Comparative Studies in Society and History 2019;61(1):207–237.
0010-4175/18 © Society for the Comparative Study of Society and History 2018
doi:10.1017/S0010417518000543

Islam and Culture: Dis/junctures in a Modern Conceptual Terrain

JEANETTE S. JOUILI

Department of Religious Studies, University of Pittsburgh

In his entry on "culture" in *Keywords*, Raymond Williams writes, "Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language" (2014 [1976]: 49). With this definition in mind, consider the problem of establishing the relation of culture to the similarly difficult concept of "religion." Reflecting on this task, Webb Keane observes: "We know that these concepts are not only recent, but also dubious on many levels, problematic epistemological assumptions and ontologies. […] But like 'the modern,' they are part of both elite and everyday discourses and mediate self-awareness just about everywhere; the categories have themselves become social facts" (2007: 86). I have been led to revisit the culture concept when noticing the ambivalent usage of the term among different sets of interlocutors during research among pious European Muslims. More particularly, I have confronted and been puzzled by a range of differing arguments about the relationship between religion and culture, from clear-cut distinctions between "religion" (that is, Islam) and "culture," to emphasizing the deep imbrication of these two domains. And what I found particularly interesting was that all of these interlocutors deemed their particular articulations of the culture-religion nexus as consequential to their aspirations for a thriving European Muslim life.

To be more specific, I encountered two broader types of culture discourses in the course of two distinct ethnographic research projects. The first one came out of ethnographic material from my recently published book (2015). In it, I chronicle the everyday struggles of women active in Islamic revival circles in France and Germany whose quest for pursuing a pious mode of life stands in close but sometimes difficult relation with their aspirations to participate

Acknowledgments: My deep gratitude goes to Jessica Winegar and Alisa Perkins for their careful and critical reading of this article. I also want to thank *CSSH*'s anonymous peer reviewers for their many valuable insights and suggestions.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in larger mainstream society, especially in order to counter widespread negative representations of Muslims. Among these women, I found a consistent emphasis on the necessity of separating religion from culture. The women critically conceived "culture" as the locus for those passively inherited customs with which Muslim societies are often associated in public discourses. This particular distinction between culture and religion enabled them to criticize certain patriarchal practices they discerned within their communities.

In my current research on the Muslim music and performing arts scene in urban Britain, a different discourse around the term "culture" is salient. This arts scene has emerged at the intersection of contemporary Islamic revival movements, the global culture industry, and recent British governmental de-radicalization programs that had temporarily identified culture and arts as one of its strategic domains. The British Muslim art practitioners and their promoters were strongly invested in the field of "culture," valorizing the term especially in the sense of self-expression, creativity, and arts. They emphasized the intrinsic link between Islam and cultural expression, another reason why these arts practitioners saw the creation of an "authentic" British Muslim culture that corresponded to their own experiences as such a vital endeavor.

Of course, these two types of culture discourses are neither new nor specific to the national and local spaces where I encountered them. Similar tropes have been articulated by Muslim thinkers, activists, and practitioners across the globe. Furthermore, the two tropes are not necessarily mutually exclusive, nor are these two culture discourses as homogenous as they might appear at first blush. Within various articulations of the two tropes, the internal differences are not insignificant, having enabled a plethora of intellectual and theological projects. But that is not the task at hand. Rather, I am interested here in understanding my interlocutors' assumptions, which connect Islam's relation to culture to a broader argument about Muslims belonging to Europe, independent of their particular definitions of the religion-culture nexus.

So what exactly renders "culture" in my interlocutors' eyes so auspicious for that particular objective? How is it that two seemingly opposed approaches to culture could serve the same objective? These questions are not merely conceptual, but clearly point to broader "ethical problems" (Keane 2007: 88) that emerge from these categories, which, as Keane urges, need to be examined when they arise in our empirical work. In order to grapple with this ethnographic, conceptual, and ethical puzzle, I will explore in this essay the multivalent meanings contained in my interlocutors' usages of the culture concept and the ways these meanings relate to the specific connections and disconnections established with "Islam." I will do so first by retracing genealogies of the culture concept that explicate how my interlocutors use the term, and second

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

by excavating some of the epistemological and ontological assumptions that lie beneath these evolving concepts.[1]

The genealogical investigations of culture's conceptual history connect the Islam-versus-culture (as custom) narrative and the (creative) culture-as-part-of-Islam narrative to particular understandings of culture as formulated successively by Enlightenment thinkers, Romanticists, and early anthropology. These earlier understandings expose a broader concern about individual freedom and agency, which further enabled consecutive arguments about civilization, modernity, and backwardness. Interestingly, Islamic reformers from the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth centuries and their more recent successors have taken up the different appraisals of the term in order to better define "Islam" and especially to make an argument about its capacity to be "modern."

My argument in this essay is twofold. First, I suggest that the particular concerns about freedom and agency in modern popularized culture concepts are clearly part of our everyday vernacular, and these concerns, too, resonate in my Muslim interlocutors' discourses. More specifically, because of Islam's often assumed vexed relationship with freedom, culture has become the key conceptual language through which Muslim difference is discussed in Europe (Lentin and Titley 2011). Whether in contemporary public debates in Europe about multiculturalism, immigration, or the Global War on Terror, anxieties about Islam and culture lurk constantly. In response to and shaped by these debates, Muslims employ the culture concept as one possible discursive tool to discuss their difference and similarities in order to affirm their belonging in Europe. More explicitly, in their discourses, the question of handling "culture" properly or badly bears directly upon whether one can claim Muslims' belonging and coevalness with Europe or not.

Second, I contend that given the epistemological and ontological assumptions that underpin these concepts, my Muslim interlocutors' justifications for belonging remain suspicious within European public spheres. However productively and creatively the term might be used in inner-Muslim debates, once these debates leave the communal space, the concept's philosophical baggage ultimately risks limiting my interlocutor's aspirations. While "culture" readily explains our contemporary realities (thereby also framing them), it seems that for those under suspicion of lacking a proper understanding of freedom, "culture" is a double-edged sword, the negative consequences of which constitute a pervasive challenge to their world-making. Ultimately, then, this article explores the im/possibilities of representation in conditions of epistemic hegemonies.

[1] To be clear, I do not seek to offer here an exhaustive discussion of the culture concept in its various histories and contemporary meanings. Rather, I will selectively highlight aspects important for understanding the conceptual field in which my interlocutors operate.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

CULTURALISM AND THE NEW EUROPE

Since 9/11, multiculturalism has come under increasing attack within public, political, and even academic debates, accused of having encouraged backward cultural practices with its supposedly misleading cultural relativism and leftist permissiveness, as well as the self-segregation of minority communities leading to "parallel societies." In turn, the claim goes, the permissiveness and self-segregation promoted an environment that ultimately contributed to the growth of Islamic extremism (Lentin and Titley 2011). These kinds of arguments have constructed a "narrative of culturalist threat" (ibid.: 60), where social unrest and violence are read through a culturalist lens that, in a neoliberal logic, obscures the relevance of power structures. The terrorist attacks in London in 2005, for instance, have been read as a consequence of young British Muslims' cultural confusion. In this understanding, young British Muslims are seen as torn between traditional and modern culture and the attacks as reflecting their lack of a strong British identity (Fortier 2006: 320). Similarly, in the same year the rioters in the French *banlieues* were labeled to suffer from a "cultural handicap," the evidence being the existence of polygamy in said neighborhoods (ibid.). These narratives put forward a "cultural absolutism" (ibid.) that opposed two different, closed and incommensurate cultural systems.

In this climate, renewed emphasis has been placed upon promoting "social cohesion" through what are taken to be the shared national or European cultural norms, defined in terms of key liberal values, such as individual liberty, gender equality, or sexual freedom. Thus, in spite of many critiques of the negative culturalism enabled by multicultural policies, culture has been reaffirmed as a central concept in debates around Islam. In order to not only guarantee better social cohesion and integration of Muslims, but also ensure national security against terrorist threats (following this logic, both aspects are directly intertwined), many European countries came out in defense of "*Leitkultur*," "Fundamental Values," or "*identité nationale*," which needed to be asserted and imposed, if necessary through coercive state power (ibid.; Lentin and Titley 2011; Lithman 2010).

The increasingly passionate connection between legal citizenship and specific ideas about what constitutes a cultural consensus has been discussed in recent literature using the term "culturalization of citizenship" (Geschiere 2009; Lithman 2010). "Culturalization of citizenship" in Europe has been consistently accompanied by an increasingly intense critique of Islam, culminating in Islamophobia and the racialization of Muslims through the naturalization of culture (Lentin and Titley 2011; Taras 2013). Thus, the promotion of a national cultural identity is directly connected to a discourse of defense against an alien—Islamic—culture. Interestingly, the particular emphasis on national cultural identity with clearly "Herderian determinations about nation-states" (Fortier 2006: 497) is easily aligned with a European identity, with both identities

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

articulated in opposition to its cultural Other, Islam. Furthermore, in both oppositional pairs, a particular temporal nexus (Butler 2008) is established wherein Europe or its individual nation-states are defined by a culture that is modern, secular, future-oriented, and based on individual freedom, while Islam delineates a culture that is religiously dogmatic, backward, and represses individuality and freedom.

In the contemporary European "culture talk" (Mamdani 2005), culture defines membership to Europe. Those populations under suspicion of not possessing a compatible culture are labeled a threat to national security and interpellated to position themselves in relation to the condition of cultural belonging. As we will see in the following discussion of the ethnographic material, first, with pious women activists in France and Germany, and, second, with cultural practitioners in urban Britain, my two sets of interlocutors were also shaped by common and popularized assumptions about culture. Even if critical toward the specific ways 'culture' has been employed to criticize Islam and Muslims, they still use the term to prove their belonging. As I will ultimately argue, certain assumptions underlying the culture concept end up limiting the potential to "speak back" through culture.

ISLAM IS NOT CULTURE OR THE CRITIQUE OF "BACKWARD CULTURAL TRADITIONS"

The pious Muslim women in Germany and France whose trajectories and everyday practices I studied for my recent book (2015) were active in institutions of Islamic learning, where they strived to acquire knowledge with the central textual sources of the Islamic tradition. This ambition has been generally caused by a dissatisfaction with the more vernacular religious education received within their families, primarily headed by immigrant parents from working-class backgrounds. The more they immersed themselves in their studies, the more they came to distinguish between "authentic Islam" and something that they alternately called culture, tradition, or custom. In the discourses of these young Muslim women, especially when they tackled the question of gender relations in Islam, they frequently made this distinction. Here, the culture/tradition/custom trope came to decry a way of life that often falsely presumed to be grounded in an Islamic ethos. They argued that Muslim societies' cultures in fact contained many aspects that did not correspond to, or even outright contradicted, Islamic norms. According to my interlocutors, when operating the distinction between "culture" (tradition/custom) and "religion" (Islam), the former stood for a range of social and religiously connoted practices that were often reprehensible either for their *non-reflexive* nature or/and for their non-egalitarian, particularly *patriarchal* character.

The distinction between culture and religion enabled my interlocutors to formulate an internal critique of Muslim cultural practices. Because the practices attributed to culture lay outside the scope of authentic Islam, they could

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

be repudiated as not normatively binding. The female teachers who gave lessons in the Islamic centers, especially, saw their mission in this logic. Salwa, a German-Syrian woman and one of the teachers in a female-led Islamic center in Cologne/Germany, for instance, linked her decision to become a teacher in this center to her desire to empower Muslim women by building their capacity to distinguish Islam from cultural traditions: "Their [the women's] Islamic identity will then be free from cultural aspects. Culture is not always bad, but it is if culture gets mixed with Islamic content, or if religion becomes abused to protect certain cultural atrocities."[2] While she acknowledged the positive potential of culture, she was especially wary of the dangers for women of non-reflexively mixing culture and religion. In this vein, Umit, a German-Turkish woman who worked full-time in the same center, emphasized along with many others the negative impact of "culture" on women: "You have to distinguish religion from culture. Islam as a religion, as a theory, I do not feel at all disadvantaged. But in the culture, how Muslims live, there you are actually disadvantaged. Unfortunately, sometimes culture weighs more than religion."[3]

Following this line of argument, I was told repeatedly that the critique of "cultural Islam" and the knowledge of "true Islam" was the condition sine qua non for improving the status of Muslim women. Overtly patriarchal or misogynist interpretations and practices existing within Muslim communities that prevent women from taking their full place in society were regularly discredited in this way. Moreover, in this context it was implied that the believer must be able to distinguish the "authentic" core of Islam from the successive layers of different local cultural practices that have accreted to and ultimately buried much of the core of "true Islam."

Behind this Islam-versus-culture binary we also find a particular reading of history that works in productive tension with mainstream discourses in Europe, which tend to posit (especially when discussing the "problem" of Islam) a simplistic vision of "Western" modernity in terms of linear progress. My female interlocutors, by contrast, located progress within the original prophetic experience in Medina. While they were aware of history being multidimensional and complex, when opposed to the moral ideal of an "authentic" Islamic core, history was read as a succession of cultural layers that represented a temporal (and moral) *regression*; as a development involving numerous moments of "falsification" and "corruption" of the original message that now necessitated unraveling.

Also in line with "culture" as understood in terms of a lack of reflexivity, the women I worked with regularly distinguished between themselves and

[2] Personal communication with the author, Cologne, Germany, 13 Apr. 2005 (the name is a pseudonym).

[3] Personal communication with the author, Cologne, Germany, 17 Mar. 2003 (the name is a pseudonym).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

other Muslims they designated as "Muslim by culture." With this label they sought to describe people who might identify as Muslim and perhaps (still) maintain a certain set of religious beliefs or practices as part of their cultural heritage, but who do not understand Islam in terms of a deliberate commitment. Conversely, my interlocutors generally described their own religious trajectory as a "conscious" turn to Islam. Thus they identified themselves as Muslim either "by choice" or "by conviction," or as "Islamic."

Aziza was one of the many women who gave significant weight to this distinction. A twenty-year-old French-Tunisian woman and university student at the time we met, Aziza's trajectory was slightly different in the sense that she had received a thorough Islamic education from parents who had been active in the Islamic revival institutions in France for the past twenty years. One time, for instance, while discussing with me the broader state of Islam in France, she employed the term "Muslim by culture" to describe the majority of the French-Maghrebi community in France: "Their parents are Muslim, so they are Muslim. They are proud of that; you can see it. They might not necessarily pray, but they fast during Ramadan, so there is this Muslim identity present." In contrast to this group, she defined Muslims like herself as "Muslim by conviction." She described her own journey accordingly: "I understood that religion should not be a heritage, a culture, like it is for many people, but it should be about something fundamentally intimate within the human. Really, this search for God and for oneself, and, in fact, for truth."[4] Thus, true religiosity was located in a personal space, actively cultivated rather than passively inherited (with passive inheritance here referring to the domain of culture), requiring deep awareness and reflection, rooted in understanding and sincerity. While this approach did not deem outward practices inconsequential, it demanded that Islamic practices and beliefs had to emanate out of a particular self-reflective understanding (see Jouili 2015).

Their skeptical stance toward the term culture in *Muslim* contexts was equally evident when the women stressed their own "cultural affinities" with Europe. Here, culture, because European, took on a liberating and modern connotation. This position could also be sensed in the women's occasional valorization of (European) converts who were considered, and considered themselves, to be free of negative cultural baggage when they "entered" Islam (see also Özyürek 2014; Rogozen-Soltar 2017). Observing similar culture discourses among diasporic Muslims, Katherine Ewing (2015) notes that distinctions between a purified notion of Islam and local cultures generate the idea of Islam as a mobile "universal" that could easily fit into different cultural contexts. Ewing argues further that such a universalist argument significantly challenges the exclusivist claims of European secular

[4] Personal communication with the author, Paris, France, Germany, 9 Aug. 2002 (the name is a pseudonym).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

universalism, as well as common perceptions about the incompatibility of Islam and European values.

As a vast body of literature has shown, the discourse put forward by my interlocutors is commonplace within contemporary articulations of Islam, in both Muslim majority and minority contexts.[5] It has its roots in Islamic Reform movements, especially of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, which emerged in response to the colonization of Muslim lands by European powers. Against the colonizer's critique of Islam as being historically inert, backward, and irrational, reformers distinguished a "real" Islam from practices found in Muslim societies. Concretely, Islamic reformers established an opposition between a "pure," timeless Islam and a Muslim civilization characterized by cultural *decay, stagnation, or decline* (see, for instance, Haj 2009; Hourani 1962; Safdar 2013). By establishing this opposition, the reformers accepted the colonizers' critique of their backwardness, as well as some of the temporal assumptions that sustained the colonizers' critique. But they shifted the ideological fault lines from "Islam" to a sphere identified as social and cultural in order to defend Islam from the accusation of being the causal factor of the decadent cultural state.

For the reformers of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a multitude of customs and practices—irrational, superstitious, and oppressive—were symptomatic of this cultural decay. This is fairly well known. What I want to stress here is the particular *cultural* critique introduced at this moment within Islamic discourse, which resonates with some of the deployments of the emerging modern culture concept that began to circulate within the colonial world. One particular meaning of that concept refers to the idea of "backward cultures" located within the "non-Western world"—in this case, the Muslim world. This notion of culture grew out of an evolutionary paradigm that described history as linear progress.

The work of nineteenth-century anthropologist Edward B. Tylor (1958 [1871]) is key to understanding the emergence of the anthropological culture concept, and clearly exposes an *evolutionist* understanding of the term. Nonetheless, Tylor refuted polygenetic theories and defended the idea of a single human nature as endowed with human reason and freedom.[6] He theorized the discrepancy entailed in the acknowledgement of different stages within a pan-human culture concept through his theory of "survivals." This theory claims that certain practices made sense in the past, but have lost their

[5] See, for instance, Bracke 2011; Deeb 2006; Ewing 2015; Fernando 2014; Grewal 2014; Göle 1996; Hermansen 2009; Jacobsen 2010; and Liberatore 2017.

[6] Tylor employed the term "culture" to grasp the "progressive evolution of human moral, intellectual, and technical capacities in society" (Sartori 2005: 689) that transcends biological determinism. This is clearly indicated in his famous definition: "Culture or civilization … is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society" (1958 [1871]: 1).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

intelligibility with the evolution of knowledge. Tylor claimed that in spite of their obsolescence, survivals continued to play a role in the beliefs and practices of some contemporary societies and were particularly persistent in non-European cultures (see Keane 2007; Ratnapalan 2008). For Tylor, the term "custom" stood in for culture in the colonies, defined by artifacts, beliefs, and practices from the *past*, asynchronous with modern temporality. In his study of "primitive culture," religion as a subfield within the broader field of culture took a vital, if not perhaps the most important, place. Tylor identified the essence of the "primitive" through animism, which he saw as the ur-religion per se. This claim thus perfectly fulfilled the task of making an evolutionary yet monogenic argument.

In this discursive context, Christian missionaries as well as religious reformers indigenous to the colonies sought highly divergent means of clarifying the relation between religion and culture. In these configurations, religion could become the purest and highest expression within a broader domain of culture. Alternately, culture could appear as an inconsequential contingency or even as a corrupting force in relation to something called "religion" (e.g., see Keane 2007; Sartori 2008; van der Veer 2001). Yet, no matter the specific relations and distinctions established, in the process of these clarifications, missionaries and reformers constituted religion as an objectified and reified entity, defined crucially around its capacity to realize free subjectivity and rationality. In their re-reading of Islamic traditions, the abovementioned Muslim reformers also tried to define an Islam that secured individual subjectivity by stressing notions like interiority, rationality, and freedom, most often by returning to original textual sources (Haj 2009; Safdar 2013; Tareen 2013). In contrast, "culture" in the sense of "custom," denoted a degrading influence that materialized, according to these thinkers, in despicable folklore, superstition, or magic. Henceforth, in Islamic modernist and reform thought—now crucially impacted by the experience, expectations, and demands of a modern sense of time (Koselleck 2004)—customs and cultural traditions from the *past*, unreflectively and passively transmitted from generation to generation, were frequently described as a negative foil for evaluating what is pure Islam, timeless, universal, in line with reason and individual agency, and thus with the demands of the modern age.

Without a doubt, these purifying trends within reform movements have built on longer traditions of *tajdid* (renewal) and *islah* (reform) contained in the Islamic discursive tradition, because the normative boundaries of Islam have always concerned Muslim theologians and jurists. However, the particular epistemological and ontological claims that underlie these new discourses concerning religion are also connected to a new set of questions triggered by colonial modernity. In this case, normative Islam was embedded within a broader civilizational language and grafted onto a project of cultural reform intended to turn around the temporal delay, which the Muslim world was supposed to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

have accumulated in comparison to Europe's advanced state. This advanced state was ultimately seen as the reason for Europe's dominance in the world.[7]

With its painstaking effort to tease out a timeless Islamic core against time-bound and now obsolete cultural customs, this argument elaborated during the reform movement has become a common trope within contemporary Islamic discourses, and has been integrated into a vast range of Islamic projects.[8] As I alluded to above, my interlocutors' own distinctions between cultural and religious cores are heirs to this history of reformers and various successive groups. Distinguishing "culture" from "religion" helped these women to define themselves in certain ways as agents and as believers out of personal conviction and choice, not oppressed by backward (and misogynist) cultural traditions. In order to ground these modern conceptions of the self into an Islamic lens, the women engaged the Islamic textual tradition in particular ways, selecting from the multifarious body of Islamic textual tradition those elements that emphasized notions of interiority, responsibility, and consciousness. Thereby, they also aimed to entrench their understanding of a modern self within a robust sense of agency rooted in the divine, suggesting a model of intersubjective connectivity (see also Jouili 2015).

On first glance the culture-versus-religion maxim seemed to prove empowering for my female interlocutors. It enabled them to negotiate or refute certain gendered norms in their communities and to make Islam plausible for themselves in light of the various social ideals by which they have been shaped. But I want to draw attention here to the complicated discursive terrain upon which their efforts to put religion and culture into their respective proper places fall. As discussed in the previous section, in the contemporary European neoliberal and Islamophobic discursive climate, where social problems within Muslim communities are generally viewed through a culturalist lens (Lentin and Titley 2011), my interlocutors' somewhat essentializing distinction between religion and culture risks reinforcing rather than dismantling the simplistic yet powerful Islamophobic narratives about Muslims, in spite of the efforts to the contrary. Similar to mainstream discourses, these pious women's discourses tend to "depoliticize" social problems and social inequality (Brown 2006). A concrete example can be found in public debates around certain forms of gendered violence, such as so-called "honor killings" among Muslim populations

[7] This is not to say that there have not been indigenous cultural/ist discourses occurring within precolonial Muslim contexts. Ibn Khaldun's discourse on culture and civilization would be an interesting example (see, for instance, Mahdi 1964), and an investigation into the similarities and differences between these two conceptual traditions around culture could prove very productive. However, this is beyond the scope of this paper.

[8] One could point here, for instance, to Salafism and Islamic feminism as indicative of the fertility of this trope for opposing theological and political projects. On modern Salafist ideas of a pure (monocultural) Islamic core as opposed to Muslim cultural pluralism, see Haj 2009. On Islamic feminism's critique not only of cultural traditions, but also of how cultural understandings impact the interpretation of the scriptural sources, see Barlas (2002).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in Europe that regularly make headlines in the European press (see Ewing 2008; Ticktin 2008; Weber 2013). My interlocutors would not necessarily elaborate upon the multiple causes that lead to this violence in a complex way, such as socio-economic marginalization or the transformation and disruption of established patriarchal patterns. Seldom did they connect it to a broader debate on patriarchy and domestic violence *within* European societies. Rather, like mainstream public discourses, they tended to reduce these questions to a matter of "Muslim culture."[9] For the mainstream public, culture is impacted by religion. In reaction, for the Muslim practitioner, culture has to be distinguished from religion. In both cases, culture becomes the overarching explanatory frame for a set of complex social problems.

Moreover, the particular distinction proposed by my interlocutors, which posits religion as flawless and culture as fallible, still falls short of satisfying the demands of contemporary liberal-secular discourses that locate religion within the domain of human-made culture. As becomes evident in popular European Islam debates condemning non-Western "backward cultural practices," as well as in academic debates about post-multicultural cosmopolitanism in Europe, what is now at stake beyond the mere critique of certain cultural practices is a group's supposed *relation* to culture, *its* cultural attachments, affinities, and modes of belonging.[10] Here, again, religion is not conceptually distinguished from culture—it falls within the scope of culture and even becomes the epitome of culture, understood in terms of subjectivity-declining culture as custom. What matters is the capacity to distance oneself self-critically from inherited beliefs and associated practices and consequently relativize them (see, for instance, Ewing 2010; Jouili 2015; Scott 2003). It is this capacity to critique religion as culture that coheres with hegemonic notions of a modern European temporality (see Koselleck 2004). In the eyes of their critics, this is the failure of my interlocutors' discourse: they neither relativize nor criticize religion—that is, the religious core. As a consequence, their multiple, heterogeneous temporal frameworks remain anachronistic, since they are unable to endorse the notion of a linear, homogeneous, and empty time.[11]

"ISLAM IS ALSO CULTURE," OR THE CRAFTING OF AN "AUTHENTIC" BRITISH MUSLIM CULTURE

My research with pious British Muslim culture practitioners provided an interesting context for observing the articulation of a very different variety of contemporary Muslim culture discourses. Here, I examine the primarily

[9] This particular argument is also discussed in Ewing (2008: 170).

[10] In the academic debate, these positions have been notably articulated by Ulrich Beck (2004); Paul Gilroy (2005); and Jürgen Habermas (2008).

[11] Some scholars have critiqued the hegemony of European temporality and provided alternative accounts to understand contemporary Islamic articulations of time (see Asad 2003: 179; Deeb 2009; and Mas 2011).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

London-based Muslim music and performing arts scene in the political context following the July 2005 London bombings, defined by increasingly intrusive counter-terrorism and radicalization-prevention programs that target the Muslim community at large. On one hand, these policies vigorously push for a "moderate" Islam and, in this optic, sometimes even fund Muslim culture and the arts. Yet the discourses underlying these policies regularly question the loyalty of Muslims to the state. In this context, this heterogeneous Muslim cultural scene continuously and critically (re)negotiates piety and ethical norms, definitions of Britishness and citizenship, as well as ideals of "authentic" Islamic artistic creativity. Attempts within the scene to create space for observant Muslim artists have generated controversial discussions as to what constitutes *halal* (permissible) art in form and content: What should *halal* art sound (or look) like? How should it be performed? And how do Islamic gendered norms, which are interpreted in extremely divergent ways, fit into all of this?

While the Muslim artists I talked to also voiced comparable culture-critiques to those previously mentioned when discussing contentious practices and customs within their communities (again, especially when it came to gender relations), as culture practitioners they also had to lay claim to a *positive* notion of culture.[12] In this sense, these art practitioners and event organizers acted within an even more complicated terrain, precisely because culture, now also understood in terms of arts and creativity, had been treated negatively in many contemporary Islamic discourses articulating the religion-versus-culture dichotomy.[13]

In fact, the "British Muslim cultural project" my informants envisaged and promoted was often expressed in explicit opposition to what they described as a hardliner and/or "Salafi" anti-culture and anti-arts position.[14] But they also opposed their project against the elder generation, which was seen to dominate mainstream Islamic organizations and criticized for either lacking any interest in culture and the arts or for being stuck in the cultural folkloric traditions of their home countries. Several interlocutors described this situation in terms of "Muslim culture wars" going on in Britain, but also globally. Many of the art practitioners and event organizers I interviewed related anecdotes about critiques and even aggressive verbal attacks with which their work was met. I was able to follow some of these disputes on social media and occasionally witnessed tensions during events. Therefore, it is not surprising that the arts and culture practitioners saw themselves on the front line of that struggle and, interestingly, they often framed that struggle in terms of "defending cultural diversity in Islam."

[12] Some artists formulated these critiques in their songs, theatre plays, and spoken-word poems.
[13] For a stringent critique of this Islam-versus-culture dichotomy, see for instance, Shahab Ahmed (2015).
[14] On various Muslim anti-arts and anti-music positions and their influence on the British Muslim music scene, see Morris (2013).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The question of cultural diversity was a substantive and concrete one for my British interlocutors, since the cultural scene they constituted is comprised of an extremely diverse group of people in terms of ethnic origins. The artists' parents hailed not only from South Asia or the broader Middle East and North Africa, but also from different West African and East African countries. Moreover, a substantial number of practitioners were Muslim converts, some of them from an Afro-Caribbean background and some white Europeans. Many culture practitioners integrated some aspects of their racial, ethnic, and regional backgrounds into their cultural work. While doing so, they tended to reflect explicitly upon the relation between their origins (whether they framed it as cultural background, identity, or heritage) and the particular art forms they created. In the context of my fieldwork, discussions of the legitimacy of different (authentic) Muslim cultures was sometimes articulated, especially by Muslims of sub-Saharan African and Afro-Caribbean backgrounds, as a critique of the "ethno-religious hierarchies" (Abdul Khabeer 2016) of the British Muslim community, dominated by South Asian and to a lesser extent Middle Eastern Muslims.

While their ideals of cultural diversity were also framed in a language congruent with British discourses on pluralism and multiculturalism, these arts and culture practitioners wanted to embed their *defenses* of culture especially within an Islamic framework. This approach was not merely in reaction or opposition to the "hardliners" to whom they did not want to relinquish the field. It was also pivotal to their own moral and intellectual investments in specific Islamic traditions, which often but not always happened to be more Sufi-inclined traditions. My interlocutors generally rejected what they described as the "Salafi" anti-cultural or mono-cultural stance and considered the relationship between culture and religion as intrinsic and symbiotic. In this sense, they saw culture as a complementary field that enables and gives expression to religion. Thus, the arts and culture practitioners I talked to related the question of culture to local and regional differences as well. This is evident in the following statement by Luqman Ali, the African-American artistic director and founder of Al-Khayyal Theatre, an established, London-based Muslim theatre company that aims to explore "Muslim world literature" in its plays: "From my point of view, it is very difficult in Islam to separate faith and culture. When you have Muslims from China to West Africa sharing the same faith, and religious customs will over time integrate and synthesize with local subculture, you do end up with a mosaic type of religious culture."[15] Likewise, in my interlocutors' discussions of the Islamic legitimacy of *artistic* practices, they articulated an *Islamic* defense of particular local cultural expressions and folklore. In this way they tied the issue of arts and culture to a broader discussion on pluralism,

[15] Personal communication with the author, London, 24 July 2008.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

as well as to questions of sameness and diversity within Islam. Consequently, defending the arts project became tantamount to defending cultural pluralism within Islam.

Tariq Ramadan, a European Muslim intellectual whose thoughts had been relevant not only for my interlocutors in Germany and France but also for many of those involved in the Muslim culture scene in the UK, dedicated a chapter in his book *Radical Reform* (2009) to the question of arts and culture in relation to Islam. While he does make (in the tradition of modern Islamic reform discourse) a conceptual difference between "religion" and "culture" in order to sustain his belief in certain universal fundamentals within the Islamic traditions, he ventures to articulate the close and complex relationship between culture and Islam. Such a relationship is also meant to go against a Salafi "reductionism," with its mono-cultural normative stance (ibid.: 184). He does so in a way that nicely elucidates the idea that many of my British interlocutors hinted at or implied:

> Although it must be reiterated that Islam is primarily "a religion" and not "a culture," one should immediately add that religion never finds expression outside a culture.… There are, therefore, no religiously neutral cultures, nor any culture-free religions. Any religion is always born—and interpreted—within a given culture and in return the religion keeps nurturing and fashioning the culture of the social community within which it is lived and thought. Those inevitable and complex links make it difficult to define … what belongs to religion proper and what instead pertains to the cultural dimension (ibid.: 183).

If Islam is universal, as Ramadan argues, and thus provides transcendent and eternal values, then the Islamic ethic "must provide its faithful with the means to approach the diversity of cultures appropriately" (ibid.: 184); a model that he sees to have existed throughout the history of Islam (ibid.: 185). Ramadan refers to the Sunna (deeds and sayings of the Prophet) in order to advocate for lenience toward a variety of customs and cultural expressions. A similar argument is made by Muslim-American scholar Umar Faruq Abd-Allah, another contemporary supporter of culture and arts in Islamic contexts, whose pamphlet "Islam and the Cultural Imperative" (2004) several of my interlocutors explicitly invoked as an inspiration and/or to justify their own activities. Abd-Allah, like Ramadan, responds to what he calls the Islamists' "culturally predatory attitude" to make the case for Islam to be "culturally friendly" (ibid.: 1–2). He, too, invokes the Prophet's Sunna as well as its inscription within the Islamic legal tradition that has developed a flexible body of law recognizing the validity of local cultures (*al-'urf* and *al-'ada*), applicable as long as they do not explicitly contradict the clear textual sources.[16]

[16] The Qur'an itself demands acceptance of these habits/customs. Cultural and ethnic differences are recognized as well (especially in the Hadith literature). Classical Islamic law recognized *al-'urf* and *al-'ada* as sources of law. For a detailed discussion of *al-'urf* in Islamic jurisprudence, see Shabana (2015).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Both Ramadan and Abd-Allah make these arguments to emphasize the importance of people living in step with their local societies. Both see culture as the seedbed in which Islam may take root, and in turn, Islam can shape culture by orienting cultural ethics and values. And while they acknowledge that this interdependent relationship already constituted a central feature of premodern Islamic history, which Muslims have a duty to cherish, their arguments are particularly geared toward the future and meant to address Muslims in a globalizing world. For Ramadan, one of the major tasks is to enable Muslims to productively respond to the cultural challenges in the contemporary world, notably what he considers the "pressures" of a money-driven "contemporary global culture" (2009: 204). For Abd-Allah, who writes about the U.S. context, the challenge is to build a new Muslim community in a diasporic setting. He urges Muslim Americans to creatively shape a "sound Muslim American cultural identity" that he defines to be among the "community's vital priorities" (2004: 2–3). Cautioning against viewing American Muslims as one monolithic group, he advocates for different "sub-group[s]" cultivating their "own self-image and unique cultural expression" (ibid.: 10).[17]

Thus, when talking about a future-oriented project of shaping or creating either a contemporary thriving artistic culture with an Islamic ethos (Ramadan) or a thriving indigenous Muslim American culture (Abd-Allah), we see a subtle shift from culture in terms of custom (*al-'adat*, habits that are inherited) to culture in terms of a creativity that expresses inner truths and reflects "imagination," the "inner self," and the "spiritual quest," as Ramadan puts it (2009: 206), or, in Abd-Allah's words "a culture that gives us the freedom to be ourselves" (2004: 12).

With their shifts between different meanings of culture, the arguments brought forth by these two contemporary Muslim thinkers summarize well the claims of my interlocutors.[18] Many professed a desire to contribute to the formation of a "British Muslim culture" that is "truly British" and "authentically Muslim," thereby also providing alternatives to mainstream cultures

[17] Interestingly, Ramadan understands Western consumer and popular culture as a "pressure" (2009: 204) to which people "are blindly drawn" and that has "preprogrammed, standardized, reduced" tastes (ibid.: 206). Without quoting him, Ramadan here reiterates aspects of Adorno's (2003) critique of popular culture, especially popular music. By contrast, Abd-Allah takes a more optimistic view of American cultural achievements and urges American Muslims to endorse "the fertile American culture legacy" (2004: 10) in their construction of an indigenous American Muslim culture. However, Ramadan does not criticize all Western cultural achievements; he says contemporary Muslims should be inspired by world cultures and artistic productions that reflect "universal" principles, such as dignity, justice, freedom, and which are part of the global heritage (see 2009: 204).

[18] There are, of course, other Muslim thinkers who write today about the culture (as art)-Islam nexus (see, for instance, Hermansen 2009). I merely discuss these two because my interlocutors explicitly invoked them.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with which many religious Muslims cannot easily identify. Bilal Hassam, for instance, the British-born South Asian and Creative Director of British Muslim TV, has defined in a conversation with me the channel's task of shaping British Muslim culture as one that seeks to "move from a narrative of cultural *baggage* to one of cultural *heritage* where we are proud of our cultural heritage and not held back by the baggage."[19] It is from this more liberating understanding of heritage (which removes the connotation of culture as exerting pressure or imposing constraints, thus "holding back") that my interlocutors claim they want to forge a "British Muslim culture." In their view, this culture should take heritage into account, but should also reflect the local experiences and ways of life of British Muslims. Additionally, and similar to Abd-Allah's plea, key in the culture discourse of my interlocutors that placed religion and culture in a close relationship was the notion that a rich "British Muslim culture" becomes part of the necessary conditions for guaranteeing not only a thriving British Muslim community, but also its very survival.

My interlocutors offered a variety of interconnected rationales to explain the vital role of culture and arts for the British Muslim community. One key claim is related to the recognition of the rich pedagogical and formative potential of arts and culture for the individual self, as well as for the community at large. A young woman and founding member of the City Circle[20]—a network of young professional Muslims—made this argument to me within a broader critique of British Muslim mainstream organizations: "The big [Muslim] organizations don't really consider culture important, that culture helps you to grow as a person, individually, and this also makes you grow as a Muslim, develop your faith, they don't see this."[21]

Another, related claim is the assumed capacity of arts and culture to provide an environment that shapes strong identities in a long-term, intergenerational perspective. This is the rationale of Abdul-Rehman Malik, a London-based Pakistani-Canadian and until 2011 the cultural director of the Muslim organization Radical Middle Way. Malik repeatedly asserted to me that identity formation was the key reason for his own investment in the Muslim cultural sector.[22] For him, culture provides references key to the construction of a strong identity, which in turn allows Muslims to resist the pressures of assimilation: "For my children, for your kids, I need a vibrant cultural space, because that's what's going to frame their Islam, it's the music, they listen to, it's the art that they see. […] I fear that the assimilationist trend, and the cultural power of the societies around us, how long can you hold this, how

[19] Personal communication with the author, Lincoln, Lincolnshire, UK, 29 July 2016.

[20] The City Circle was created in 1999 with the intention to strengthen the Muslim voice in British mainstream society. It mainly organizes lectures and, infrequently, cultural events.

[21] Personal communication with the author, London, 18 July 2011.

[22] Radical Middle Way has organized many cultural events across British cities. Between 2005 and 2011 it was funded mainly by the government.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

long can you hold that level of [Muslim anti-culture] conservatism, you'll hold the street for one more generation, two generations, it will break down."[23]

At the same time, these cultural references, as Abdul-Rehman put it, not only craft a strong Muslim identity but a *British* Muslim identity that allows British Muslims to feel a sense of belonging. In this logic, it is by providing the space to "express themselves," to express their own "experiences," their "struggles," and their "identity" that culture becomes so vital in this regard: "From my point of view, from our point of view, culture is the battlefield. I mean you create a culture, a dynamic, Islamic culture, Muslim culture in Britain, [expressing] our stories, our thoughts, you know, our books, poetry, our music, our dance, our plays, that gives us a sense of being here.… Culture creates the necessary ground for belonging and being, and we have to recognize that."[24]

Another key argument that my interlocutors have made over and over is that culture and the arts can help British Muslims to gain recognition within a multicultural Britain. Again, in the words of Abdul-Rehman, "[Culture] allows us to have social capital, it also gives us a confidence to be who we are in the world." Here, in an almost Bourdieusian sense, Abdul-Rehman recognized how culture in European societies constitutes "social capital"—what Bourdieu defines as "a capital of honourability and respectability" (1977: 503)—which potentially enables ascending social hierarchies. It offers social recognition, which ultimately is one of the important conditions for building self-confidence. And it is with such "capital," the argument often continues, that the community will be able to enter into conversation or dialogue with broader mainstream society. Art practitioners as well as cultural event organizers all stressed to me repeatedly the power of art for "building bridges," engaging in "cultural dialogue," "overcoming stereotypes," or "showing a positive image of Islam."

In this vein, artists again and again stressed their responsibility as artists to represent Islam in a positive light to mainstream society, and also to deconstruct stereotypes. Frequently, when speaking within cultural spaces where their opinions are solicited, religious scholars appealed to the artists' extraordinary capacity to represent, and urged them to take seriously their duty of being something akin to "ambassadors" of Islam. Artistic expression, as well as the atmosphere of joy and fun that often goes along with these practices, seemed here particularly apt to counter images of violence, austerity, and rigidity so often associated with the Islamic faith.

To understand the specific assumptions that underlie my interlocutors' positive evaluations of culture, I want to pause here in order to scrutinize a different moment in the history of the culture concept, one that in fact precedes the

[23] Personal communication with the author, London, 21 June 2014.
[24] Personal communication with the author, London, 25 July 2008.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

anthropological formulation I addressed earlier. From the Enlightenment onward, the term "culture" became integrated into a humanist project and began to stand in for what distinguishes humans from animals and their biological determinism, so as to delineate the nature-commanding human, endowed with rational control (Sartori 2005: 685). Historian Andrew Sartori, who investigates the evolving modern culture concept, shows that culture in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century debates refers not only to the human capacity for mastering nature, but also to the process that enables humans to do so. Thus it has been theorized as cultivation and perfection of humanity and various, exclusively human capacities (ibid.).[25] In the words of Matthew Arnold, culture is the "idea of perfection as an *inward* condition of the mind and spirit" (2006: 37). With Herder, the term becomes intrinsically linked with *Volk*, which turns culture into "the process of unfolding the inner propensities of each people" (Sartori 2005: 687), thereby laying the groundwork for the later anthropological culture concept I discussed above.[26]

If at first art is merely subsumed by the humanistic culture concept as one aspect among others and as the possible materialization of this cultivation—in other words, as its objectified results—toward the end of the nineteenth century the term took on an additional meaning. It also came to explicitly denote the whole field of *arts* (Williams 1983: 46). But as Raymond Williams explains, this latter sense of culture grew out of the former, at a time when the artist (rather than the artwork) gained new attention as creative agent, which enabled "the association of the idea of the general perfection of humanity with the practice and study of arts" (ibid.). Romanticism placed such a value on creative expression that it not only defined the artist but humanity in general as endowed with "imaginative and spiritual aspirations, […] emotional depths, […] artistic creativity and powers of individual self-expression and self-creation" (Tarnas 1993: 367). Art was seen as the expression of artistic subjectivity, the materialization of interiority.

Thus, from Romanticism onward, art was theorized as representing the epicenter of the humanistic culture concept. As the pure materialization of interiority, the expression of a personal and original truth, it also became intrinsically connected to the new ideal of "authenticity" (Taylor 1992). In addition, Talal Asad argues that Romanticism has contributed to the development of a secular aesthetic theory by shifting the understanding of "inspiration" from the realm of the divine to the creative genius (2003: 52–53). It is at this

[25] During this time, "culture" was often contrasted with the term "civilization." The two terms were also used interchangeably to denote either technological advancement (the knowledge and sciences that provide skills or prowess to control nature and facilitate life), or the elevation of the mental state, or the spirit, which allows humans to cast off the "despotism of desires," or biological (or animal) instincts.

[26] It is in the context of the emergence of such a nationalist culture discourse that Norbert Elias articulated his classic work on the modern German culture-civilization dichotomy (1994).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

moment, then, that artists began to be celebrated for resisting social constraints or pressures (such as religion) in their pursuit of realizing one's inner potential and personal truth, which cannot be found elsewhere.

At the same time, art came to be seen as analogous to the broader culture concept and as a pivotal *tool* for the cultivation and perfection of various human capacities. Tony Bennett (2000), for instance, demonstrates that since the nineteenth century, cultural activity has been lauded by liberal politicians for its "reforming capacities" that reflect a belief in art's "ability to effect an inner moral transformation that would give rise to changed forms of behavior" (ibid.: 1415). The power of art could be used to uplift entire populations, thus also lending itself, Bennett argues, to becoming a tool for state building or state consolidation when deployed to unify and manage a national people and make them aware of their responsibilities to this end (see also Lloyd and Thomas 2013).

This framing of culture in terms of arts and a general artistic environment has, next to the anthropological one, become one of the most widespread understandings of culture (Williams 2014 [1976]: 90). Many of the assumptions underlying this culture concept are also echoed in my interlocutors' discussions about the relevance of art and culture for the British Muslim community. As described previously, they see culture and art as essential for developing a strong sense of self, because it provides a means of shaping and then expressing oneself as well as of creating identity and a sense of belonging. Furthermore, my interlocutors emphasized the role of art and culture in building a thriving and strong diasporic community. They, too, believed in the power of art to uplift entire communities.

Finally, they connected it to authenticity, and, because art is generally perceived as expressing the inner nature of a community, they also had strong faith in the representative power of art for shaping a more positive image of Muslims in the larger British society. This kind of appreciation of the arts in contemporary pious Muslim life is not specific to my interlocutors but is also part of a growing trend within contemporary Islamic movements, which have begun to valorize art to various extents as conducive to strengthening Muslim subjectivities, communities, and nations (see Winegar 2014).[27]

It is important to indicate here as well the important ontological shifts that occurred in my interlocutors' deployment of a popularized culture-as-art concept. This became especially apparent when the question of freedom arose, which is often closely associated, in European public debates, with the

[27] Jessica Winegar in her work (2006; 2009) shows how the culture discourse has been incorporated by secular nationalist elites in Muslim countries (invoking a "national" culture with the objective of civilizing the nation), but much less so by Muslim reformers. Only the more recent Islamic revival movements have begun to see potential in the arts for supporting their own religious projects (Winegar 2014).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

idea of art. Indeed, the Muslim artists in my research have a complex relationship with ideals of freedom, agency, and self-formation, but also with the notion of authorship. Their specific approaches only partially map onto the (post-) Romantic ideal as it is cherished today (however simplified) in popular European art and culture discourses as they are promoted in public debates. In spite of my interlocutors' emphasis on self-expression and artistic agency in their promotion of British Muslim culture, their articulation of an authentic interiority and agency when talking about artistic "self-expression" was not indicative of notions of a pure, autonomous space within an inner, unencumbered self.[28] It is in this sense that British-Mozambican rapper Mohammed Yahya explained to me his own understanding of self-expression: "Every artist has the right to express himself like he wants to, but for me, I don't feel I am compromising my art form, for me Islam is not just like praying five times a day. For me, my whole life is based around Islam, from how I speak, to how I rap, to my relation I have with my wife. So the fact that I am trying to follow the Islamic principles as a performer, that I set boundaries that I don't cross, I don't see that as compromising, I just see this as me being myself."[29]

The self that my interlocutors wanted to express through the arts was thus conceptualized as a complicated product of a variety of elements. First, it was generally accepted among these pious interlocutors that the self must be shaped by God-consciousness (*taqwa*), honed with the help of various religious techniques of self-cultivation. Yet my informants also recognized the impact of personal and collective life trajectories on the self, which is why the project of *British* Muslim culture as the venue for self-expression was so important to them.

All of these elements appeared in my interlocutors' discourses to fashion the inner self that then is expressed through the arts, an expression that is itself also often read as partially originating from the sphere of the divine. In this sense, art could, for instance, be understood as the celebration of divine beauty, as Luqman said: "Art for us is about celebrating and expressing the beauty of the divine, whatever form it takes and that as an ethos governs our heart." But art could also be viewed in terms of individual artistic talent being comprehended as a divine gift.[30] Sukina, member of the British-Jamaican female Hip Hop duo Poetic Pilgrimage, explained her work as a lyricist, poet, and hip hop artist in this way: "What you've got is something that Allah has given you for you to look after for a while, it's a gift […]. So that you know

[28] This is in no way to postulate the existence of one homogenous, secular modern self, nor one single idea about modern arts in the West. However, they often appear as such in popular media debates when positing Islam's incapacity to endorse modern ideas about arts.

[29] Personal communication with the author, London, 30 July 2008.

[30] Such an understanding of the arts reflects some basic understandings of what could be coined "Islamic aesthetics," which links together beauty, ethics, and remembrance of God (see, for instance, Elias 2012, ch. 5).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

creativity is something which one day may not be here and I, just looking at it as it's something that's from Allah and being grateful to Allah."[31]

Following this understanding, self-expression for these artists is not meant to necessarily go against any structures or norms that hinder the sovereign self from expressing itself freely and spontaneously. The Islamic norms deemed authentic are incorporated into creative expression, not only because the artist feels committed to abide by them but also because culture and the arts are seen in terms of their pedagogical mission to contribute to the shaping of Muslim audiences (*da'wa*), thereby, again, enhancing and refining the pious self (see, for instance, Winegar 2014). However, my informants also believed that norms and structures could and should be critiqued through art if they contradicted the ethical norms of "authentic" Islamic tradition as they saw it, which they defined often in terms of justice and equality. The anti-racist or anti-imperialist messages often reflected in their art indicate that stance.

Contestations over how to define the rules of conduct and the norms that would best delimit Muslims' artistic productions recurrently generate passionate debates among British Muslims. There are a variety of interpretations as to what such an ethics should consist of and whether and to what extent one can and should define normative boundaries around Muslim cultural projects. These debates are partially related to the different affiliations of artists and their promoters with particular religious groups and schools of thought. Thus, the religious norms that should or should not govern artistic projects were constantly discussed and redefined depending on how my interlocutors interpreted, at specific moments through their personal trajectory, the vast and multifarious body of the Islamic discursive tradition and what elements were referred to and highlighted. While some artists pushed against orthodoxies and narrower interpretations, others did not. But for most of the artists with whom I worked, it was a matter of a difference of opinion sanctioned by the Islamic tradition itself and it should be up to one's individual conscience. This was also the response to their more "Salafi" inclined peers my interlocutors would typically articulate.

As I have shown so far, my interlocutors aptly employed the culture concept in order to accommodate their specific ontological assumptions as well as their congruent ethical commitments. However, this is never quite accepted by the European mainstream societies with which they seek to engage. The lack of acceptance becomes evident in observing how public media seem to pay special or near-exclusive attention to Muslim artists who are perceived (rightly so or not) to be the most disruptive to, or even rebelling against, Islamic orthodoxies and restrictions.

Such a preference poses an important challenge to the *representative* aspect of my interlocutors' cultural project, so closely connected to their

[31] Personal communication with the author, London, 28 July 2008.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

broader quest for recognition. If most Muslim artists I talked to imagine their work contributing to the deconstruction of stereotypes against Muslims and Islam by showing, as they usually put it, "a positive image of Islam," they quite often only succeed in this if their art indicates some transgression of an imagined Islamic normativity. It is for this reason that female British Muslim performance artists in particular are solicited to do this kind of "deconstructive" work of representation, given the simplistic notion that Muslim women become transgressors simply by being Muslim women and performance artists. The two members of Poetic Pilgrimage are probably the most popular British Muslim hip hop band in the UK and abroad, and they spoke to me about the reception of their work and their efforts to resist being branded in this way. Sukina, one of the band members, explained: "We are very passionate, we express ourselves, they [journalists] are like wow, sometimes they like to read us differently, like there is this Norwegian singer, born-Muslim, very much like a Muslim Madonna,[32] who tries to rebel against [Islam], so they think we are like this. But no, we don't want to rebel against anything, we love it, so that comes across, so it is confusing to them, but people like to use it to their advantage."[33]

Thus, there is an imbalance in what is legible for recognition and who is granted the possibility to "dialogue."[34] It seems to me that this possibility is distinctly tied to a requirement to demonstrate freedom.[35] Again, this requirement maps only partially on the artists' own desire to represent Islam positively, to oppose what they deem the "Salafi" purism and severity as well as to vehemently denounce the "perversion" of the Islamic teachings by extremists.

The release of the controversial "British Happy Muslims" video is another interesting example that highlights the extent to which the broader reception of Muslim culture risks entrapment within a narrative of freedom versus constraint, alongside the "moderate versus extremist Islam" mantra. In 2014, an organization called Honesty Policy released a cover video of Pharrell Williams's original "Happy" song, but with the same soundtrack. That year, the Williams' song and video had taken the world by storm and triggered covers of the video by groups and communities across the globe. The video "Happy British Muslims" shows British Muslims, young and old, male and female, of all ethnic backgrounds, walking, dancing, and bicycling through the streets of London with smiling faces. Many of the artists and cultural brokers I have worked with over the years appeared in it.

[32] Sukina refers to the Norwegian-Pakistani singer Deeya Khan.
[33] Personal communication with the author, London, 22 July 2011.
[34] On this point, see also Winegar 2008.
[35] Of course, this is not a problem specific to British Muslim artists. The problematic reception and consumption of non-Western and racialized arts and artists in the West has been extensively criticized by anthropologists and cultural criticists (e.g., Clifford 1988; Oguibe 2004).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

As might be expected, a debate divided the Muslim community about the permissibility of this video, in particular on social media. Certain voices took issue with music in general as not permissible, and with women and men moving (or dancing) together. Another crucial controversy took shape around the appropriateness of performing Britishness and happiness at a time when the entire community was under attack by the media, politicians, and counter-terrorism policies. As might also be expected, this internal community debate was quickly taken up by the mainstream British media. In the shift from an internal Muslim debate to a mainstream debate *on* Muslims, some of the parameters of the debate were transformed as well. The initial statement on the blog of Honesty Policy made a case for diversity and cosmopolitanism in Britain where, interestingly, "Brits" were in need of some image work rather than Muslims: "We Brits have a bad rep for being a bit stiff, but this video proves otherwise. We are HAPPY. We are eclectic. We are cosmopolitan. Diverse. Creative. Fun. Outgoing. And everything you can think of" (Gander 2014). When I spoke to several video participants about this issue, they explained their participation not too differently, either in terms of "just having a good time" or the welcome possibility of changing the negative narrative about Muslims in British society by showing a positive image.

However, once the critiques appeared online and the debate was taken up by the British media, the comments took on another tone. In the *Independent*, the critique was covered in an article entitled "'Sinful': Video of British Muslims Dancing to Pharrell Williams's Hit Happy Comes under Attack." It speaks of a "vocal minority" that criticized the video. The article then quotes Honesty Policy's spokesperson, who responded to the controversy in this way: "Lots of people have an idea of Islam that you have to conform to prescribed rules to be a good Muslim, but to us, as young second and third generation British Muslims, that's not the case. We're thankful to have grown up in a British society with freedom of expression…. And we're thankful that our faith gives us the room to be British and to be a Muslim. Some people don't see that. They don't see Islam as pluralistic [as we do]" (Merrill 2014).

Thus, a video meant to showcase British Muslim normalcy became yet another occasion to situate Muslims in opposition to one another, on one side those who accept freedom of expression ("second and third generation British Muslims") and on the other, those who conform excessively to "prescribed rules," who also seem to be implicitly excluded from Britishness. In a climate where extremism has been articulated in relation to fundamental British values such as individual liberty (Miah 2017), considering such a video *haram* might even become an extremist position.[36]

[36] It was hence not surprising when Majeed Navaaz, co-founder of the controversial Quilliam Foundation, a think tank that focuses on counter-terrorism, tweeted an image of a poster supposedly taken from a British Muslim school that explains the evils of music (Nguyen, 2014). This tweet

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

CULTURE "AS" OR "VERSUS" RELIGION: RELATING THE TWO NARRATIVES

The culture concept discourse of the participants in the Muslim cultural scene I studied in the UK, with its emphasis on the connectedness between culture and religion, seems, on the face of it, to be opposed to the pious women's culture discourse from my research in Germany and France, which insisted on the separation between "religion" and "culture." But I remind that in spite of this apparent opposition, these two culture concept tropes are not mutually exclusive—that is, they can and do occur together—precisely because they highlight two distinct aspects of culture. In this section, however, I want to point to the important convergences between these two tropes, which can reveal crucial insights about shared assumptions underlying both culture terms.

Both discourses reveal deep concerns over the right or wrong approach to culture. Both define themselves in opposition to an Other who is engaged in the "wrong" relationship with culture. Both also see Muslims' handling of culture as central in creating a sense of belonging and acceptance in Europe. Central to both of these concerns is a capacity to properly tease out obsolete cultural practices from either the Islamic universal principles or those cultural practices that qualify as one's rich cultural heritage. As we have seen, underlying all these vexations in both culture discourses is a common concern for possibilities for agency and notions of free subjectivity. This is not a coincidence, because the two different strands of the culture concept—which are reflected in my interlocutors' distinct culture discourses—emanate from a common origin. As Sartori argues, the "anthropological" definition of culture has grown out of the earlier "humanist" approach to the term. He shows how the concern for grasping human agency, which postulates "the fundamental underdetermination of human subjectivity" (2005: 677), and therefore a capacity for self-creation, has been carried over from the humanist to the anthropological definitions of the term. This capacity for self-creation was, if we read Sartori together with Reinhardt Koselleck (2004), embedded within a new experience of secular time, which made possible a progress narrative that self-consciously ruptured from religious time (defined by religious prophecy), where the future, now undetermined, became "an extensive space of possibility" (ibid.: 70).

By acknowledging the particular ontological and epistemological implications of the culture concept we can properly understand how the term appears in contemporary debates about Islam and in Muslims' responses to it. Let me return here to Tylor's culture concept, in which lies ingrained not merely a more socially defined humanist framework, but also a dual understanding of

happened, incidentally, at the height of the "Trojan Horse" affair in Birmingham, which revolved around a supposed Islamist plot to take over Muslim schools in Birmingham (see Miah 2017). The connection between an anti-music stance and Islamist infiltration thus was directly made.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

culture with two distinct temporalities that are mapped geographically. As addressed earlier, Tylor's concept argued for a global culture term that could *potentially* demonstrate the "underdetermination" of human subjectivity by biology. But when it came to the "primitive cultures" he studied, he especially emphasized "customs" that he saw as senseless "survivals" from the past. In this sense, these survivals became implicitly connected to an argument about the *actually existing* overdetermination of human subjectivity—rather than the promise of its opposite—by (primitive) culture grounded in a particular (backward-looking) temporality. If anthropology has gone some way in developing a more subtle culture discourse, such a reductively dual culture concept persists, not only in contemporary popularized discussions or common sense parlance but also among certain liberal political thinkers (Scott 2003).[37] Thus today there is a culture concept in use that is rife with earlier humanist inflections, providing the necessary conditions for securing and promoting free subjectivity. When it appears in discussions around the failure of multiculturalism and Muslim populations in Europe, this concept seems to have become almost an exclusive descriptive for Western (liberal) societies. At the same time, the earlier anthropological discussion of "primitive culture" in terms of "survival" and "custom" now becomes freedom's antipode, the context that thwarts its realization (because it is not liberated from the past), and is mainly associated with non-Western, especially Muslim, societies.

As Wendy Brown's (2006) discussion of the uses and abuses of an only vaguely defined culture concept in contemporary liberal discourse shows, liberal theory has identified Western societies in terms of an individualism that limits the reach of "culture" (as custom)—including religion—while valorizing "culture" (in the humanist sense). This seems to stand in contrast to non-Western societies, whose culture is almost exclusively defined in terms of "custom" and fully determines behavior (see also Mamdani 2005). Here, culture represents the power of the collective rather than the possibilities for subjectivity (see also Scott 2003).

Thus, the two culture concepts constitute an interesting pair. One is defined through the other, situated on opposite ends on a spectrum regarding the question of the over- or under-determination of individual subjectivity. As I showed in the previous sections, in this dominant discursive framework established through "culture" my European Muslim interlocutors tried to distance themselves from an association with the all-encompassing and oppressive culture (as *past* and *obsolete* custom) concept and to lay claim instead to a more "humanist-inclined" (universal, timeless, and/or future-oriented) concept in order to overcome the stigmatization and exclusion stemming from their assumed incapacity to endorse and enact the ideal of individual freedom.

[37] On the self-critical anthropological discussions about the "culture" term, see, for instance, Abu Lughod 1991; and Clifford 1988; see also Sewell 2005.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

They did so by gesturing toward a distinction between the universal, timeless Islamic values, practices, ethics, and modes of life that are "mobile," fitting into diverse local contexts, and those other cultural aspects that are potentials or "variables" that must differ from context to context and be able to adapt to their time. As the participants in the UK Muslim culture scene highlighted in particular, those who inhabit that space should actively and dynamically shape these potentials. In this sense, culture as a "*potential*" that is realized in the *future* rather than rehearsing the past (but may creatively engage with the past), is nonetheless essential and becomes the central domain of investment, what some called the "battleground."

As with everyone, European Muslims have been shaped by prevalent culture discourses, reflected in their own interactions with culture. Plus they are situated within a discursive field that operates on culturalist terms. These terms have determined how their presence in Europe has been debated for the last fifty years. Still, my interlocutors' own culture discourse is also inflected by the particular (and for them, urgent) world-making project in which they engage. Without being exclusively defined by them, their world-making project pays tribute to certain modern concerns about subjectivity. Such a project poses some important epistemological and ontological questions that stand in interesting tension with earlier Islamic epistemologies and ontologies. The specific answers my interlocutors tried to give are always sought within the Islamic discursive tradition, thereby contributing to interesting reconfigurations of these frameworks. Yet, however productive and enriching these internal debates may be, they risk never being quite enough to be fully successful in the quest for recognition.

CONCLUSION

With this essay I have started to think about the broader conceptual terrain in which "culture" is articulated today among European Muslims. From this terrain emanate some of the discursive conditions that heavily impact how European Muslim practitioners try not only to define what Islam is, but even more relevant for me here, how they understand Islam should be lived *and* represented in their particular time and space.

The modern conceptual framework in which the European Muslims I worked with operated creates an interesting discursive field with specific possibilities and constraints. On one hand, it provided a conceptual tool to revisit the Islamic tradition in novel and interesting ways, allowing people to formulate a range of new projects. My interlocutors defined the religion-culture nexus in a way that was congruent with their recognition of multiple temporal frameworks and then emphasized timeless Islamic universalism (the Islamic core), and/or talked about and defended Islamic notions of (cultural) pluralism. In this way they also reacted to different homogenizing projects, one articulated by European nation-states that, with increasing aggression, demands

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

assimilation, and the other promoted by certain Islamic revival groups. Each of these homogenizing projects themselves built on idiosyncratic cultural discourses.

On the other hand, I have also shown that the culture concept posed a powerful challenge to full recognition. As we have seen for both articulations of the culture concept (the first, culture as custom and backward tradition; the second, culture as arts and creativity), it is the epistemological and ontological assumptions that underpin these concepts that render Islam a problem in the first place, as it is always defined in terms of lack or delay. So no matter how eloquently Muslims might criticize certain "backward" traditions and articulate Islam as in step with interiority and choice, no matter how creatively Muslim artists seek to represent their interiorities, religious Muslims always risk suspicion that they are not free enough. In this sense, the development of the culture concept tells us something about what others have named the history of the secular (Asad 2003; Hirschkind 2011; Mahmood 2006). I do not refer to the (also very important) effort to separate spheres as reflected in various debates about the distinction or connection between religion and culture. Rather, I am addressing the extent to which these categories are defined and evaluated in relation to questions of freedom, sovereignty, and pure interiority. It does not matter whether this is achieved by establishing a positive or negative relation to religion—in other words, what matters is the kind of relations to the self, but also to time, to community, and to the nation, since they are reflected in the different and constantly evolving genealogies of the culture concept. It seems to me that it is this "secular" history of the culture concept and the particular knowledge paradigms it evokes that creates an unresolvable conundrum for pious Muslims who seek full recognition with the help of this concept. This begs, once again, the question that Talal Asad (2003: 180) so famously asked: Can Muslims, or any other racialized minorities for that matter, represent themselves in today's Europe? And if so, through what language?

REFERENCES

Abd-Allah, Umar Faruq. 2004. Islam and the Cultural Imperative. *CrossCurrents*: 357–75.

Abdul Khabeer, Su'ad. 2016. *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States*. New York: New York University Press.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1991. Writing against Culture. In Richard G. Fox, ed., *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*. Santa Fe: School of American Research Press, 137–62.

Adorno, Theodor. 2003. On Popular Music. In Robert W. Witkin, ed., *Adorno on Popular Culture*. London: Routledge, 98–115.

Ahmed, Shahab. 2015. *What Is Islam? The Importance of Being Islamic*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Arnold, Matthew. 2006. *Culture and Anarchy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity.* Stanford: Stanford University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Barlas, Asma. 2002. *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
Beck, Ulrich. 2004. The Truth of Others: A Cosmopolitan Approach. *Common Knowledge* 10, 3: 430–49.
Bennett, Tony. 2000. Acting on the Social Art, Culture, and Government. *American Behavioral Scientist* 43, 9: 1412–28.
Bourdieu, P. 1977. Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction. In Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey, eds., *Power and Ideology in Education*. New York: Oxford University Press, 487–511.
Bracke, Sarah. 2011. Subjects of Debate: Secular and Sexual Exceptionalism, and Muslim Women in the Netherlands. *Feminist Review* 98, 1: 28–46.
Brown, Wendy. 2006. *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Butler, Judith. 2008. Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time. *British Journal of Sociology* 59, 1: 1–23.
Clifford, James. 1988. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Deeb, Lara. 2006. *An Enchanted Modern: Gender and Public Piety in Shi'i Lebanon*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Deeb, Lara. 2009. Emulating and/or Embodying the Ideal: The Gendering of Temporal Frameworks and Islamic Role Models in Shi'i Lebanon. *American Ethnologist* 36, 2: 242–57.
Elias, Jamal. 2012. *Aisha's Cushion: Religious Art, Perception, and Practice in Islam*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
Elias, Norbert. 1994. *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
Ewing, Katherine Pratt. 2008. *Stolen Honor: Stigmatizing Muslim Men in Berlin*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Ewing, Katherine Pratt. 2010. The Misrecognition of a Modern Islamist Organization: Germany Faces 'Fundamentalism.' In Carl W. Ernst and Richard C. Martin, eds., *Rethinking Islamic Studies: From Orientalism to Cosmopolitanism*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 52–71.
Ewing, Katherine Pratt. 2015. 'Islam Is Not a Culture': Reshaping Muslim Publics for a Secular World. In Jane Garnett and Sondra L. Hausner, eds., *Religion in Diaspora: Cultures of Citizenship*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 202–25.
Fernando, Mayanthi. 2014. *The Republic Unsettled: Muslim French and the Contradictions of Secularism*. Durham: Duke University Press.
Fortier, Anne-Marie. 2006. The Politics of Scaling, Timing and Embodying: Rethinking the 'New Europe.' *Mobilities* 1, 3: 313–31.
Gander, Kashmira. 2014. Pharrell Williams 'Happy': British Muslims Dance to Song in Video. *Independent*, 16 Apr. At: http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/pharrell-williams-happy-british-muslims-dance-to-song-in-video-9265188.html (accessed 5 Sept. 2017).
Geschiere, Peter. 2009. *The Perils of Belonging: Autochthony, Citizenship, and Exclusion in Africa and Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Gilroy, Paul. 2005. *Postcolonial Melancholia*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Göle, Nilüfer. 1996. *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
Grewal, Zareena. 2014. *Islam Is a Foreign Country: American Muslims and the Global Crisis of Authority*. New York: New York University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Habermas, Jürgen 2008. Notes on Post-Secular Society. *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25, 4: 17–29.
Haj, Samira. 2009. *Reconfiguring Islamic Tradition: Reform, Rationality, and Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Hermansen, Marcia. 2009. Cultural Worlds/Culture Wars: Contemporary American Muslim Perspectives on the Role of Culture. *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture* 11, 3: 185–95.
Hirschkind, Charles. 2011. Is there a Secular Body? *Cultural Anthropology* 26, 4: 633–47.
Hourani, Albert. 1962. *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age 1798–1939*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
Jacobsen, Christine. 2010. *Islamic Traditions and Muslim Youth in Norway*. Leiden: Brill.
Jouili, Jeanette. 2015. *Pious Practice and Secular Constraints: Women in the Islamic Revival in Europe*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Keane, Webb. 2007. *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Koselleck, Reinhart. 2004. *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Lentin, Alana and Gavin Titley. 2011. *The Crises of Multiculturalism: Racism in a Neoliberal Age*. London: Zed Books.
Liberatore, Giulia. 2017. *Somali, Muslim, British: Striving in Securitized Britain*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
Lithman, Yngve. 2010. The Holistic Ambition: Social Cohesion and the Culturalization of Citizenship. *Ethnicities* 10, 4: 488–502.
Lloyd, David and Paul Thomas. 2013. *Culture and the State*. New York: Routledge.
Mahdi, Muhsin. 1964. *Ibn Khaldun's Philosophy of History: A Study in the Philosophic Foundation of the Science of Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Mahmood, Saba. 2006. Secularism, Hermeneutics, and Empire: The Politics of Islamic Reformation. *Public Culture* 18, 2: 323–47.
Mamdani, Mahmood. 2005. *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror*. New York: Three Leaves Press.
Mas, Ruth. 2011. On the Apocalyptic Tones of Islam in Secular Time. In Markus Dressler and Arvind Mandair, eds., *Secularism and Religion-Making*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 87–103.
Merrill, Jamie. 2014. 'Sinful': Video of British Muslims Dancing to Pharrell Williams's Hit Happy Comes under Attack. *Independent*, 17 Apr. At: http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/music/features/sinful-video-of-british-muslims-dancing-to-pharrell-williamss-hit-happy-comes-under-attack-9268418.html (accessed 5 Sept. 2017).
Miah, Shamim. 2017. *Muslims, Schooling and Security*. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
Morris, Carl. 2013. *Sounds Islamic? Muslim Music in Britain*. PhD diss., Cardiff University.
Nguyen, Tina. 2014. Why Are People Upset by this Video of Muslims Dancing to Pharrell's 'Happy'? *Mediaite*, 17 Apr. At: https://www.mediaite.com/online/why-are-people-upset-by-this-video-of-muslims-dancing-to-pharrells-happy/ (accessed 5 Sept. 2017).
Oguibe, Olu. 2004. *The Culture Game*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Özyürek, Esra. 2014. *Being German, Becoming Muslim: Race, Religion, and Conversion in the New Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Ramadan, Tariq. 2009. *Radical Reform: Islamic Ethics and Liberation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Ratnapalan, Laavanyan. 2008. E. B. Tylor and the Problem of Primitive Culture. *History and Anthropology* 19, 2: 131–42.
Rogozen-Soltar, Mikaela H. 2017. *Spain Unmoored: Migration, Conversion, and the Politics of Islam*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Safdar, Ahmed. 2013. *Reform and Modernity in Islam: The Philosophical, Cultural and Political Discourses among Muslim Reformers*. New York: I. B. Tauris.
Sartori, Andrew. 2005. The Resonance of "Culture": Framing a Problem in Global Concept-History. *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 47, 4: 676–99.
Sartori, Andrew. 2008. *Bengal in Global Concept History: Culturalism in the Age of Capital*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Scott, David. 2003. Culture in Political Theory. *Political Theory* 31, 1: 92–115.
Sewell, William H. Jr. 2005. *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Shabana, Ayman. 2015. Custom in the Islamic Legal Tradition. In Anver M. Emon and Rumee Ahmed, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Islamic Law*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Taras, Raymond. 2013. 'Islamophobia Never Stands Still': Race, Religion, and Culture. *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 36, 3: 417–33.
Tareen, Sherali. 2013. Narratives of Emancipation in Modern Islam: Temporality, Hermeneutics, and Sovereignty. *Islamic Studies* 52, 1: 5–28.
Tarnas, Richard. 1993. *The Passion of the Western Mind: Understanding the Ideas that Have Shaped Our World*. New York: Ballantine.
Taylor, Charles. 1992. *The Ethics of Authenticity*. Harvard: Harvard University Press.
Ticktin, Miriam. 2008. Sexual Violence as the Language of Border Control: Where French Feminist and Anti-Immigrant Rhetoric Meet. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 33, 4: 863–89.
Tylor, Edward B. 1958 [1871]. *Primitive Culture*. New York: Harper.
van der Veer, Peter. 2001. *Imperial Encounters: Religion and Modernity in India and Britain*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
Weber, Beverly. 2013. *Violence and Gender in the "New" Europe: Islam in German Culture*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
Williams, Raymond. 1983. *Culture and Society, 1780–1950*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Williams, Raymond. 2014 [1976]. *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Winegar, Jessica. 2006. *Creative Reckonings: The Politics of Art and Culture in Contemporary Egypt*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
Winegar, Jessica. 2008. The Humanity Game: Art, Islam, and the War on Terror. *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, 3: 651–81.
Winegar, Jessica. 2009. Culture Is the Solution: The Civilizing Mission of Egypt's Culture Palaces. *Review of Middle East Studies* 43, 2: 189–97.
Winegar, Jessica. 2014. Civilizing Muslim Youth: Egyptian State Culture Programs and Islamic Television Preachers. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 20, 3: 445–65.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Abstract: Over the last decades, Europe debates on Islam have been framed increasingly through the lens of cultural difference. In this discursive climate, culture constitutes a crucial terrain of investment for European Muslims in their struggle for inclusion and recognition. Based on two different ethnographic research projects among European Muslims, this essay examines two distinct types of culture discourses. One employs an Islam-versus-culture trope that serves to disconnect Islam from certain patriarchal practices perceived to exist within Muslim communities. The other discourse defends the intrinsic and symbiotic link between Islam and culture, especially in order to elevate the place of artistic practices within Muslim communities. To make sense of these seeming contradictions, I explore the multivalent meanings contained in my interlocutors' uses of the culture concept by tracing the respective genealogies of these meanings. This includes an investigation of culture's conceptual histories, formulated successively by Enlightenment thinkers, Romanticists, and early anthropologists, as well as by Islamic reformers and their more recent successors. My investigation into these conceptual histories exposes broader concerns about individual freedom and agency on the part of cultural theorists, which have furthermore enabled various claims about modernity and backwardness. While European Muslims creatively integrate various articulations of the culture concept into their world-making projects, I argue that the ontological assumptions underpinning the culture concept continue to haunt and render precarious efforts to demonstrate Muslim belonging to Europe via culture.

Key words: Islam, Europe, culture, arts, culturalization of citizenship, modernity, freedom, subjectivity

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417518000543 Published online by Cambridge University Press