRODUCTION

Germanizing Islam and Racializing Muslims

"I would never have become a Muslim if I had met Muslims before I met Islam." During my three and a half years of research among German converts to Islam, I heard this repeatedly. Contradictorily, a fifty-year-old man who had converted to Islam in the 1980s after meeting Iranian revolutionaries, a German imam who had converted while trying to convert Arabs and Turks to Christianity, and a twenty-five-year-old former East German woman converted through her Muslim Bosnian boyfriend were all among those who said it. Murad Hofmann (1998, 135), also a German convert to Islam, writes that toward the end of his long life, the renowned German Jewish convert Muhammad Asad told him that he doubted that he would again find his way to Islam, as he had done in 1926, if he were a young man in today's Muslim world. "With some bitterness he shared the frequently heard opinion that one could find lots of Muslims in the Orient, but precious little Islam these days, whereas the Occident had very few Muslims, but now much Islam."[1]

Although almost all German converts I met during my research embraced Islam following intimate relations with born Muslims, since their conversion many nonetheless distance themselves from immigrant Muslims. Converted Germans love Islam, and in most cases they had fallen in love with a Muslim, but they do not always find it easy to love born Muslims in Germany or elsewhere.

Contemporary German converts embrace Islam in a country where Muslims and especially Islam are seen as unfitting. When then president Christian Wulf said on the day of German unification, October 3, 2010, "Islam too has now also become part of German history," his statement was considered a scandal.[2] That week the popular magazine *Stern* published photoshopped images of Wulf with an ostensibly Muslim beard and fez.[3] Conservative political leaders quickly contested Wulf's claim and insisted that it is absolutely wrong to say that Islam can be considered "part of

Germany." Wolfgang Bosbach of the Christian Democratic Union (CDU) said that "while Islam is a part of daily reality in Germany, ours is a Judeo-Christian tradition." Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière added, "If you now ask: will Islam be put on the same level as the Judeo-Christian understanding of religion and culture that we have, then my answer is: not in the foreseeable future."[4] The prominent CDU politician Volker Kauder declared, "Islam is not part of tradition and identity in Germany and so does not belong in Germany."[5] When Germans embrace Islam the same politicians accuse them of being traitors, enemies within, and even potential terrorists who may attack their own nationals (Schmidt 2007; Özyürek 2009).

In a political climate that sees no place for their religion and is antagonistic toward their conversion, some German converts try to open up a legitimate space for Islam by disassociating it from Turks and Arabs. Some promote the view that Islam can be experienced as a German religion; others call for a totally postnational Islam. Both groups argue that being German is not only compatible with but also can even lead to a better way of being Muslim, and some advance the idea that becoming Muslim can be an especially proper way of being German. In doing so, German converts to Islam simultaneously challenge and reproduce biological and cultural racisms as well as a homogeneous understanding of a German and European culture.

Being German, Becoming Muslim focuses on such contradictions and challenges in the lives of converts to Islam, and aims to understand what it means to embrace Islam in a society that increasingly marginalizes and racializes Muslims. It explores different ways in which converted German Muslims—who now number in the tens of thousands—accommodate Islam to German identity and carve out legitimate space for Germans in the *Ummah*, the global community of Muslims.[6] In other words, this book examines the socially transformative consequences of the seemingly individualistic and politically unmotivated acts of converts for the German society and Muslim community. It inquires into how today's German converts come to terms with their admiration for Islam alongside the widespread marginalization of Muslims. How and why can one love Islam, yet find it so difficult to love immigrant Muslims or their Islamic practices? What does it mean to be a "white" Muslim when Islam is increasingly racialized? How do German Muslims relate to immigrant Muslims once they convert? How do previously Christian or atheist German Muslims shape debates about the relationship between race, religion, and belonging in Germany?

By focusing on the experiences of indigenous Europeans who have embraced a religion that is seen as external to Europe, this book also seeks to understand the complex set of prejudices and exclusionary practices that

are called Islamophobia. The reactions of both mainstream German society and born Muslims to converted Muslims, and the latter's responses to born Muslims, shed light on the intersection of biological with cultural racism. Muslim identity is something that is scripted on the bodies of immigrant Muslims, but Islam can also be chosen by indigenous Europeans. Can we call converted Muslim criticism of born Muslims and their traditions Islamophobia? What are we to make of the abhorrence that converted Muslims generate in mainstream society? Or to put it another way, where do belief and individual choice fit in the racialized and religiously defined exclusion of Muslims in Europe?

I explore these questions in the context of social and political developments that shape German society at large, paying special attention to the political consequences of conversions. The arrival of millions of Muslim workers to rebuild the war-torn country was one of the most significant post–World War II developments. It transformed, and continues to transform, Germany. These workers and their families brought an unexpected challenge to the mostly homogeneous post-Holocaust German society, and forced it to come to terms with difference again. One result of this development was the construction of racial dichotomies between Turks and Germans as well as between Muslims and Christians/Europeans/secular subjects. Another related, perhaps inevitable outcome was cultural interpenetration and boundary crossing between these dichotomies. Hundreds of thousands of Muslim immigrants and their children took citizenship after changes in the German citizenship law in 2000, while a small but increasing number of formerly Christian or atheist Germans converted to Islam. Such border crossings have a profound effect on transforming these categories because they challenge how we define Germans and Muslims.

Mainstream society marginalizes German converts to Islam, and questions their Germanness and Europeanness, based on the belief that one cannot be a German or European and a Muslim at the same time.[7] Converts to Islam are accused of being traitors to European culture, internal enemies that need to be watched, and potential terrorists (Özyürek 2009). Having become new Muslims in a context where Islam is seen as everything that is not European, ethnic German converts disassociate themselves from Muslim migrants (chapter 2), and promote a supposedly denationalized and de-traditionalized Islam that is not tainted by migrant Muslims and their national traditions but instead goes beyond them. Some German Muslims along with some other European-born ethnic Muslims promote the idea that once cleansed of these oppressive accretions, the pure Islam that is revealed fits in perfectly well with German values and lifestyles (chapter 1). Some even argue that practicing Islam in Germany builds on the older but now-lost values of the German Enlightenment (Aufklärung), including curiosity about and tolerance of difference. For East German

Muslims who converted after the fall of the Berlin Wall, becoming Muslim was a way of escaping their East German identity (chapter 3). Born Muslims who grew up in Germany increasingly adopt these discourses and promote de-culturalization of Islam as a way for Muslims to integrate into German society without giving up their religious beliefs (chapter 4). At the same time, a newer and even more popular trend of Islamic conversion bypasses the questions of national tradition and identity altogether by ostensibly going back to the earliest roots of Islam, with converts isolating themselves not only from non-Muslim society but also from other Muslims (chapter 5).

Religious converts throughout the world have different ideas regarding the relationship of their new religion and indigenous culture. Converts to evangelical Christianity in Papua New Guinea (Robbins 2007) and Ghana (Meyer 1998) believe that their conversion involves a complete transformation, and that they have not only left their old religion but also their old culture behind. In other places, such as Turkey (Özyürek 2009) and India (Roberts 2012), converts to evangelical Christianity believe that they have changed only their religious beliefs and what they have embraced is totally compatible with local culture. At the same time, revivalist religious movements often aim at "purifying" their creeds of antithetical cultural practices. Muslim revivalists worldwide fall back on Islam's foundational texts in an attempt to attain a purportedly true Islam freed of cultural accretions (Göle 1997; Mahmood 2004; Hirschkind 2009). In her study of Shiʻi Muslims in Lebanon, Lara Deeb (2006, 20) calls this "authenticating Islam," a process "dependent on textual study and historical inquiry as well as on a particular notion of rationality."[8]

Regardless of how clear such a differentiation between culture and religion may look to religious actors, the separation between these two realms is problematic. As Nathaniel Roberts (2012, 20) reminds us that there is "no natural ground from which to answer" questions regarding the nature of either religion or culture. Hence, it is important to understand seemingly parallel efforts to separate or relate culture and religion in their social contexts as well as in terms of their political consequences. Purifying Islam for young Turkish women, for example, might mean breaking with the limiting worldviews of their parents and allowing for increased social freedom (Göle 1997). For Shiʻi activists in Lebanon, it might mean self-improvement and accepting modern ways of being Muslims (Deeb 2006). For Moroccan Dutch Muslims, it can be a way to negotiate the dilemma of having to choose between being Moroccan or Dutch, while for the Dutch authorities, attempts at Islamic purification might indicate radicalization (Koning 2008).

One of the main arguments of this book is that the call of many German- and other European-born converts for a purified Islam can be best understood in its context of increasing xenophobia and Islamophobia, where

being Muslim is defined as antithetical to being German and European. When confronted with unexpected hostility from mainstream society, converts to Islam take an active role in defending the place of Islam in Germany by disassociating it from the stigmatized traditions of immigrant Muslims. The German Muslim take on a purified Islam is inspired by Islamic revivalism worldwide, but also based on Enlightenment ideals of the rational individual and natural religion.[9] While this call for a culture- and tradition-free Islam that speaks directly to the rational individual seems universalistic, in the contemporary German context it ends up being strictly particularistic or, more precisely, Eurocentric. It assumes that the "European" or "German" mind is truly rational—and hence the "Oriental" mind is not—free of the burden of cultural accretions, and thus uniquely capable of appreciating and directly relating to the real message of Islam in its essential form.

CONVERTING TO RACIALIZED RELIGIONS

Voluntary religious conversion is one of the few acts that grant individuals, regardless of their intention, the power to break through established social, cultural, and political boundaries.[10] In their study of colonialism in southern Africa, Jean and John Comaroff (1991) note how religious conversion to Christianity endowed both the colonizers and colonized with different kinds of power. Europeans utilized Christianization in order to deepen their rule and "colonize the minds" of their subjects. At the same time, the Comaroffs observe, individual converts—especially pious ones—disrupted colonial categories that assumed the white colonizers to be the essential Christians.[11]

In the context of India, Gauri Viswanathan (1998) points to the subversive potential of conversion, especially when it involves adopting a lower-status religion. She sees such conversion as a critical commentary on, or opposition to, mainstream religion and society: "By undoing the concept of fixed, unalterable identities, conversion unsettles the boundaries [by] which selfhood, citizenship, nationhood, and community are defined, exposing these permeable borders" (16). Inasmuch as it takes "religion's importance in community, politics, and morality" (Hefner 1993, 102) seriously, *Being German, Becoming Muslim* emphasizes the social and political power of religious conversion. I show that even when individuals do not convert for political reasons, their conversion has political consequences, because they "cross boundaries while altering these boundaries in the process" (Pelkmans 2009, 12). Such transgressions are politically loaded when former Christians convert to Islam in contemporary Europe.[12] When Christian or atheist Germans convert to Islam, they transform both what it means

to be a German and the makeup of Muslim communities in Germany. More significantly, indigenous converts to Islam challenge the post–Cold War European ideology that defines itself through the exclusion of Islam and Muslims (Asad 2003, 164), and bring to light inconsistencies in the myth of a European culture that in other instances defines itself as tolerant of diversity as well as respectful of individual choice.

As opposed to earlier generations of converts, who took Arabic or Turkish names, and hence affiliated with those communities, newer converts proudly keep their German names, prefer to marry other converted Germans, and give birth to and raise German Muslims without any immigrant background. They also challenge immigrant Muslim communities by demanding Islamic activities in the German language. In the process, they form alliances with second-, third-, and fourth-generation young Muslims of Turkish and Arab backgrounds who do not feel at home in their parents' language or mosques. As a result, they help establish multiethnic Islamic communities whose language is German.

A smaller group of converts to Islam take an even more activist stance. It is openly critical of mainstream society, especially its ethnoreligious hierarchy. Some German converts write scholarly books and give academic lectures about the intolerance of German society, which once marginalized and then murdered its Jewish citizens, and is now excluding Muslims from the nation (chapter 1). Other converts use their hip-hop music to criticize the exclusion and criminalization of Muslims (chapter 4). Still others oppose the capitalistic and materialistic orientation of German society, and promote conversion to Islam in order to achieve a just society based on communalist traditions such as *zakat*, or charity (chapter 2). And an even smaller number of German converts has joined jihadist groups in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Syria, and established terrorist cells in Germany (chapter 5).

I take the German convert's act of not identifying with mainstream society and instead forming a new identification with a minority position as an act of "queering ethnicity" with transformative potential. I borrow this concept from Fatima El-Tayeb (2011), who uses it to explain the nature and effect of unexpected alliances among racialized communities in Europe. Rather than as an adjective or noun, El-Tayeb treats the word queer as a verb, and not necessarily in its sexual meaning. She explains emergent youth culture in Europe as "a practice of identity (de)construction that results in new ways of diasporic consciousness neither grounded in ethnic identifications nor referencing a however mythical homeland." As practiced by feminists of color or hip-hop artists, queering ethnicity has the creative potential to build "a community based on the shared experience of multiple, contradictory positionalities." More important, "the new European minority activism demonstrates a queer practice by insisting that identity is unstable, strategic, shifting, and always performative" (xxxvi).

Here I contend that German conversion to Islam involves parallel processes of identity de- and reconstruction that creates multipositional alternative communities while destabilizing the religio-racial boundaries and hierarchies of social life. German conversion to Islam is increasingly a significant aspect of, although not limited to and much older than, the emergent urban European youth culture that brings together diverse and marginalized urban communities. Both white Germans and Germans of color in this case detach themselves from their identification as Christian, and identify with the racialized community of Muslims. In so doing, they establish uniquely German communities that confute the discourse that dichotomizes Germans who were all born and raised in Germany into the categories of Christian natives and Muslim immigrants.

Conversion to a lower-status religion in a racialized context creates a situation that is reminiscent of African American scholar W.E.B. DuBois's ([1903] 2013, 5) concept of "double-consciousness," which he used to characterize "the strange meaning of black in America" more than a hundred years ago. In an often-quoted passage, written shortly after he finished his studies at Berlin University, DuBois describes the "twoness" he saw as central to the African American experience:

> The Negro is . . . born with a veil, and gifted with a second sight in this American world—a world which yields to him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two reconciled strivings. . . . He simply wishes to make it possible to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spat on by his fellows, without having the doors of opportunity closed roughly in his face. (10–11)

These observations, made in Berlin over a century ago, still resonate today. The British scholar Nasar Meer (2011) employs this concept of double consciousness to reflect on the peculiar experience of being Muslim in contemporary Europe. Even though it is not a parallel comparison, DuBois's discussion of double consciousness is also exceptionally illuminating for understanding the experiences of German converts to Islam in the city where DuBois formulated these thoughts. The German Muslims I describe are not "born with a veil," as DuBois says of his people. Rather, they choose to don one—not only a metaphoric but also a literal veil in the case of converted women—as adults. Yet this veiling nonetheless affords them "a second sight" within the European world they inhabit. German converts frequently talk about society making them feel the

"peculiar sensation" of having irreconcilable identities. Converts therefore strive to be German and become Muslim without being either cursed and spat on by their fellow Germans or excluded by the Ummah.

I concede that this analogy between African Americans in the early twentieth century and converted German Muslims of the early twenty-first century is neither simple nor straightforward. German converts to Islam are not born as Muslims. Many come from the majority group, and most important, they always have the option of either hiding their conversion or leaving it completely behind, along with any stigma associated with it—an option unavailable to racialized groups.[13] As a result of crossing the lines of race and religion, however, converts experience a sudden, unexpected fall in social status that arises from being both German and Muslim. Perhaps because they were not raised with such double consciousness, or because their conversion involves a new and chosen affiliation with the lower strata, many German Muslims try to transcend this twoness, the sense of irreconcilability, by insisting that Islam can have a German face, showing that it fits with German values and can be saved from Turkish and Arab traditions.

The conflicting consciousnesses and identities DuBois talks about are often not only double but in fact multiple as well.[14] Many converts to Islam are not simply Germans but also have marginalized identities as such. For instance, converts may be former East Germans or immigrants with Eastern European, Russian, Latin American, or African backgrounds. Increasingly, too, there are working-class Muslim converts. In chapters 3 and 5, I show how converting to Islam allows some of these "hyphenated" Germans to surmount their sense of being purportedly inferior, second-class citizens of the Federal Republic. Once converted to Islam, they become unquestionably German and also Muslim.

ISLAMOPHOBIA AS SIMILAR TO ANTI-SEMITISM OR HOMOPHOBIA?

In contemporary Germany, there is much evidence that Islam and Muslims are treated unequally. Despite the fact that Islam is one of the most actively practiced religions in the country, regional German governments have resisted granting Islam public recognition even after multiple applications (Fetzer and Soper 2005; Jonker 2002; Özyürek 2009; Yükleyen 2012). Protestants, Catholics, Greek Orthodox Christians, and Jews enjoy the status of a *Körperschaft des Öffentlichen Rechts* (public law corporate body), which enables them to collect church taxes and offer religious classes in public schools. But Islam is not supported by the government or taught in public institutions.[15] Muslims also face obstacles when they want to build

new mosques (Jonker 2005), open faith-based Islamic schools, and observe halal rules in slaughtering animals.

In recent major opinion polls, 46 percent of Germans agreed with the statement "there are too many Muslims in Germany" (Zick, Küpper, and Hövermann 2011, 70), 58 percent agreed that "the practice of religion should be severely limited for Muslims" (Decker et al. 2010, 134), and more than half said "they do not like Muslims."[16] In the face of such sentiments, a 2010 study conducted by the Open Society in Berlin found—not surprisingly—that 89 percent of Muslims feel they are not perceived as Germans by others; 79 percent felt racially and 74 percent felt religiously discriminated against at least once in the past year; and young Muslim women feel impeded by the headscarf ban when attempting to secure meaningful employment (Mühe 2010).[17] Indeed, discrimination against Muslims is well documented, especially in the labor and housing markets.[18] Last, but not the least, Germany has witnessed several hate crimes in the past few years. These include the hate crime killing of Marwa El-Sherbini in 2009 as well as nine Turkish or Turkish-looking men by a terror cell of the right-wing National Socialist Union between 2000 and 2006.

This complex interplay of subtle and overt forms of discrimination and violence against Muslims, though, is generally seen as insufficient grounds for considering Islamophobia as a form of racism. Part of the problem arises from the fact that even though the term Islamophobia has been widely used for several decades, there is no agreement about what it means (Shryock 2010). The 1997 report prepared by the Runnymede Trust Commission on British Muslims and Islamophobia, titled *Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All*, popularized the term in public culture. The European Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia followed this report with others invoking the same notion.[19] The original report defines Islamophobia as "an unfounded hostility towards Islam and therefore fear or dislike of all or most Muslims" (Runnymede Trust Commission 1997, 4). Neither the first report nor its sequels differentiate Islamophobia from other forms of racism involving discrimination against immigrant Muslims (Allen 2010). A number of scholars of racism, such as Robert Miles and Malcolm Brown (2003, 116), also see Islamophobia as a redundant concept because it can easily be incorporated into existing theories of racism and xenophobia. Others, such as Fred Halliday (1999), are critical of the notion because they suggest it "culturalizes" a political reality. French scholars Jocelyne Cesari (2002) and Michael Wieviorka (2002) contend that Islamophobia is too vague to be fruitful.

Despite a lack of consensus on the usefulness of the term Islamophobia, these commentators agree that patterns of exclusion and racism are transforming, especially in Europe, and that immigrants of Muslim heritage are bearing the brunt of those shifts. Whereas pseudoscientific theories of heredity were used to justify exclusionary and oppressive practices during

the colonial era, in the postcolonial period, there has been an upsurge in theories that legitimize similar practices based on allegedly irreconcilable cultural differences (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991; Stolcke 1995; Wieviorka 2002). Biological justifications for racism never disappeared, but cultural explanations, which scholars refer to as "new racism" (Barker 1981), "neo-racism" (Balibar 1991), "cultural fundamentalism" (Stolcke 1995), "differentialist racism" (Taguieff 1987), "culture talk" (Mamdani 2004), and even "racism without race" (Rex 1973), have become prevalent.

Throughout Europe and especially in Germany, the most important litmus test for the legitimacy of Islamophobia is whether it is similar to or different from anti-Semitism. The camp that devalues the reality of discrimination against Muslims argues that the comparison is not valid because Islam is a culture or religion that can be taken or left behind at will. The British Islam critic Polly Toynbee defends this stance by saying that "race is something people cannot choose and defines nothing about them as people . . . [whereas] beliefs are what people choose to identify with. . . . The two cannot be blurred into one which is why the word Islamophobia is a nonsense" (quoted in Meer 2013, 12). Necla Kelek, a Turkish German Islam critic who is especially liked by right-wing Germans, also echoes this perspective. In defending Tillo Sarazzin's controversial 2010 book *Deutschland schafft sich ab* (Germany is abolishing itself), which blamed Muslims in Germany for the failure of German immigration policy, she declared that Sarazzin cannot be called a racist because "Islam is not a race but rather it is a culture, a religion" (quoted in Shooman 2011, 59). Such critics frequently point to indigenous Europeans who convert to Islam as well as Turks, Arabs, Iranians, and others who leave Islam behind and themselves become so-called Islam critics.

The other camp that wants Islamophobia to be recognized as a form of racism operative throughout Europe is committed to showing that Islamophobia is not really different from the other fully acknowledged forms of racism, especially anti-Semitism.[20] Rita Chin and colleagues (2009, 14) demonstrate that both biological and cultural elements are equally present in anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant, and anti-Muslim discourse. Meer and Tariq Modood show that the so-called culture-based critique may also be racist. Hence, they suggest that we should see Islamophobia as "not merely a proxy for racism but a form of racism itself" (Meer and Modood 2010, 79). The German scholar Shooman (2011) embraces the phrase anti-Muslim racism rather than Islamophobia because "Muslimness," she argues, "is a racialized state of being from which people marked as Muslim cannot escape."[21]

Bunzl adds a new perspective to the debate inasmuch as he regards Islamophobia as a bigger challenge than anti-Semitism, both in terms of Europe's future and the geopolitical situation at large, while nonetheless

asserting that anti-Semitism and Islamophobia are different. "Whereas anti-Semitism was designed to protect the purity of the ethnic nation-state, Islamophobia is marshaled to safeguard the future of European civilization," writes Bunzl (2005, 506). Like Bunzl, I see elements unique to Islamophobia that make it qualitatively distinct from its predecessor. I suggest that what is most distinctive about Islamophobia is that it is based on the premise of a rational individual subject who is responsible for their actions and thus their consequences. Islamophobes maintain that Muslims do not qualify for the legal protection granted to other groups that are systematically discriminated against, such as women or blacks, because belief is not ascribed at birth but instead is willingly chosen or held by Muslims (Bloul 2008). Since they are free to choose or leave their belief behind, so the reasoning goes, they disqualify for any kind of protection against discrimination. This kind of thinking, which holds individual Muslims responsible for any difficult situation they may find themselves in, because they brought it on themselves by making these choices, is reflected in a 2007 Frankfurt court ruling in which the judge refused to grant an easy divorce to the battered wife of a Moroccan husband, arguing that since Islam attributes an inferior position to women and grants husbands the right to beat their wives, the battered woman, who chose to marry a Muslim man, could not be seen as experiencing hardship in her marriage. This idea of holding victims responsible for their own fate fits in well with contemporary neoliberalism, which extends the market mentality to citizenship and holds individuals that it imagines to be making rational choices responsible for their actions (Paley 2001; Özyürek 2007; Ong 1999). In other words, "this racism is a racism of its time," as David Tyrier (2010, 104) puts it.

Another related element of Islamophobia is an emphasis on the ostensible neutrality of the secular public sphere in Europe. The ideal model of the public sphere in Germany is essentially a Habermasian one—a social space that is separate from the state, economy, and family, and where private individuals can gather to deliberate about the common good. In his original formulation, Jürgen Habermas entirely neglected to discuss religion (Calhoun 2011). This was not an unintentional oversight.[22] Charles Taylor (2011, 323) shows us that a fixation on religion as a special kind of reason that needs to be excluded from the public sphere has its roots in the Enlightenment thought that sees only secular reason as genuine rationality, and regards religious thinking as "dubious, and in the end only convincing to people who already accepted the dogmas in question." Religious thought is taken as the most dubious and least fit for the secular public sphere especially when it comes to Islam. Hence, seemingly liberal political actors suggest they are not against the religion but rather only against the public expression of Islam. In 2004, France passed a law that

bans wearing conspicuous religious symbols in public schools, on the grounds that it is a violation of republican principles (Bowen 2007). School-girls are asked to adapt to French ways by leaving their headscarves at home. Following the French precedent, the states of Berlin and Branden-burg in Germany passed the Law on Neutrality (Neutralitätgesetz) in 2005 prohibiting not students but instead employees of public schools and the justice system from wearing religious signs, symbols, or garments. Not-withstanding that the three Abrahamic religions are treated equally in this respect in France, the idea of a "neutral" public sphere and "free" private sphere is rendered absurd by the experience of practicing Muslim women, for who headscarves are necessary specifically in the public sphere and not in the private one.

Owing to the idealization of individual choice and the limits of public expression in arguments regarding Islamophobia in Europe, I suggest that it makes as much—or more—sense to compare Islamophobia with con-temporary homophobia as it does to liken it with historical anti-Semitism. Homophobic discourses treat lesbians and gay men as responsible for hav-ing chosen the "lifestyle" in which they find themselves discriminated against, and thus as undeserving of legal protection. Christian homophobic lobbies, which are much stronger in the United States than in Europe, en-courage homosexuals to join the heterosexual mainstream. Less radical homophobes urge homosexuals to limit the expression of their sexual identity to the private sphere, forgoing public recognition and legal protec-tion, as in the "don't ask, don't tell" policy adopted by the US military until 2011. These views resonate with Islamophobic discourses in Europe, which similarly promote the idea of an ostensibly neutral public sphere where no one is identified by markers signifying religious or sexual difference.[23]

Issues of sexuality and freedom, then, are intertwined in the case of Is-lamophobia. Even though the Islamic social outlook is heterosexist, Mus-lims regard sexuality as something that needs to be marked and regulated whenever men and women are present together in public. Europeans, however, consider this a queer, misplaced public emphasis on something that properly belongs in the private sphere. The way that practicing Muslims organize sex and sexuality is deeply unsettling to the French, whose repub-licanism is based on the abstract idea of equal citizenship along with the psychological denial of sexual difference and patriarchy, as Joan Scott argues (2007). French law sees the headscarf not only as "conspicuous" when worn to school by girls, Scott contends, but also as indicative of an excess of sexuality and even perversion. Ironically, this is of course precisely the op-posite of how practicing Muslims perceive it.

The ideological centrality of "choice" in conversations regarding the Muslim experience is revealed most clearly in the experiences of the two groups that take the most active differential positions in their commitment

to Islam—namely, cultural Muslims, who are socialized into Islam in their families but not necessarily fully observant, and converted German Muslims. It is not a coincidence that the attention these two groups garner in public discourse is disproportional to their numbers or influence. The different yet parallel kinds of marginalization faced by the two groups shed light on the complex matrix of Islamophobia overall. Central here are the concepts of the individual subject who is free to make choices, but is then responsible for the consequences, and a supposedly neutral public sphere, which in reality rejects alternative modes of expressing oneself.

THE RACIALIZATION OF MUSLIMS AND GERMANIFICATION OF ISLAM

Even though Germany has a long history of racializing religion, especially Judaism, the racialization of Muslims with a clear class dimension is relatively new.[24] The story of Muslims is another example of what Rey Chow (2002) calls the "ethnicization of labor" in late capitalist Western societies. Prior to World War II, there was a small but well-off and socially integrated community of Muslims in Weimar Germany (Motadel 2009). This group of Muslims practically disappeared in the aftermath of World War II, whereas masses of other Muslim workers arrived in Germany. Subsidized by the Marshall Plan, the German government invited in workers from southern Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East, including Tunisia, Morocco, and Turkey. Once Muslims became established proletarians in Germany, "an internal boundary between what is considered proper and valuable on the one hand, and foreign and inferior, on the other," came into being (Adelson 2005, 8).

Sociohistorical processes through which even the children of migrants could not be folded into the German nation are readily apparent. For decades, both German officials and migrant workers assumed that the so-called guest workers would go back to their countries. As a result, no one expended much effort in order to ease the workers' adjustment to German society. The first guest workers to arrive were mostly single men, who slept in factory dormitories segregated by nationality. They were similarly separated during the day inasmuch as they worked among compatriots and received orders in their native language through translators (Chin 2009; Yurdakul 2009). As the workers had multiple shifts in demanding jobs, they had no incentive or opportunity to learn the German language or integrate into mainstream society.

This generation of workers responded unexpectedly to the 1973 ban on foreign worker recruitment owing to the global economic crisis. Instead of returning to their countries when confronted with the diminishing

availability of jobs in Germany, they in fact brought their families to join them. They knew that once they returned to their countries of origin, which were also in the grip of the global economic crisis, they would not be allowed to reenter Germany. Migrant populations of single men with limited needs were thus transformed into full-fledged migrant communities, calling for schools and housing that would accommodate families (Chin 2009; Yurdakul 2009). As a result, there was an explosion of child immigrants at a time when Germany no longer wanted immigrants. Indeed, "between 1974 and 1980, the number of Turkish children living in West Germany increased by 129% and after 1980 more than 40% of the Turks in Germany were less than 18 years old" (Ostergaard-Nielsen 2003, 33).

Once Muslim labor migrants became fully aware that they were there to stay, they began to organize as migrants. In the 1980s, they started to organize independently of their home countries for the first time, made demands for increased political rights, and became active interlocutors in domestic debates (Ostergaard-Nielsen 2003; Yurdakul 2009).[25] Despite the realities of migrants' lives, successive German governments have repeatedly based their policies on their supposed return. Helmut Kohl, German chancellor between 1982 and 1998, insisted that Germany was "not a country of immigration."[26] During this period, in order to ease the immigrants' desired reintegration into their native countries, the German government delegated their needs for religious facilities and schooling to their home countries.[27] This move prompted their countries of origin, which were dependent on remittances sent by immigrants, to also take an active role in working against their integration. "Both European governments and Muslim states purposely worked against integration for decades by promoting native language retention and the maintenance of distinct cultural and religious identities that did not mingle with the majority society" (Laurence 2012, 38).

In the 2000s, a new trend toward the "domestication" (Laurence 2012, xix) or "institutionalization of Islam" (Amir-Moazami 2013) swept through Europe. Governments accepted the fact that Muslim migrants were there to stay and switched from treating them as invisible to recognizing them. According to the German scholar Schirin Amir-Moazami, though, such recognition has involved "shaping the habits, sensibilities and life-conduct of Muslims in ways and under constraints defined by a liberal constitutional state" (73). In Germany when the Socialist Party and Green Party coalition changed the immigration law in 2000, making it possible for the children of immigrants born in Germany to have German citizenship, millions of residents shifted from being Turks, Bosnians, or Arabs to being German Muslims. Yet the new law had a catch. Between the ages of eighteen and twenty-three, these children had to give up their parents' citizenship in order to maintain German citizenship—a sacrifice not expected from other

dual citizens. Far fewer applied for citizenship than expected. Nonetheless, the new law changed the basis of citizenship from blood to soil, and catalyzed intense discussion and debate about what it means to be German.

In reaction to the new immigration law, Christian Democrats asserted that immigrants threatened Germany's *Leitkultur* (leading culture) (Pautz 2005). This view was first formulated by Bassam Tibi (1998), an Arab German sociologist who believed that a unified Germany should base itself on the European values of democracy, modernity, secularism, enlightenment, human rights, and civil society. Following the 2000 law, the concept was taken up by CDU leaders such as Friedrich Merz and Jörg Schönbohm, who argued against multiculturalism and for the assimilation of existing immigrants (Bernstein 2004). Promoters of the Leitkultur perspective shied away from defining the leading culture in nationalist terms, but instead embraced an anachronistic definition of European culture (Ewing 2008). They maintained that immigrants do not fit German society, not because of their nationality, but rather because of their religious and non-European cultural backgrounds.

Ironically, the anti-Muslim and assimilationist discourses promoted by CDU politicians went hand in hand with recognizing Muslims *as* Muslims for the first time. On September 28, 2006, the Chancellor's Office initiated a new project by inviting Muslim representatives to meet at a German Islam Conference. This effort was part of a larger continental process whereby all European countries with sizable Muslim populations organized parallel Islamic councils that brought state officials together with religious leaders in order to foster a dialogue. Jonathan Laurence (2012) contends that these councils indicate a new stage in the Muslim presence in Europe where the European states now accept Muslims as permanent and attempt to domesticate Muslims by fashioning them as national citizens.

The Islam Conference was a significant moment in German history, not because it brought concrete changes for the everyday Muslim experience, but instead because it signaled government recognition of Muslim leaders. Probably the most important thing that happened during the meeting was that Federal Minister of the Interior Wolfgang Schäuble said, "Islam is a part of Germany and a part of Europe, it is a part of our past and a part of our future. Muslims are welcome in Germany," and went around the room shaking hands with every representative—an act that deeply moved the Muslim representatives I spoke with.[28] The German Ministry of Internal Affairs (2006) Web site defines the aim of the conference as "[Germany recognizing] cultural and religious differences while requiring [from people from different cultures] the complete acceptance of Germany's liberal democracy." The German Islam Conference made it clear that Muslims are recognized based on "a privatized notion of religion and more generally [the] adoption of liberal ideals." Hence, the first working group of the

German Islam Conference was asked to concentrate on "the German social order and values consensus" (Amir-Moazami 2013, 75). By doing so, the conference organizers underscored that while recognizing Muslims, they saw their values as fundamentally different from those of Germans.

Those CDU officials willing to shake hands with Muslims also wanted to know and define who were Muslims in Germany, and the Interior Ministry declared that there were four million of them (Haug, Mussig, and Stichs 2009). Since more than half of Germany's Muslims were born in Germany since the end of the 1990s, and now have the option of applying for German citizenship, the government attempted to distinguish them. This estimate, however, considers Muslims as an ethnoracial racial rather than a religious group. The researchers were concerned only with the number of people who came to Germany from Muslim majority countries, and estimated how many children they might have had. These people were simply taken to be Muslims, even though some of them are Christian and Jewish as well as atheist. The case is most obvious with Iranians. Many of the seventy thousand Iranians in Germany are there because they escaped the oppressive regime of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In the same study, 33 percent of Iranians who live in Germany define themselves as atheists, and 72 percent do not practice religion in any way (ibid., 307). Yet the Interior Ministry counted all Iranians in Germany as Muslims. Moreover, the study did not take German converts to Islam into consideration at all.

As a result of an ethnicized conceptualization of Islam, native German Muslims who blur the boundaries between Germans and Muslims became a matter of serious concern for Christian Democrats. While the Islamic Conference was under way on February 4, 2007, Schäuble gave an interview to the conservative daily *Die Welt* in which he warned the nation against the threat posed by German converts to Islam (Schmid 2007). They therefore took center stage in the national discussion about the place of Islam in Germany. Even though the conference aimed to develop a "German Islam," ethnically German Muslims became the focus of anxiety about the increasingly undeniable incorporation of Muslims into German society along with the mixing of the boundaries between German and Muslim. This new unease about converts as well as the ways in which converts try to navigate between racialized and culturalized definitions of Muslims give us clues to the complex nature of contemporary Islamophobia.

THE ROLE OF CONVERTS FOR A EUROPEAN ISLAM

Over the past decade, scholars have demonstrated how Islamic practice has changed as Muslims have moved to new locations, especially to Europe and the United States.[29] Even though Islam has been a global religion from the

beginning, scholars rightly argued that a significant Muslim presence, particularly in secular Europe, has had profound consequences. In his influential study *Transnational Muslim Politics*, Peter Mandeville holds that one of the major outcomes of the Muslim immigration to the West has been the encounter of diaspora Muslims with the plurality of Islamic practice. "In the migratory or global cities, Islam is forced to contend not only with an array of non-Islamic others but also with an enormous diversity of Muslim opinion as to the nature and meaning of Islam. In such spaces Muslims will encounter and be forced to converse with interpretations of their religion which they have either been taught to regard as heretical or which they perhaps did not even know existed" (Mandeville 2001, 107). He also asserts that the result of this unforeseen coexistence of Islamic groups side by side prompts new critical engagement with the plurality of Islamic experience. Mandeville predicts that this set of historical forces coming together for Muslims in the West will "provide fertile venues for the rethinking and reformulation of tradition and the construction of an Islam for generations to come" (115).

Research conducted a decade after Mandeville's work proves some of his predictions about Muslims rethinking aspects of their Islamic practice. Muslims in Europe with immigrant backgrounds are being creative in the ways they adapt to their new home countries. French Muslims navigate through the tension between remaining accountable to the transnational Muslim community and becoming acceptable to the secularist French state by building a pluralistic, pragmatic approach to their practice (Bowen 2010). German and Dutch Muslims reinterpret their Islamic practice according to local conditions as they adapt to their new homelands (Yükleyen 2012; Yurdakul 2009; Schiffauer 2010; Sökefeld 2008; Mandel 2008).

Olivier Roy is one of the few scholars who has focused on converts in Europe, although his interest lies in how conversion is possible and not what converts enable. In *Holy Ignorance*, he argues that new fundamentalisms, including Islamism in Europe, owe their success to their ability to break the link between culture and religion. Roy (2010, 2) contends that secularization pushed religion into a sphere separate from social and cultural aspects of life, where it could be formulated as a "pure religion," while globalization contributed to the standardization of religions in circulation in the world market. It is in this context, he asserts, that Europeans convert to puritanical Islamic movements such as Salafism.

Roy is correct in one sense: movements that emphasize propagating Islam, such as the Salafis and other orthodox groups, endorse an understanding of Islam that is stripped of cultural or traditional interpretation, and promote the idea of returning to the foundational texts. They also claim that the four Islamic legal traditions, which are closely affiliated with national traditions, are not relevant for the correct practice of Islam. In that sense it does not matter if one is a Turk, Arab, Japanese, or German to be a "good" orthodox

Muslim. On the contrary, having been a good Turkish, Bosnian, or Pakistani Muslim can interfere with the practice of true Islam, since people grow up with traditions that are not perceived as properly Islamic.

Hence, Roy's observations are useful for explaining the recent spread of Islam in Europe, but they present only half of the story. His model attributes no agency to converts and converters. I suggest that what guides this de-linking is not only globalization and secularization. The increased racialization and marginalization of Muslims is at least an equally, if not more important dynamic. As a response to the racialization of Muslims, European converts and European-born Muslims make an effort to break the association between being Turkish or Arab and being Muslim mainly because of the increasing Islamophobia that treats Muslims along with their traditions as completely alien and anathema to Europe. In this book, I show that converts promote a universal Islam that is not only open to all. The culture-free Islam that they promote also seems more fitting to European and German values and mentalities than to Middle Eastern or immigrant ways of being. But I first want to underline the fact that even though converts engaged themselves with the idea of a German Islam for a long time, the emergence and specific political consequences of this idea are specific to the contemporary sociopolitical realities of Europe at large and Germany in particular.

GENERATIONS OF GERMAN CONVERTS TO ISLAM

Even though European conversion to Islam is often discussed as a new and surprising phenomenon, it has been going on for more than a hundred years in Germany. Men and women, old and young, rich and poor, gay and straight, religious and atheist, Christian and Jewish, Protestant and Catholic, indigenous or immigrant, Germans have been embracing orthodox and unorthodox interpretations of Islam for quite a while. Different kinds of Germans have encountered different kinds of Muslims at different historical moments. Those involved in Muslim and German encounters at any particular time have largely shaped the vision of Islam that German converts embraced. The following brief history of conversion to Islam is also therefore a history of Islam and Muslims in Germany. A generational perspective challenges the prevailing view of Muslims in Europe as a perpetually new and hence not well-integrated presence.[30]

Although yearbooks of Muslims from the turn of the twentieth century mention a few converts to Islam (Germain 2008), the first real wave of German conversion took place during the Weimar Republic, from 1919 to 1933. A liberal atmosphere open to experimentation in many aspects of life, from art and architecture to political ideas to sexuality, marked this brief

but special chapter in German history.[31] Weimar Germany was also home to more than a thousand Muslim students from India, Turkey, Iran, and Arab countries as well as anticolonial activists from India and the Middle East. Like Muslim diplomats and businesspeople, these students were catalysts for conversion. Until the 1920s, however, the number of converts was extremely small.

A real change in the conversion scene happened when the Indian Muslim group known as the Ahmadiyya Society for the Propagation of Islam decided to open European mosques, first in England and then in Berlin.[32] When the Ahmadis came to cosmopolitan and tolerant Berlin in 1921, their aim was to counter Christian missionaries who were proselytizing among Muslims. They aspired to do so by fighting the missionary vision of Islam as a backward religion (Germain 2008). Between 1924 and 1927, the Ahmadis built a beautiful mosque in the bourgeois neighborhood of Wilmersdorf. This still-surviving though poorly maintained mosque is built in the Indian style with references to the Taj Mahal. Soon after its opening, the Ahmadi mosque became a trendy cultural center for open-minded intellectuals and literary types, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. The mosque was also quite effective in its mission of propagating Islam. By the 1930s, about a third of Germany's Muslim population consisted of converts to Islam (ibid.). Some of these encountered Islam in the gatherings of the Ahmadi mosque, and others during their studies of and travels to the Middle East. Regardless, new Muslims now had a place to meet other German-speaking Muslims and talk about issues common to them. Paralleling the Muslim population of Berlin at the time, converts to Islam were a well-educated elite, including Orientalist scholars, aristocrats, and professionals. A number of prominent German converts holding doctorates were present at the opening ceremony of the Ahmadi mosque (Backhausen 2008, 62). In their publications, such as the *Moslemische Revue*, the Ahmadis seem to have been especially pleased with their upper-class converts (Clayer and Germain 2008, 307). The mosque's most renowned convert was a German aristocrat, Baron Omar von Ehrenfels, who converted to Islam in 1927 and went to Lahore to tour India in 1932 (Germain 2008, 107).

German-speaking converts to Islam included Jews who had come into contact with Islam during their travels to Palestine and sometimes through their contact with Muslims in Germany. The most famous German-speaking Jewish converts to Islam include Muhammad Asad—formerly Leopold Weiss—the grandson of a Polish rabbi and later appointed by the Pakistani government to set up the Islamic principles on which the new Islamic state would rest; Essad Bey—formerly Lev Nussimbaum—one of the most prolific German writers, whose books were listed by the Nazi propaganda ministry as "great books for German minds" until it discovered his Jewish roots; and Hamid Hugo Marcus, who edited the first German-language

translation of the Qur'an (albeit the Ahmadi version) and remained the leader of the German Muslim society housed at the Ahmadi mosque until the Nazis came to power.[33]

Like all others in Germany, Muslim organizations were greatly affected by the coming to power of the Nazis. Members who would not be approved by the Nazis, such as the Jewish-born Marcus, had to step down. Increasingly more German converts who had close relations with the Nazis or were themselves members of the National Socialist German Workers' Party took the lead. After World War II, Germany was practically empty of Muslims. Ahmadis and other Indian Muslims who had been in Germany as diplomats, businesspeople, or students left during the war, because as British subjects they were considered enemy nationals, and thus liable to imprisonment or worse. They did not return. Their beautiful mosque in Berlin remained with a community of a few German converts, but these people were marginal and insignificant among the Muslims who later came to the city. What changed the Islamic scene in Germany was the invitation of guest workers from Turkey, Yugoslavia, and Italy starting in the early 1960s. As the German economy and institutions improved, in part thanks to the guest workers, students from all around the world, including the Muslim world, began once again to attend German universities.

The number of converts to Islam started to increase again with the arrival of migrant Muslim workers. In the 1960s and 1970s, single men made up the majority of the Muslim population in Germany. Some of these, Muslim students and asylum seekers, in particular, struck up romantic relationships with German women. Asylum seekers, who had to live in apartments designated for them, were especially motivated to establish relations with German women in the hope of marrying them and gaining papers that would allow them to live permanently in Germany.[34] Some of these meaningful encounters initiated conversion, and in this period more women than men converted to Islam. The decreasing cost of tourism also contributed to an increase in German women's contact with Muslims.[35] Once an elite male diversion, travel to exotic, sunny places steadily became popular among Germans of all classes. A number of converted women I met during my research had come into meaningful contact with Muslims for the first time during their trips to places such as Turkey, Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco.

By the 1990s, the number of German converts to Islam had reached a critical mass, and they began forming German-speaking Muslim groups and developing a new group identity as "German converts to Islam."[36] Since they were especially alienated from their own families and friends, but also could not feel completely at home in the society of native-born Muslims, converted women sought emotional support in groups of German Muslim women.[37]

In the 2000s, the dynamic changed once more. Even though old trends still continue, today there is a new cohort of converts who are young, male, lower class, and often Germans of color. These young men—and some women—convert to Islam through contact with native-born Muslim friends with whom they drink, smoke marijuana, and enjoy graffiti and hip-hop. As Islam becomes further marginalized and criminalized in German society, it becomes attractive for some marginalized non-Muslims. German youths with multiple backgrounds who live in the affordable but relatively undesirable marginal areas of German cities—like Neukölln and Wedding in Berlin, where I did my research—convert to Islam. These neighborhoods are home to many Turks and Arabs, along with lower-class white native Germans and non-Muslim immigrants from Russia, East Europe, Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The transformation of the convert demographic from twenty-to-thirty-year-old women to teenage males also has something to do with the transformation of what Islam represents in Germany. Until recently, Islam was associated with things female. Even if the headscarf, honor killings, and forced marriage were all problematic issues, they were all nonetheless "women's" issues. In the 2000s, on the other hand, Islam is increasingly presented in masculinist terms. Muslims are depicted as a problem, not only owing to women's issues, but also because Muslim men are seen as terrorists, drug dealers, and machos who beat up their wives and sisters as well as German kids in the schools. Katherine Ewing (2008) shows how the Muslim male is increasingly imagined as something alien to the German nation. It is therefore unsurprising that this oppositional image attracts teenage boys alienated because they are darker skinned and socioeconomically underprivileged. The significant increase in the number of converts during early 2000s went hand in hand with the global rise of Salafism. Unlike other ethnically based mosques in Germany, Salafi ones are eager to attract and accommodate new Muslims, and teach their interpretation of Islam in German. Moreover, a number of Salafi leaders have German wives, and these women have been active in seeing to it that German converts are made welcome in the mosques, where they are able to meet like-minded people and learn more about Islam.

My historicization of conversion to Islam in Germany demonstrates its democratization.[38] One way of reading this history is as an index of Islam's declining value. As the perceived value of Islam decreased in Germany, the socioeconomic background of the converts did too. In other words, the more marginalized Islam became, the more people from more marginal segments of German society found it attractive. Yet a closer look at German conversion trends also leads to another, more positive interpretation. Whereas in the early 1900s there were a handful of converts, today the number is estimated to be in the tens of thousands, and even close to a hundred thousand. Conversion to Islam is almost always a result of a

meaningful relationship between a Muslim and non-Muslim, and affects
the lived experience of both native Germans and migrant Muslims as well
as the definitions of these terms. Hence, the dramatic increase in conversion
shows what an inseparable part of German society Muslims are. As Muslims
have been transformed through their migration to Germany, they also
transform German society—at the very least, increasing the number of
individuals who embrace Islam—in fundamental ways. In the process, Islam
has become an unquestionably national religion in Germany.

The immense diversity of the types of Germans who have converted to
Islam and Islamic traditions they have embraced mean that there is no one
type of European conversion to Islam. There is nothing intrinsic to Islam
that attracts certain types of people, nor is there any certain type of indi-
vidual who is attracted to religious traditions with particular characteristics.
What the changing trends about who in Germany converts to which type
of Islam reveal, however, is the importance of the social, political, and
cultural contexts that make only certain kinds of conversions possible at a
given time, and the others unlikely.[39]

RESEARCH AMONG CONVERTED MUSLIMS

The research for this book was done over three and a half years (2006–7,
2009–11, and half of 2013). I met local converts to Islam primarily by regu-
larly attending German-language lectures organized for converts along with
devotional and social activities organized by a handful of mosques whose
operating language is mainly German. There are over one hundred mosques
and prayer houses in Berlin (Spielhaus and Farber 2006), but when I began
conducting research in 2006, only six of them—eight by the end of my
second period of fieldwork in 2011—had activities designed for German-
speaking Muslims and especially newcomers to Islam. I attended countless
weekly lectures, prayers, Arabic-language classes, picnics, and fund-raising
activities organized by the Deutschsprachiger Muslimkreis (German-
speaking Muslim circle, or DMK), Interkulturelles Zentrum für Dialog und
Bildung (Intercultural Center for Dialogue and Education), and al-Nur
mosque. I also attended numerous activities organized by the Muslimische
Jugend, Islamische Gemeinde deutschsprachiger Islam und Freunde des
Islams Berlin, and Weimar community in Potsdam. I always had my field
book with me, and took extensive notes during events and gatherings. I
talked about the choice of discussant, event, or the direction that conversa-
tions took with others in the mosque whenever I could. I conducted semi-
structured interviews with sixty-six converts and fourteen native-born
Muslims active in German-speaking Muslim contexts.[40] I completed my
interviews over one sitting with some, and spoke with others over three or

four sittings. With many of them, I had a chance to revisit some aspects of
their lives outside the interview setting over my long research period. Like
all ethnographers, however, I gathered the most important insights regard-
ing trends and tensions in this small but more or less tightly connected
community of German Muslims through taking part in countless hours of
mundane everyday activities and conversations over an extended amount
of time. Genuine friendships eventually developed that allowed me to better
discern German Muslim lives in their complex integrity and immense
diversity.

Spending time among German converts to Islam as a native-born Turkish
Muslim researcher who lives in the United States brought a special produc-
tive tension to this study. On the one hand, because I am a Muslim, we
shared some basic beliefs and dispositions. On the other hand, unlike many
converts, I do not organize many aspects of my life according to Islamic
principles and do not practice many requirements of my religion. In many
ways, I fit the stereotypes that German converts have about what they call
"cultural Muslims." My knowledge of Islamic sciences and practices is far
from systematic, and based on bits and pieces I learned from my grandpar-
ents, or just picked up along the way while growing up in Turkey. My being
Muslim eased my presence in Islamic contexts and relationship to the
Muslims I worked with. My not being a practicing Muslim and being Turk-
ish brought a variety of tensions to the surface that converted German
Muslims often have with other practicing and nonpracticing Turkish
Muslims. This particular tension, though, gave me the most insight into the
complex relationship that German Muslims have with immigrant
Muslims.

Although there are sizable convert communities in every major western
German town and city, the position of converted Muslims in Berlin has its
specificities. Berlin's history before the fall of the Berlin Wall as an island
of West Germany surrounded by East German territory marks communities
in Berlin. Berlin is unique in being home to numerous East German converts
to Islam who belong to the same German-speaking Muslim communities
as West German converts. Native Germans from all parts of Germany as
well as immigrants from diverse corners of the world live in Berlin, a liberal,
cosmopolitan city. In German-speaking mosques, I thus met not only
former indigenous German Catholics, Protestants, atheists, and seekers
who came to Islam after trying out a number of different religions but also
converts with Latin American, African, or eastern European backgrounds.
I attempt in this book to give a good sense of the diversity of contemporary
indigenous Sunni Muslims in Germany, while pointing to commonalities
in their experiences.[41]