This item is the archived peer-reviewed author-version of:

Negotiating a contested identity : religious individualism among Muslim youth in a super-diverse city

Negotiating a contested identity: religious individualism among Muslim youth in a super-diverse city

This paper aims to understand how young Muslims in the super-diverse city of Antwerp negotiate the constructed tensions between their religious identification and the broader cultural framework of individualism. Based on 26 interviews with Muslim students in two secondary schools, we describe how presenting a dignified self to both non-Muslim and Muslim audiences requires a delicate balancing act. Drawing conceptually from cultural sociology, we explore how our respondents present themselves towards various audiences by selectively employing elements from the cultural repertoire of 'religious individualism'. In our analysis, we examine four ways in which respondents employ this repertoire to rework the constructed tensions and present themselves as agentive within their religious framework. We also discuss how negotiating a contested identity requires more taxing boundary work for girls, and how they challenge gender norms without denying their religious identification. Overall, our analysis demonstrates how young Muslims in a West European context engage in complex boundary work and creatively draw on the cultural repertoire of religious individualism to negotiate their multiple identifications.

Introduction and research objectives

Chaimae is a young Belgian Muslim girl, nineteen years old, who presents herself, like many of her Muslim peers, as *"a Flemish and Belgian Muslim woman with Moroccan roots"*. While she emphasizes that she feels *"fully Belgian, fully Moroccan and fully Muslim",* she also explains it can be difficult to combine these various identifications. For instance, she has decided to wear her headscarf only sometimes because *"I can't wear it at school [due to an almost general ban on headscarves and other religious symbols in Flemish schools] and I don't wear it at official appointments such as job interviews […] if I feel that I will be judged, I would take it off"*. On such occasions Chaimae takes her headscarf off to avoid feeling stigmatized by non-Muslim audiences, yet she wears it whenever possible because she wants to feel "*good enough*" as a Muslim. Chaimae belongs to a broader Belgian 'secular' context while identifying

as Muslim, an identity that is often treated as incompatible with the dominant society. Indeed, second-generation Muslim youth in a West-European country face the difficult situation of having to construct their multiple identifications in a context where Islam is stigmatized and problematized, and Muslims are often seen as the cultural and religious other (Fadil, El Asri & Bracke, 2014; Modood, 2019; Sunier, 2014; Zemni, 2011).

The main objective of this article is to understand how Muslim youth in Belgium experience and negotiate potential tensions between their religious identification and the dominant cultural framework of individualism (O'Brien, 2015, 2017). Young Muslims in the super-diverse city of Antwerp are, like their peers, socialized within this modern socio-cultural context. Simultaneously, they are socialized in (often stigmatized) religious minority communities, embedded in this broader context, and most identify as Muslim (Author II, 2020; Bayat & Herrera, 2010; Fleischmann & Phalet, 2018). While Muslim youth wish to participate in religious practices and traditions and maintain their belonging within their Muslim communities (families, peers, etc.), their non-Muslim friends, teachers and broader society often expect them to prioritize a life style stressing individualism over religious tradition. This can lead to tensions as our respondents are confronted on a daily basis with non-Muslim audiences questioning their autonomy and agency. Hence, our analysis will explore how our young respondents, who self-identify as Muslim, develop different strategies of 'self-presentation' (Goffman, 2002) in relation to non-Muslim as well as Muslim audiences (O'Brien, 2015, 2017). Our study is based on 26 in-depth interviews with Muslim youth, aged between 16 and 19, in the third grade of two secondary schools, in the super-diverse city of Antwerp (more information is included in the method section).

To better understand how young Muslims negotiate these tensions, we draw upon different concepts from cultural sociology. First, to unpack the symbolic interactions between Muslim youth and non-Muslim groups we employ the concepts of 'symbolic boundaries'. Second, to understand how young Muslims rework tensions between their religious identification and the cultural framework of individualism we elaborate on the concept of 'religious individualism' developed by O'Brien (2015). We argue that it constitutes a 'cultural repertoire' (Lamont & Small, 2008; Swidler, 1986) on which young Muslims can draw to manage their contested religious identification. These theoretical approaches will be discussed in the first section of the paper. Thereafter, we describe the tensions Muslim youth can experience when their religious identification is treated as opposed or even incompatible with personal choice, autonomy and authenticity. Subsequently, we argue that the repertoire of 'religious individualism' enables

them to construct their definitions of agency within their religious identification. After presenting our method, we will highlight in our analysis in more detail why the repertoire of 'religious individualism' is useful for young Muslims, as it provides a set of cultural resources, to rework the constructed tensions between their religious identification and the expectations of being an autonomous individual. We conclude by discussing our findings and policy implications as well as the limitations of our study.

Theoretical framework

We draw on three interrelated concepts from cultural sociology: symbolic boundary work, cultural repertoires and religious individualism.

Symbolic boundary work

Firstly, this article draws upon a symbolic boundary approach, which recognizes that everyday categorizations are socially constructed, based upon culturally shared meanings (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Boundaries separate people into groups and often generate feelings of in-group similarity and out-group hostility, constructing a hierarchy of moral worth between groups (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Small, Harding & Lamont, 2010). Moreover, symbolic boundaries may transform into social boundaries, which are objectified forms of social differences and can lead to unequal access to resources and social opportunities (Lamont & Molnár, 2002). Thus, it can manifest and institutionalize into patterns of social exclusion on the group-level. Existing social boundaries (e.g. educational inequalities) can as well become endowed with symbolic meaning as being caused by religious characteristics rather than social exclusion processes (Author I, 2014). This dynamic approach emphasizes the on-going creation and reworking of group boundaries, at the group as well the individual level. We will focus on a religious symbolic boundary in Western Europe, which still has not received enough attention within this literature (Trittler, 2019). This approach enables us to understand the Belgian (and broader Western-European) context of a bright religious symbolic boundary (Alba, 2005; Foner & Alba, 2008), wherein young Muslims need to negotiate their religious identification. It allows to understand how these youths creatively, strategically and actively rework the boundaries they are confronted with. We turn to the concept of 'cultural repertoires' to better understand on which cultural resources Muslim youth can draw to negotiate religious symbolic boundaries.

Cultural repertoires

Secondly, to show how young people creatively make sense of their identity, we make use of the notion of 'cultural repertoires' (Lamont & Small, 2008; Swidler, 1986). Repertoires are culturally available 'caches of ideas' that help social actors to give meaning to a multifaceted and often contradictory social reality and construct their identities within it. There is some slippage in terminology between cultural repertoires and notions such as cultural narratives, resources, or discourses[1] (see Silber, 2003; Small, Harding & Lamont, 2010). However, the idea of repertoire has gained significant currency - especially in cultural sociology - as "it allows for a measure of individual meaning and agency in mobilizing and choosing a specific configuration of cultural resources, while also stressing the public, and publicly available nature of those resources" (Silber, 2003, p. 431). It brings attention to how social agents selectively draw from elements from larger repertoires to make sense of their social world, to justify their (in)actions and to position themselves within particular social contexts, vis-à-vis various 'others' (Lizardo & Strand, 2010; Swidler, 1986).

Religious individualism

Thirdly, we refer to the cultural repertoire of 'religious individualism' (O'Brien, 2015), which involves a broad set of cultural ideas articulating individual autonomy and agency within a religious framework. As noted by O'Brien (2015, 2017), 'religious individualism' can be seen as a specific mode of cultural meaning-making among young believers, as a way of negotiating potential conflicts between individualism and their religious identification. The notion gives an important nuance to the classic debate on secularization in Western societies. Instead of opposing religion and individuality, the repertoire of 'religious individualism' offers resources for religious individuals to emphasise their autonomy in being religious, and to express their personal choice within a religious frame (O'Brien, 2015).

Rather than seeing 'religious individualism' as a singular, static piece of culture, we want to emphasize its multifaceted and dynamic character. Through our interview data, we will show how Muslims youth situationally draw on different elements and ideas in the broader repertoire, in this way also contributing to the further evolution of the repertoire. While the 'religious individualism' repertoire has been mainly studied in North-American context (O'Brien 2015,

---

[1] The concept of culture repertoires is related to the idea of 'narratives'. Narratives draw attention to how social actors interpret their lives as a set of stories that are causally linked sequences of events. Researching 'narratives' is useful to understand how individuals can collectively narrate their experiences in dealing with their minority identity (Prins, Van Stekelenburg, Polletta & Klandermans, 2012; Small, Harding & Lamont, 2010). It is less suited to gain insight into how actors aim to present a dignified self to very different audiences, as the idea of a 'narrative' presumes a certain continuity and consistency in personal identities and "views individual's actions as chosen consistently with their personal stories" (Small, Harding & Lamont, 2010: 17).

2017; Pearce, Uecker & Denton, 2019), our findings emerged in a specific West-European context and reflect the specific social situation of young Muslims in a super-diverse urban setting.

Reworking a contested Muslim identity in Western Europe

The tension between modern individualism and religious (Muslim) identification

Modern individualism refers to the 'individual-as-actor' worldview that is central to modern societies, and requires individuals to present themselves as autonomous, self-reflexive actors, capable of taking their own decisions (Cortois & Laermans, 2018; O'Brien, 2015). Within the overarching cultural framework of individualism, two important strands can be distinguished, namely moral and expressive individualism (Cortois & Laermans, 2018). Moral individualism can be understood as the belief that every human should be treated as equal and worthy of respect (cf. Durkheim, 1976 [1898]). Expressive individualism refers to the importance of expressing one's 'true self' and authenticity (cf. Parsons, 1974). Both forms have become dominant cultural frames. They are highly institutionalized in West-European societies (e.g. school, work, family) and have become powerful repertoires vis-à-vis which individuals must position themselves.

Developing a religious identity in this individualist culture is challenging, as the latter expects young people to live a life emphasizing personal choice and self-development over commitment to tradition and religious communities (O'Brien, 2017). Indeed, the process of individualization is seen as central to the secularization trend of Western Europe and refers to the de-institutionalization and rejection of traditional religious authorities and religiously informed morality (Casanova, 2011; Dobbelaere, 1999). Self-expression is associated with anti-structure (Cortois & Laermans, 2018) and agency and autonomy are often perceived as a movement against religious norms and tradition (Modood, 2019; O'Brien, 2015).

Hence, Muslim youth in Europe face the challenge to demonstrate that individual autonomy is compatible with being religious. They must do this, however, in a context where Islam is "a chronic object of discussion and debate" (Brubaker, 2013, 4). Islam is often problematized in public and political debate and viewed as inherently incompatible with so-called 'Western' secular and liberal values such as individualism, neutrality, freedom of speech and gender equality (Cesari, 2004; Fadil, El Asri & Bracke, 2014; Modood, 2019; Phalet, Maliepaard, Fleischmann & Güngör, 2013; Trittler, 2019). In debates about the hijab, Muslims are frequently painted as cultural outsiders, ill-equipped to adapt to Western norms. Islamic prayer

– which blurs the boundaries between places of worship and public spaces (e.g. praying at work) - can be perceived as a disruptive intrusion into public life by a 'foreign' religion (Göle, 2017).

Given this clear (Islamic) religious-secular symbolic boundary in Western Europe (Trittler, 2019), Muslims, are often expected to comply with the dominant secular repertoire and to not prioritize their religious identification if they wish to claim equal membership of the national belonging (Modood, 2019; Sunier, 2014). Generally, young Muslims must relate to a dominant non-Muslim and secular society that expects religion to be experienced in private (Casanova, 2011; Dobbelaere, 1999) and thus defines how and where Muslim identity should be practised in public life (e.g. the enforcement of widespread headscarf bans in schools and on the labour market). While young Muslims can choose to be involved in religious activities, from the dominant, secular point of view this is seen as 'unyouthful' and lacking in personal autonomy (Amir-Moazami, 2010; Bayat & Herrera, 2010). Autonomy is then perceived to be expressed not by, for instance, choosing to follow religious rules and refrain from 'typical' or 'normal' youthful behaviours such as drinking alcohol (Amir-Moazami, 2010; Mahmood, 2011). Therefore, young Muslims who identify as such and present themselves as modern, self-conscience individuals when adhering to religious expectations such as praying, modesty, avoiding alcohol or premarital intercourse still have their agency questioned.

While young Muslims are expected to prioritize individualism over religious tradition in relation to non-Muslim audiences, these young people also identify as Muslim and interact with Muslim audiences. Research indicates that religious identification and traditions are highly valued among first- and second-generation Muslims in Europe (Fleischmann & Phalet, 2018; Rizzo, Miglietta, Gattino & Fedi, 2020). Participating and engaging with religious traditions and practices are important for feelings of social belonging and of being a good Muslim (O'Brien, 2017; Foner & Alba, 2008). As Muslims are a minoritized and vilified group within broader society (O'Brien, 2017; Rizzo et al., 2020), scholars emphasize the importance for in-group members of upholding certain religious group norms and values (Foner & Alba, 2008; Phalet et al., 2013; Rizzo et al., 2020; Ryan, 2014). Indeed, processes of vilification and stigmatization have led to a more self-conscious sense of collective identity for Muslims (Bayat & Herrera, 2010; Fleischmann & Phalet, 2018; Modood, 2019), and Muslims can aim to revalorize their stigmatized identity (Lamont, Morning & Mooney, 2002). While young Muslims may aim to maintain a sense of belonging to their Muslim communities, they are confronted with a dominant vision within the broader individualistic context where agency is understood as opposed to religious participation. They need to negotiate this constructed

opposition between individualism and religious identification, while preserving their belonging to their Muslim communities (local and the universal umma). To grasp these processes we explore how they draw on the repertoire of religious individualism.

Religious individualism as an alternative to secular individualism

As already noted, the repertoire of religious individualism enables youth to present cultural templates such as 'personal choice' included within a religious frame, rather than outside of it. Thus, it can provide an alternative to a dominant and often taken-for-granted frame of secularization. This notion relates to sociologists of religion who discern a trend towards a declining importance of religious and normative control, and the concomitant privatization and individualization of religious belief (Dobbelaere, 1999). Scholars refer to an eclective and selective 'bricolage' of religious beliefs and practices (Heelas & Woodhead, 2005). Indeed, in contemporary societies, youth can tap into a range of sources to make sense of questions of religious, cultural and social belonging (Hemming & Madge, 2012). Various studies have shown how young Muslims, for instance, express flexibility and creativity towards religious practices and beliefs when managing their religious identification with other (sometimes competing) sets of moral and social norms, cultural expectations and desires (Deeb & Harb, 2013; Jeldtoft, 2011; Ryan, 2014). These studies show how young people attach their own value and importance to particular religious concepts, ideas and practices, and in so doing emphasize flexibility and personal interpretations when renegotiating religious meanings and practices (Hemming & Madge, 2012). In addition, they can regulate their relationship with religion, and manage morals and values that compete with religious values, by expressing an intention to become more religious later in life (Fadil, 2005; Schielke, 2009). This indicates that the construction of religious meaning is in flux during their lives (Deeb & Harb, 2013). These studies emphasize the importance of focusing on 'everyday Islam' (e.g. Deeb & Harb, 2013; Jeldtoft, 2011; Schielke, 2009; Sunier, 2014), and aim to move the focus away from Islamic norms and piety to the everyday lives of Muslims which are not 'all about Islam'.

While the literature on bricolage and everyday Islam enables to emphasize the flexibility of religiosity for Muslim youth, it risks failing to see agency and individualization existing within a religious framework (Fadil, 2005; Fadil & Fernando, 2015). Saba Mahmood (2011) famously argued that feminist and liberal scholars often equate individual agency with resisting religious norms and community, even though social actors are also agentive when embracing religious practices expected by tradition and communities. Amir-Moazami (2010) observed how respondents express autonomy when choosing religious practices (e.g. veiling) as this counters

and challenges dominant cultural norms. Expressing personal interpretations of religious norms can therefore also be understood as engagement within a religious framework and regime of truth (Fadil, 2005; Sunier, 2014). In line with this literature, we argue that more insights are needed into how young Muslims find an identity through Islam, rather than against Islam.

Method

Our analysis uses data gathered through 26 in-depth interviews with Muslim students in the third grade of two secondary schools. The interviews were part of a larger study where, in a three month period (January – March 2019), 40 in-depth interviews were conducted with students from various ethno-religious backgrounds. The first author presented the research in class and students could register to participate. Thereafter, students were randomly selected, taking into account variation in gender, educational track and religious identification.

Research participants and context

The sample consists of sixteen girls and ten boys, 16 to 19 years old, who self-identified as Muslim. Fifteen students are of Moroccan descent, nine of Turkish descent, one of Albanian descent and one is Ghanaian-Dutch. Three students were born in Belgium, like their parents, while the other students were born in Belgium while their parents migrated to Belgium.

Respondents were selected from two secondary schools chosen from a previous survey research in seventeen schools, which was part of the research project. Both schools are located in the super-diverse context of Antwerp. The city displays significant cultural and religious diversity (Oosterlynck et al., 2017) and is an example of a majority-minority city in which there is no longer a numerical ethnic majority (Crul, 2016). We believe that this specific research context offers us an analytical advantage in understanding how young Muslims make sense of their (religious) identifications. As these teenagers attend diverse schools, they engage on a daily basis with people from diverse ethno-cultural and religious backgrounds and are confronted with potentially differing expectations from different social networks (Yuval-Davis, 2010; O'Brien, 2017). Research has shown that the city of Antwerp has higher degrees of inequality and more salient religious boundaries than other European cities, partly due to the greater success of right-wing political movements (Phalet et al., 2013). Indeed, research in Belgium, and specifically Antwerp, shows that Muslim youth are more likely to experience discrimination at school than other minorities (Author I, 2014; Fleischmann, Phalet & Klein, 2011). A headscarf ban exists in almost all schools (Torrekens, 2015) and teachers tend to have negative attitudes towards the Islamic religiosity of students (Van Praag, Agirdag, Stevens &

Van Houtte, 2016). Therefore, Antwerp is a good research site to explore identity constructions of Muslim youth and how they negotiate religious boundaries.

Data collection

Our semi-structured interviews (1h30m – 2h) took place at school in a private classroom. First, the researcher asked about the respondent's free time, their reflections on their school career and future ambitions. Second, their religious experience and identifications were discussed and their relations to their family. Third, we discussed their multiple identity constructions and probed into how they perceive themselves and feel perceived by others. Further, we discussed their friendship networks, peer and teacher relations and situations where they felt stigmatized.

Data analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim by the first author who got familiar with the data by reading through the interviews several times. The analysis started by looking at how respondents themselves discussed their religious identity and how they responded to others contesting this identity. From this initial reading, it became clear that most interviewees were drawing from a common repertoire, which aimed to bridge their religious identity with terms from the broader repertoire of individualism. Second, initial codes were created by using open and axial coding (using NVivo). This allowed the researcher to highlight the different elements in this broader repertoire of religious individualism and to categorize interview transcripts according to the relative presence/absence of prevailing elements and themes ((e.g. free choice, reflexivity, autonomy). Third, the researcher analysed the data according to the strategies used by the respondents in interactions with significant audiences (parents, teachers, peers).

Researcher's position

It is important to briefly reflect on the position of the researcher who has conducted the interviews, a non-Muslim female researcher without a migration background. Respondents felt the need to explain and educate the researcher (on what it means to be Muslim). This meant that she could probe deeper into how respondents wished to present and negotiate their identities in the conversation. As the respondents could answer in a socially desirable way to avoid stigma, the researcher tried to acknowledge their experiences of stigma and showed she was aware of dominant racist discourses in Belgium. She presented herself actively as a researcher unaffiliated with the school and acknowledged 'the teacher' as 'the other'. In addition, she

expressed her knowledge of youth styles such as clothing, social media and music to build rapport.

Results

How do young Antwerp Muslims rework the potential tension between individualism and their religious identification? We will argue that a common, yet multifaceted repertoire of religious individualism can be discerned in the conversations with our respondents. This repertoire offers resources for religious individuals to emphasise and express their autonomy and personal choice within a religious frame (O'Brien, 2015). Therefore, it appears to be highly suitable to respond to others contesting their religious identity, and enables respondents to present a dignified self to non-Muslim as well as Muslim audiences.

Experiencing challenges from different audiences

How non-Muslim audiences contest Muslims' agency

First, when conversing with respondents on their religious identification, most of them feel the need to explain that – in light of the problematization of Islam in Belgian society – Islam is misrepresented in the media and public debates.

> Ahmed: *'How do I feel religious? Certainly when they talk about it in the media. Islam is seen as a bad subject, and that is not what it is. So yeah, the religion that I believe in is not the one you see in the media, do you understand? That is important to know.'*

The researcher asks Ahmed if he feels this explanation is needed at the beginning of the interview. He elaborates: *'Yes, this is very important, that needs to be explained first. I could also just explain what Islam is but well… if I don't explain it, people will think the wrong way'.* Respondents feel the need to get this out of the way before proceeding with the interview, and emphasize *'exhaustion'* for needing to defend their religious identification. These feelings show that contestation and negotiation are actively present in young Muslims' daily lives.

Our analysis focuses on how respondents experience tensions as their religious identification is treated as incompatible with modern individualism. Indeed, the young Muslims we spoke with are used to non-Muslim audiences, such as peers and teachers, questioning their autonomy and agency because of their religious identity. For instance, when I ask Ayoub if he sees himself as religious, he anticipates a possible contestation of his religious stance.

> *Ayoub: 'I am religious because I participate in religious practices, such as praying, which I got from my upbringing. I wasn't really obliged to, but just because at the weekend I had classes in the mosque and we learned how to pray. But it really comes from myself; I am not obliged to do this.'*

Samira discusses how she faces this tension when her teacher asks about her headscarf.

> *Samira: 'I was in my 2nd year of high school. It was an art school and definitely as a girl there you had to 'express' yourself. My teacher saw me with my headscarf outside of school, and later in class, she came to me and asked 'Why do you wear a headscarf'? I thought 'Oh no, what do I answer?' Back then, I wasn't trained in having deep discussions like that about such subjects. You know why you wear it, but people often say that the headscarf is oppressive for girls and I do not want to give her the impression that my parents said that I have to wear it. So, I said 'I wear it because I want to' and she said 'but you have such beautiful hair, why won't you just show it?'.*

Samira describes how she is expected to present and express her 'true self', which she – according to her teacher – cannot do while wearing her headscarf. Therefore, she fears her teacher perceives her as oppressed, thus questioning her agency.

Likewise, non-Muslim peers can contest respondents' religious identification. Salma, for instance, describes the shocked reaction of her non-Muslim friend when she tells her she might wear a headscarf one day.

> *Salma: 'I said 'I think I want to wear it when I am older' and she said 'Yes but not now right? Because you are really too young?' [...] I did feel a bit annoyed. That they would think differently about me. If I started wearing the headscarf, would they think 'ooh' 'are you being forced, is this normal'? I am disappointed because I feel like you know me that long and you do know I am still the same person, right?'*

While her friend does not deny Salma's religious identification, she does question the way Salma wishes to express it. Salma is disappointed that her friends would question the 'normality' of her choice and may question 'who she is' when she chooses to engage in religious practices.

Like Salma, Bilal's friends acknowledge his religious identification when they ask him to go out with them and propose that he does not have to drink. When he declines, they attack his religion and his choice as limiting.

> *Bilal: 'My friends asked if I wanted to come to a party and they said that I don't have to drink. I said no and they started saying 'but drinking alcohol is not that bad'. If I say that it is because of my religion that I don't do this, they say 'ugh, it is again because of your religion, in Islam you aren't allowed ANYTHING'.*

Non-Muslim audiences do not necessarily deny our respondents' religious identification. However, they do seem to question their agency and how respondents choose to practice and express their religious identification.

Presenting oneself to Muslim audiences

All respondents perceive themselves as Muslim, and express their religious identification as important to their self-understandings.

> *Samira: 'I see myself as Muslim. I am religious and I am also brought up like this. This is my way of thinking.'*

Respondents differ in how and to what extent they express their religious identification and engage in religious practices, experience internal religious feelings and feelings of belonging to their families and Muslim communities.

> *Zakaria: 'I wouldn't say I really follow the rules of my religion, but I definitely see myself as Muslim, that's really important to me.'*

While respondents aim to rework stigmatization from non-Muslim audiences (as discussed in the previous section), they are also concerned with the risk of jeopardizing feelings of social belonging to their Muslim communities. Indeed, they interact with Muslim audiences as well such as peers and their families. Take Chaimae, discussed in the introduction of the paper. To negotiate her religious identification in relation to non-Muslim audiences, she takes off her headscarf. However, she wears it sometimes as she still identifies and wants to present herself as Muslim.

> *Chaimae: 'There are probably other people who do not see me as Muslim, because I wear my headscarf sometimes and they would say 'either you wear it, or you don't' and that I am not taking it seriously. But I see myself as Muslim so I am Muslim.'*

As she aims to manage stigma in the dominant society, she risks other Muslim audiences questioning her Muslim identification. Indeed, young Muslims are challenged with a complex balance between different representations of what being a good Muslim is within a broader context of managing stigmatization.

. Salma, for instance, mostly hangs out with her Belgian friends. Therefore, she risks being seen as 'too Belgian'.

> *Salma: 'I also have Muslim friends, but sometimes I get the comment that I am 'Belgianized' because I mostly hang out with my Belgian friends.'*

On the other hand, when engaging in religious practice, they can also face the risk of being seen as 'too extreme'. Some family members of Karani, for example, are afraid of his explicit religious practices and fear he will become a 'Syrian foreign fighter'.

> *Karani: 'When I started practicing, rumours among the family started to spread, like 'oh Karani who suddenly practices'. They were a bit afraid that I would become a warrior. They were like 'be careful that you don't…'.'*

In short, Muslim youth have to balance how they present themselves to preserve their religious identification in relation to Muslim peers, family and communities and negotiate the constructed tension between their agency and religious identification in relation to non-Muslim peers, teachers and broader society. Presenting a dignified self to both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences requires them to maintain a delicate balance between various audiences - as Ayoub argues *'There is fear of judgement, from both sides, non-Muslims and Muslims'* – urging young people to address and rework these tensions.

Reworking these challenges: enacting a repertoire of religious individualism

In this section, we will discuss four specific ways in which respondents enact the cultural repertoire of religious individualism, allowing respondents to give sense to their multiple belongings and creatively rework their contested religious identification.

Through our interview data, we investigate what elements of the religious individualism repertoire appear most salient when dealing with specific contestations. To be clear, we are not claiming that the different ways of enacting religious individualism constitute clear-cut and separate variants of the broader repertoire. Respondents can creatively draw upon multiple elements of the repertoire simultaneously and these elements can overlap and resonate with each other and, all together, show the multifaceted and flexible nature of this repertoire. Moreover, the findings reveal that the same strategy can even be applied in relation to non-Muslims and Muslims alike.

The personal choice to negotiate or embrace religious norms

Our respondents tend to actively enact a repertoire of religious individualism through emphasizing *personal religious choice*. This firstly refers to the active choice to apply flexibility to religious norms and practices. Respondents can emphasize the importance of attaching their own meaning to particular ideas and practices in their religious lives (Hemming & Madge, 2012). This is for instance discussed by Necip.

> *Necip: 'How someone wants to believe, is his or her choice. It is not up to me to tell them 'no if you want to be a Muslim you need to do this and this'. They take what they want from it and I am not going to decide that what they are doing is wrong, Allah decides this' [...] 'I have a Muslim friend who went out and drank, and that's her choice. I think it is a pity when other people judge her for it, if you judge someone else, you are not being a good Muslim.'*

Likewise, Yassine applies flexibility to religious practices when he combines it with school and hanging out with friends.

> *Yassine: I pray, but sometimes I skip one or I forget it because you are out late, or you are coming from school or I am out with friends. You know, I am still young, and it is difficult to combine all that stuff. I try to do it as good as possible, but it's ok to not always do it perfectly'.*

Thus, respondents can defend and value choice and flexibility in the level of religious participation.

Secondly, respondents can express agency by embracing religious practices and norms, while emphasizing their personal choice in doing so (O'Brien, 2015; Mahmood, 2011). This is clearly discussed by Karani, who started praying two years ago and expresses his pride in actively choosing to do so.

> *Karani: 'I was born there (Morocco) and I live here (Belgium). That is something that I have no control over. I just have to accept that I am those things; it is not a conscious choice. But, being a Muslim makes me proud because that is something that I took and that is something that I am working on.' [...] 'I am proud to have chosen my religion, and that I am making progress over the years.'*

Karani emphasizes his individual effort and achievement in religious behaviour, and presents individual autonomy as part of his religious experience. This way of agency is often expressed by girls who embrace wearing the headscarf and emphasize their choice to do so. When Samira in the previous section discusses her conversation with her teacher, , she defends her personal choice by stating: *'I wear it because I want it to'*. In addition, when embracing religious norms, respondents can resist social norms of the mainstream dominant society. Respondents can

critically discuss mainstream practices, which are perceived as 'normal 'or 'youthful' (e.g. drinking alcohol).

> Bilal: 'My friends think that my parents don't allow me anything e.g. 'he can't go out and he is not allowed to drink and smoke'. But I am not going to drink or smoke anyway because it's just not good for your body… And that's why the Quran says you shouldn't drink, because you need to treat your body well.'

Indeed, religion can inform a critical perspective and, for example, Samira discusses how religion plays an important role when studying history. She learns about important Arabic scholars and therefore calls her history teacher out for discussing one-sided content (e.g. only discussing the Western perspective on history).

Throughout our interview data we have noted that whether respondents emphasize 'personal choice' or not is related to one's societal position. The role of gender turns out to be crucial and merits further analysis. Our female respondents experience greater tensions between their religious identification and individuality. In the dominant perception, their religion is often perceived as restrictive in how it treats female members. They are often seen as victims of social coercion and as suffering from 'false consciousness' (e.g. in thinking they 'choose' the veil) (Bracke & Fadil, 2012; Yeste, Zeguari, Álvarez & Folch, 2020). Female respondents therefore feel the need to defend themselves vis-a-vis broader society, which perceives them as oppressed.

> Liliana: 'Many people have the image of a Muslim woman who has to keep quiet and has to be submissive. It is mostly people who are really against Islam that say those things. But, I know a lot of Moroccan, Turkish and Albanian Muslim women who aren't submissive. They are very outspoken and they stand up for themselves. But then you have people who keep insisting that Muslim women are not free. But that is just not true.'

Female respondents emphasize free will when embracing religious norms and customs such as wearing the headscarf, and thus invoke a feminist discourse within their religious framework, and not in opposition to their religious identification (Fadil, 2005; Mahmood, 2011; Yeste et al., 2020). Chaimae takes her headscarf off to avoid being stigmatized by e.g. a non-Muslim employer. She further elaborates on her actions as a way of presenting herself as not oppressed.

> Chaimae: 'I also take my headscarf off when it comes to women's rights and when people say 'yeah, Muslim women are oppressed'. I take it off and say 'No we are not oppressed' just to

prove them wrong. [...] For me, this symbolizes that people should not feel sorry for me, that I can stand up for myself and that I choose for myself what I want and what not!'

AD: 'Is this a reaction to non-Muslims?'

Chaimae: 'Both, non-Muslims and Muslims.'

As Chaimae shows, not only do these girls defend their personal choice in relation to non-Muslims, they can also do so in relation to Muslim audiences. Female respondents report experiences of social control in relation to religious choices. This can be very taxing for these young women as they feel the need to stand up for themselves in relation to other Muslims, while trying not to confirm existing stereotypes on gender inequality in Islam, as Samira explains.

Samira: 'I feel that the boys in my class are strict towards women, but not towards themselves. Sometimes I have discussions with them about that in class. But really, I often feel this double conflict between these boys with certain views and then the teacher...'

AD: 'You don't want the teacher to have a bad image of Islam?'

Samira: 'YEEES, exactly!'

This preconception of Islam being oppressive for women also creates the image of Muslim men as oppressors. Indeed, Necip argues that Muslim men can be seen as *'someone who beats his wife, or treats her bad, so she can't have a free life. Those preconceptions are quite strong'*. Therefore, our male respondents also felt the need to talk about gender and e.g. Bilal presents himself by saying: *'I am a feminist'*. Respondents need discuss gender as Ayoub explains to the researcher what Islam is.

Ayoub: 'I want to say something about men and women. Some people think that women are treated as inferior in Islam, but that is not true [...] you often hear stuff like 'women are oppressed by their man because they need to wear a headscarf' but – maybe it is hard for you to understand or difficult to get the picture – men and women are equal in Islam.'

In conclusion, our respondents express personal choice and agency by either embracing religious tradition and/or by articulating personal interpretations and flexibility within this tradition. Emphasizing personal religious choice in relation to non-Muslim and Muslim audiences is useful for Muslim youth. Respondents can present themselves as agentive and creatively rework the equivalence between religious identification and submission. By doing so, these youths blur a religious symbolic boundary and construct a repertoire of religious

individualism where personal choice and autonomy is included within a religious frame and religion can remain a significant marker of their identity.

Islam of the Heart

While the previous emphasis on personal choice has a strategic and more cognitive nature, respondents can also foreground more affective dimensions of religious individualism. Caitlin Killian (2007) has coined the apt term 'Islam of the Heart' to refer to an emotional dimension of religion where believers prioritize what they feel and how they interact with others, rather than what they practice (see also Beaman, 2016).

> *Necip: 'I don't think that religion is something you can show by e.g. wearing a headscarf or by praying. If you believe in your heart that you are Muslim, then that is 90% of being religious. The internal feeling is important.'*

This strategy is useful for respondents who chose not to practice their religion, but still aim to identify as Muslim. For other respondents, this internalization is pragmatic, helping to fit Islam into mainstream societal expectations and rules.

> *Gullusan: 'It is not always that easy to pray 5 times because I am at school for 8 hours. I can't do it always, and occasionally I would say 'I won't pray today because I have too much homework'. Actually, you're not allowed to do that, but it is not my fault, and so the most important thing is what is in your heart and how you act towards others'.*

In addition, it allows a person to be less religiously visible and thus avoid stigma, while preserving a perception of oneself as Muslim. Because of Bilal's non-Muslim friends judging him for being religious and e.g. not going out, he tends to internalize and hide his religion, and focus what is in his heart to preserve his self-perception as Muslim.

> *Bilal: 'I tend to be discouraged to be involved with religion. That is not something that I want. I don't want to hide my religion from others because they would have prejudiced ideas. I want to be more involved with my religion, but sometimes it is just not possible. For that reason, I am less involved with religion and I pray less. I am more concerned with what the world thinks of Islam and what others think about me.'*

While internalization is seen as a desired consequence of secularization in Western Europe, for Muslim youth it is not necessarily a preferred individualization strategy; as Bilal indicates, he does not want to be discouraged from practising his religion. Sarah also shows that she mostly internalizes her religion to avoid being seen as not good enough by other Muslims and to avoid stigma from Non-Muslims.

> *Sarah: 'I could talk about my religion with Muslim peers, but I don't dare to. I want to keep it low key for now. Because I am not in the mood to be judged by people.' […] 'With my Belgian friends, I can talk about anything, except religion. They just don't understand it and they don't want anything to do with it. I don't want my religion to be the reason for us not to be friends anymore. So I don't show it to them.'*

Some of our respondents also expressed their religious identity as an 'aspiration', a wish to become better Muslims *'in the future'*, rather than a fixed reality. As most respondents find it difficult to live up to a certain image of what it means to be a 'good' or 'ideal' Muslim, they emphasize taking it '*step by step*' and '*God will appreciate that I am trying my best*'.

> *Yassine: 'For now, I just try to do my best and in the future I will work on it […] If you just plan it step by step then eventually you will be the ideal Muslim.'*

By presenting their religious identity as an aspiration, respondents can give themselves time, flexibility and less pressure in combining various social and cultural belongings. They can emphasize personal growth and gradual development, and present their religious experience as in flux during their lifetime. However, they do indicate that Islam remains an important source of meaning and norms, and an Islam of the heart is a commitment to that meaning system.

Emphasizing the emotional and private dimension of religious individualism allows respondents to internalize Islam to fit within the dominant perception of how religion should be practiced (in private), thus avoiding stigma in relation to non-Muslim audiences. Simultaneously, it enables respondents to maintain their Muslim identity and belonging vis-à-vis Muslim audiences. The emotional elements in the repertoire can be enacted in a strategic way to give meaning to their religious belonging within a dominant secularized context.

Reflexive religiosity

A third way in which our respondents emphasized their autonomy and agency within a religious framework, is by emphasizing the importance of reflexive religiosity. As young Muslims grow up in a society where Islam is a chronic object of discussion and debate, there is little space for an unreflective and taken-for-granted identification as Muslim (Brubaker, 2013). As their religion is contested in public debates, our respondents are urged to consciously reflect on their position and identification as Muslim.

> *Samira: 'There are many questions now about Islam, and suppose someone has 'another' image of Islam and starts asking questions about it, then I would want to give a correct answer and not 'I believe in Islam because I believe in Islam'.*

In this way, Samira can rebut stigma in relation to non-Muslim audiences by being reflexive about her religious choices.

As respondents are not able to take on a taken-for-granted or uncontested Muslim identity, they can hold each other accountable and expect from each other to take a stance (Brubaker, 2013).

> Sarah: 'Everyone has their own interpretation of religion, but some people keep it really simple. They are always talking about 'that's haram, that's halal', but that is not the essence of Islam. You have to think about it, you need to understand the content and you have to know what it's about'.
>
> .

In line with the element of personal choice, respondents strategically use the idea of reflexive religiosity vis-a-vis both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences. Respondents present themselves as reflexive within their religious framework, thus using a repertoire of religious individualism to contribute to the blurring of the constructed religious symbolic boundary.

Destigmatizing Islam: 'This is not Islam'

In the beginning of our analysis, we highlighted how Ahmed wished to set the record straight concerning the 'wrong' image of Islam. As Islam is often associated with negative traits such as gender inequality, social coercion and external authority and seen as opposite from modern individualism, respondents feel the need to destigmatize Islam. By disassociating Islam from these negative traits, respondents enact a more positive image of Islam ('this is not Islam') and relate the negative traits to ethnic and cultural practices, while distancing themselves from the latter.

> Chaimae: 'Moroccan culture, that's not my thing, but I am Muslim. I think that some people wrongfully see Moroccan culture as religion. For example, if women aren't treated fairly, that's something you see in cultures and not in religion itself. I do not distance myself from everything from Moroccan culture because some things are good, but I do distance myself from the unfair stuff.' […] 'I think it is really sad when other people think women are inferior in Islam. Many people think it's the religion, and that's a shame. That is not Islam.'

By distinguishing between their religious identity and traditional or cultural practices, they employ Islam to avoid stigma and counter anti-Islamic stereotypes (because 'this is not Islam') (Ryan, 2014; Synnes, 2018; Fadil, 2005). In case of gender equality issues, Islam is also used to emphasize equality and associate unfair treatment of girls with traditional culture.

Respondents thus creatively draw on elements of moral individualism (e.g. equality) within their religious frame, and thus use the repertoire of religious individualism as a way out of stigma. . Although this way of employing the repertoire shifts the symbolic boundary from a religious boundary towards ethnic and cultural boundaries, it also allows a more nuanced view on Muslim religious identity, which is often viewed by others as inextricably linked with traditional culture.

Discussion and conclusion

We have analysed how young Muslims make sense of experienced tensions between their religious identification and a broader dominant and normative cultural framework of individualism. As our results show, young Muslims are confronted with non-Muslim audiences questioning their individual autonomy and agency due to their religious identification. In the dominant perception, agency is perceived in opposition to religious tradition (Fadil, 2005; Fadil & Fernando, 2015; O'Brien, 2015; Mahmood, 2011). Therefore, young Muslims have to relate to a society that only perceives them as agentive when they adapt to the mainstream definition of how religious identification should be expressed (e.g. not wearing a headscarf, praying in private, etc.). However, as our respondents consciously identify and present themselves as Muslim, they aim to maintain their social belonging in relation to Muslim audiences (Fadil, 2005; O'Brien, 2015). They want to present a dignified self to both non-Muslim and Muslim audiences and hence construct and perform their own definitions of agency, which do not contradict their religious identification.

In general, we can conclude that the broader contestation of their religious identification prompts various responses among Muslim youth to rework these tensions. In our analysis, we look at how these youths creatively employ four, partly overlapping, key ideas of the cultural repertoire of religious individualism: emphasizing personal religious choice, an Islam of the Heart, reflexive religiosity, and the disassociation of religion from traditionalist culture. Thinking about religious individualism as a multifaceted and flexible cultural repertoire, helps us to appreciate how our young respondents creatively select and combine elements of this repertoire in their everyday life.

While dominant groups can impose their representations of individualism as mainly secular-liberal, our analysis shows that young Muslims use various elements - personal religious choice, reflexive religiosity, emotional and internal feelings and moral individualism - to express individuality within a religious meaning system. Our analysis contributes to the understanding

of agency not only as applying personal interpretations and flexibility in relation to religious norms and expectations (Hemming & Madge, 2012), but also as a way of expressing choice in embracing religious norms (Fadil & Fernando, 2015; Mahmood, 2011). Thus, this shows that young Muslims may equally construct their own definitions of individualism and that this offers tools to emphasize and present their agency and autonomy in being religious (O'Brien, 2015). The repertoire of religious individualism blurs the constructed tensions between religious identification and individualism, and enables young Muslims to belong to a broader individualistic society while preserving religion as a significant marker of their identity and maintaining their engagement with their religious identification and communities (Amir-Moazami, 2010; Bayat & Herrera, 2010; Fadil, 2005; O'Brien, 2015). In addition, it provides an alternative for a dominant and normative belief where religion is opposed to individual traits such as personal choice, and thus challenges a taken-for-granted belief on the privatized role of religion in Western society.

Further, our analysis shows that young Muslims employ various elements of religious individualism (e.g. Islam of the Heart, reflexive and self-conscious choices, 'this is not Islam') to avoid stigma, while preserving their status as good Muslims and their religious belonging. This within a context of a general process of secularization and privatization of religion in Western European societies (Sunier, 2014). Religion is generally expected to be private, and specifically Islam is targeted as it is highly problematized in Western European societies (Fadil, El Asri & Bracke, 2014).

Furthermore, we have highlighted how presenting a dignified self to both Muslim and non-Muslim audiences is more taxing for female respondents. In Western Europe, Islam is often perceived as opposite to gender equality (Fadil, El Asri & Bracke, 2014). Therefore, Muslim girls – definitely those who wear the headscarf – need to demonstrate individualism, which involves being in control of their own lives and choices (Bracke & Fadil, 2012; Mahmood, 2011; Rizzo et al., 2020). While aiming to blur the constructed tension between personal choice and their religious identification, Muslim girls also experience opposition from Muslim audiences. Scholars argue that women in general often experience a higher degree of social control and pressure to conform to social norms (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989; Van Kerckem, Van De Putte & Stevens, 2013). This is related to the symbolic role of women as 'designated keepers of culture' of collective cultural and religious identities (Amir-Moazami, 2010; Van Kerckem, Van De Putte & Stevens, 2013). Yet, our analysis shows that efforts to achieve equality do not have to take place outside of religious frameworks: these young girls - as well

as boys - challenge gender norms in relation to non-Muslims and Muslim audiences without compromising their religious identification.

With our findings, we aim to emphasize the broader implications for policy makers, teachers and school officials. Our results demonstrate how complex it is for young Muslims in a West European context to negotiate their multiple identifications. As their agency and autonomy are overlooked and questioned, young Muslims must, every day, carry out difficult boundary work. This is definitely the case in school contexts, where these young people spend most of their time and interact with non-Muslim teachers and peers. To support these young Muslims in their identification processes, it is imperative for e.g. teachers to recognize their expressions of agency, reflexivity and individuality and acknowledge that these do not contradict their religious identities, which can remain an important part of how they present themselves.

To conclude we shortly reflect on the limitations of our findings, which need to be understood within a West-European context and clearly reflect the ambiguous social situation of young Muslims in a super-diverse urban setting. We expect that research in other settings and among other stigmatized religious minorities could yield other results. Our findings also point to the research possibilities of using in-depth interviews to better explore the tensions young Muslims experience in their everyday life and how they address these tensions. Yet, we acknowledge that drawing on cultural repertoires in artificial interview settings does not necessarily provide insight into how youngsters deal with their religious identity in concrete, real-life, institutional situations. We expect that ethnographical research is more suited to shed light on how young Muslims - in practice - interact with various audiences.

Bibliography

Alba, R. (2005). Bright vs. blurred boundaries: Second-generation assimilation and exclusion in France, Germany, and the United States. *Ethnic and racial studies*, *28*(1), 20-49.

Author I. (2014).

Author II. (2020).

Anthias, F., & Yuval-Davis, N. (1989). *Woman-nation-state*. Springer.

Amir-Moazami, S. (2010). Avoiding "youthfulness"?: Young Muslims negotiating gender and citizenship in France and Germany. In A. Bayat, & L. Hererra (Eds.), *Being young and Muslim: New cultural politics in the global south and north* (pp. 189-205).

Bayat, A., & Herrera, L. (Eds.). (2010). Introduction: Being young and Muslim in neoliberal times. In *Being young and Muslim: New cultural politics in the global south and north* (pp. 3 – 24).

Beaman, J. (2016). As French as Anyone Else: Islam and the North African Second Generation in France. *International Migration Review*, *50*(1), 41-69.

Bracke, S., & Fadil, N. (2012). Is the headscarf oppressive or emancipatory? Field notes from the multicultural debate. *Religion and Gender*, *2*(1), 36-56.

Brubaker, R. (2013). Categories of analysis and categories of practice: a note on the study of Muslims in European countries of immigration. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *36*(1), 1-8.

Casanova, J. (2011). *Public religions in the modern world*. University of Chicago Press.

Cesari, J. (2004). *When Islam and Democracy meet.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Cortois, L., & Laermans, R. (2018). Rethinking individualization: the basic script and the three variants of institutionalized individualism. *European Journal of Social Theory*, *21*(1), 60-78.

Crul, M. (2016). Super-diversity vs. assimilation: how complex diversity in majority–minority cities challenges the assumptions of assimilation. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *42*(1), 54-68.

Deeb, L., & Harb, M. (2013). Choosing both faith and fun: Youth negotiations of moral norms in South Beirut. *Ethnos*, *78*(1), 1-22.

Dobbelaere, K. (1999). Towards an integrated perspective of the processes related to the descriptive concept of secularization. *Sociology of religion*, *60*(3), 229-247.

Durkheim, E. (1898). 1976. Individualism and the Intellectuals, translated by S. J. Lukes. *Political Studies*, *17*(1969), 21–32.

Fadil, N. (2005). Individualizing faith, individualizing identity: Islam and young muslim women in Belgium. In J. Cesari (Ed.), *European Muslims and the secular state* (pp. 143-154). Ashgate.

Fadil, N., El Asri, F. & Bracke, S. (2014). Belgium. In J. Cesari (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam* (pp. 222-261). Oxford Handbooks in Religion.

Fadil, N., & Fernando, M. (2015). Rediscovering the "everyday" Muslim: Notes on an anthropological divide. *HAU: journal of ethnographic theory*, *5*(2), 59-88.

Fleischmann, F., Phalet, K., & Klein, O. (2011). Religious identification and politicization in the face of discrimination: Support for political Islam and political action among the

Turkish and Moroccan second generation in Europe. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *50*(4), 628-648.

Fleischmann, F., & Phalet, K. (2018). Religion and national identification in Europe: comparing Muslim youth in Belgium, England, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, *49*(1), 44-61.

Foner, N., & Alba, R. (2008). Immigrant religion in the US and Western Europe: Bridge or barrier to inclusion? *International migration review*, *42*(2), 360-392.

Goffman, E. (2002). 1959. *The presentation of self in everyday life*. Garden City, NY, 259.

Göle, N. (2017). *The daily lives of Muslims: Islam and public confrontation in contemporary Europe*. Zed Books Ltd.

Heelas, P. & Woodhead, L. (2005). *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion Is Giving Way to Spirituality*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

Hemming, P. J., & Madge, N. (2012). Researching children, youth and religion: Identity, complexity and agency. *Childhood*, *19*(1), 38-51.

Jeldtoft, N. (2011). Lived Islam: religious identity with 'non-organized' Muslim minorities. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *34*(7), 1134-1151.

Killian, C. (2007) From a Community of Believers to an Islam of the Heart: "Conspicuous" Symbols, Muslim Practices, and the Privatization of Religion in France, *Sociology of Religion*, 68(3), 305-320.

Lamont, M., & Molnár, V. (2002). The study of boundaries in the social sciences. *Annual review of sociology*, *28*(1), 167-195.

Lamont, M., Morning, A., & Mooney, M. (2002). Particular universalisms: North African immigrants respond to French racism. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *25*(3), 390-414.

Lamont, M., & Small, L.M. (2008). How Culture Matters: Enriching Our Understanding of Poverty. In A.C. Lin, & D.R. Harris (Eds.), *The colors of poverty: why racial and ethnic disparities persist* (pp. 76-102).

Lizardo, O., & Strand, M. (2010). Skills, toolkits, contexts and institutions: Clarifying the relationship between different approaches to cognition in cultural sociology. *Poetics*, *38*(2), 205-228.

Mahmood, S. (2011). *Politics of piety: The Islamic revival and the feminist subject*. Princeton University Press.

Modood, T. (2019). *Essays on Secularism and Multiculturalism*. ECPR Press/Rowman & Littlefield International, Limited.

O'Brien, J. (2015). Individualism as a discursive strategy of action: Autonomy, agency, and reflexivity among religious Americans. *Sociological Theory*, *33*(2), 173-199.

O'Brien, J. (2017). *Keeping it halal: The everyday lives of Muslim American teenage boys*. Princeton University Press.

Oosterlynck, S., Saeys, A., Albeda, Y., Van Puymbroeck, N., & Verschraegen, G. (2017). *Divercities: Dealing with Urban Diversity: The Case of Antwerp*. Antwerp: Centre on Inequality, Poverty, Social Exclusion and the City, University of Antwerp.

Parsons, T. (1974). Religion in Postindustrial America: The Problem of Secularization. *Social Research*, *41*(2), 193-225.

Pearce, L. D., Uecker, J.E., & Denton M.L. (2019) Religion and Adolescent Outcomes: How and Under What Conditions Religion Matters. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 45 (1), 201-222.

Phalet, K., Maliepaard, M., Fleischmann, F., & Güngör, D. (2013). The making and unmaking of religious boundaries. *Comparative Migration Studies*, *1*(1), 123-145.

Prins, J., van Stekelenburg, J., Polletta, F., & Klandermans B. (2013). Telling the Collective Story? Moroccan-Dutch Young Adults' Negotiation of a Collective Identity through Storytelling. *Qualitative Sociology 36*, 81–99.

Rizzo, M., Miglietta, A., Gattino, S., & Fedi, A. (2020). I feel Moroccan, I feel Italian, and I feel Muslim: Second generation Moroccans and identity negotiation between religion and community belonging. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *77*, 151-159.

Ryan, L. (2014). Islam does not change: young people narrating negotiations of religion and identity. *Journal of Youth Studies*, *17*(4), 446-460.

Schielke, S. (2009). Being good in Ramadan: ambivalence, fragmentation, and the moral self in the lives of young Egyptians. *Journal of the royal anthropological institute, 15*, 24-40.

Silber, I.F. (2003). Pragmatic Sociology as Cultural Sociology. Beyond Repertoire Theory? *European Journal of Social Theory 6*(4), 427–449.

Small, M.L., Harding, D.J., & Lamont, M. (2010). Reconsidering Culture and Poverty. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, *629*(1), 6-27.

Sunier, T. (2014). Domesticating Islam: exploring academic knowledge production on Islam and Muslims in European societies. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *37*(6), 1138-1155.

Swidler, A. (1986). Culture in action: Symbols and strategies. *American sociological review*, 273-286.

Synnes, R. M. (2018). Ethnicity Negotiations: Strategies of Young Muslims and Christians in Oslo. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, *31*(2), 139-156.

Torrekens, C. (2015). Islam in Belgium: From formal recognition to public contestation. In M. Burchardt, & I. Michalowski (Eds.), *After Integration* (pp. 153-169). Springer VS, Wiesbaden.

Trittler, S. (2019). Consequences of religious and secular boundaries among the majority population for perceived discrimination among Muslim minorities in Western Europe. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *45*(7), 1127-1147.

Van Kerckem, K., Van de Putte, B., & Stevens, P. (2013). On becoming "too Belgian": A comparative study of ethnic conformity pressure through the city-as-context approach. *City & Community*, *12*(4), 335-360.

Van Praag, L., Agirdag, O., Stevens, P. A., & Van Houtte, M. (2016). The perceived role of Islamic religiosity in minorities' educational success in Belgium. A cure or curse? *Social Compass*, *63*(4), 529-546.

Yeste, C. G., Zeguari, O. E. M., Álvarez, P., & Folch, T. M. (2020). Muslim women wearing the niqab in Spain: Dialogues around discrimination, identity and freedom. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *75*, 95-105.

Yuval-Davis, N. (2010). Theorizing identity: beyond the 'us' and 'them' dichotomy. *Patterns of prejudice*, *44*(3), 261-280.

Zemni, S. (2011). The shaping of Islam and Islamophobia in Belgium. *Race & Class*, *53*(1), 28-44.