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ARTIVISM, POLITICS AND ISLAM – AN EMPIRICAL-THEORETICAL APPROACH TO ARTISTIC STRATEGIES AND AESTHETIC COUNTER-NARRATIVES THAT DEFY COLLECTIVE STIGMATISATION

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Introduction: Performances as Aesthetic Practices in a Political Context of Stigmatisation

In a world characterised by the globalised circulation of references, choreographies and images, various social, political and religious actors are increasingly appropriating specific aesthetics and means of expression to create visual and audio products that are intended for widespread circulation via social networks.

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, and ever increasingly since the 9/11 attacks in New York, new antagonisms have emerged that are contributing to changes in the ways Muslims are perceived in certain countries, particularly France and the USA. The experience of collective stigmatisation and the conflation of Islam with terrorism have fuelled the development of aesthetic counter-narratives and artistic forms of self-representation; in particular, performances by means of which those performing distance themselves from jihadi ideologies. In the present chapter, we explore the interrelations between art and activism, activism in art and the use of art in activism in the current context in which Muslims are experiencing growing stigmatisation. To what extent have the arts been political to date, and how does political activism make use of art (poetry,

performance, painting, photography, music, video, and so on)? Starting from the Situationists' movement and following Rancière's 'Distribution of the Sensible', I will reflect on links between the aesthetic and the political. After a conceptual overview of activism and political engagement as a research field and a consideration of its methodological challenges, I will provide concrete examples of artistic strategies that demonstrate how Muslims engage with various media in order to counter collective stigmatisation and (mis-)representation. I will share insights from three ongoing research projects, 'Undocumented Mobility (Tunisia-Switzerland) and Digital-Cultural Resources after the 'Arab Spring'', '(In)visible Islam in the City – Material and Immaterial Expressions of Muslim Practices in Urban Spaces' (both funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation) and the project 'ARTIVISM. Art and Activism. Creativity and Performance as Subversive Forms of Political Expression in Super-Diverse Cities' funded by the European Research Council (ERC). Each case shows how Muslims (predominantly from North Africa and from Senegal) have been developing activist strategies based on music in order to counter collective stigmatisation and the conflation of Islam with terrorism.

Artivism: Concepts and Methods

*Artivism*¹ is a neologism combining the words art and activism. It refers to both the social and political engagement of militant artists (Lemoine and Ouardi 2010) and to the use of art by citizens as a way of expressing political positions (Salzbrunn 2014, 2015; 2019b; Malzacher 2014: 14; Mouffe 2014). The term gained notoriety through its use by Latin-American activists and artists working in California: the group Mujeres de Maiz, founded in 1997 in East Los Angeles, has included 'women of colour activists' in their recent oral history project.² Referring to the Chicana artist Judy Baca,

¹ The ERC ARTIVISM project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (ARTIVISM – grant agreement No. 681880), Available at <www.erc-artivism.ch> (last accessed 17 October 2019). I would like to thank my assistants Serjara Aleman and Lisa Zanetti for their help in translating parts of the text from French to English, and Lorena Ehrbar for technical assistance.

² Available at <<https://www.mujeresdemaiz.com/20th-anniversary>> (last accessed 26 September 2019).

founder of the SPARC laboratory in 1996 in Los Angeles, Chela Sandoval and Guisela Latorre use the term ‘digital activism’, observing that the combination of ‘activism’ and digital ‘artistic’ production’ is ‘symptomatic of a Chicana/o twenty-first-century digital arts movement’ (Sandoval and Latorre 2008: 81). The increasing interest in mural art has led to a professionalisation of mural artists who started as political activists and now travel globally and participate in mural art festivals or tours organised by the local governments of cities like Porto³ or Cologne,⁴ which have been marketing mural art as a tourist attraction.

On a conceptual level, researchers studying *artivism* have questioned the distinction often drawn between art considered as work and art for art’s sake, as discussed, for example, by Jacques Rancière in *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*:

Producing unites the act of manufacturing with the act of bringing to light, the act of defining a new relationship between *making* and *seeing*. Art anticipates work because it carries out its principle: the transformation of sensible matter into the community’s self-presentation. (Rancière 2004: 44)

It goes without saying that the simple fact of sharing a common religion does not automatically lead to any kind of homogeneity or community. Nevertheless, sharing a common political goal or being subject to similar prejudices or stereotypes can lead to a shared position or situatedness, which may result in a sense of belonging to a larger group (see also Ali et al., Chapter 9).

Artivistic expression can take innumerable forms: from mural art, graffiti, comic strips, music, flash mobs, or theatre, to the invention of new forms of expression (Concept Store #3 2010). Recent forms of artivism that use performance art find their roots in other experimental artistic movements developed in the 1960s, notably Agostò Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed, Situationism (Debord 1967) and Fluxus. Just as the Situationist International (1958–69)

³ See the current research project dedicated to street art in Porto. Available at <<https://www.streetartcei.com/>> (last accessed 26 September 2019).

⁴ Available at <<http://cityleaks-festival.de/>> and at <<https://blog.koeln-tourismus.de/en/arts-culture-en/the-best-quarters-and-spots-for-discovering-street-art-in-cologne/>> (last accessed 26 September 2019).

movement tried to create situations (1967) with which to destabilise the audience (Lemoine and Ouardi 2010), and the Theatre of the Oppressed (Boal 1996) used theatre as a form of therapy, contemporary activism aims to awaken the public from its ‘supposed inertia’, inciting people to position themselves in relation to social issues (Lemoine and Ouardi 2010; on the transformation in and of urban spaces see Schmitz 2015 and Salzbrunn 2011). The artist, curator (at ZKM Karlsruhe) and university professor Peter Weibel (2013), referring to the global aCtIVISm exhibition, wrote: ‘Audience participation in art as a consequence of the performative turn has probably created the historical prerequisites for the new civic participation in democracy.’⁵ Furthermore, he considers activism to be ‘the first new art form of the twenty-first century’ (ibid.). In the empirical examples that follow, I focus on the way activists and/or engaged citizens have used art – mainly music and performance – for political purposes, rather than examining how contemporary artists perpetuate the long tradition of socially and politically engaged art. Focusing on specific performances allows us to better follow the involvement of the performative audience, and to observe the direct effects of activist action. Just as certain actors define themselves as activists, some performances are defined as activist by their authors. In other cases, these terms are not used as emic categories but are imposed as etic categories (in the anthropological sense of the term) by researchers. In this chapter, I focus on the way activists have used artistic means, including performance, to express narratives that counter the stigmatisation of Muslims.

Finally, current activist movements make wide use of the latest information and broadcasting technologies, both during the process of creation and in circulating their works, images and testimonies (Salzbrunn et al. 2015). More radically, hacktivists intervene by diverting links and transforming websites. The Internet has facilitated the development of new ways of mediation, for example, the transformation of images or messages from one medium to another, or the creation of new forms of expression, namely digital assemblages, by which I mean the combination of still and moving images with music. What have been referred to as ‘new’ media, which are no longer a

⁵ Available at <<https://zkm.de/en/blog/2013/12/peter-weibel-global-activism>> (last accessed 26 September 2019).

novelty, and their style figures have been widely used by various actors. Since the beginning of their activities, members of Islamic State (IS) have used social networks to promote their ideologies as well as to exhibit their treatment of prisoners, most notoriously disseminating aesthetically elaborate audiovisual documentations of executions. As other contributions in the present volume show, the use of memes (Dawkins 1976) and *détournement* is central to IS's creation and circulation of audiovisual narratives. Certain images evoke analogies between the conditions of detention in Guantanamo and the treatment of kidnapped journalists in IS-controlled territories – images that have become widely circulating Internet memes (including those used against IS: see Pfeifer, Fuhrmann and Wevers, Chapter 8). Conversely, Muslims who have wanted to distinguish themselves from IS have used public performance in order to stage different ways of being Muslim and/or of practising Islam, as I will show below.

Finally, anthropologists who work on activism are exploring not only new methods of investigation, but also new ways of communicating their results, in particular with the aim of decentring the status of text (Schneider and Wright 2006) by shooting documentary films, creating comic strips, holding discussions with activists via blogs,⁶ or interacting through performances such as *Rawson's Boat*, led by the Nigerian Jelili Akiku in May 2018 at the Museum of Aquitaine in Bordeaux.

One aspect commonly raised in relation to the analysis of performances is the performativity of such acts and their transformative potential. In their constructive dialogue, Judith Butler and Ana Athanasiou propose that the performative is a specific power of the precarious (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 121). They identify the 'promise of performing disruptively – that is, the open-ended possibility of performing within, beyond, and against retro-active recitation, and expropriating limitations and injuries prescribed by it. This understood, performative politics, in its conjunction with the politics of precarity, remains open and unprefigurable, persistently and interminably susceptible to the precarious forces of eventness' (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 131).

In an age in which individuality is often erased, especially in media

⁶ Available at <www.erc-activism.ch> (last accessed 19 October 2019).

representations of refugees, the portrayal of Muslims or any other (post-) migration phenomenon as a collective, apparently homogeneous group reflects a process related to a certain form of biopolitics. At such times it is all the more imperative that research should, as Jean-Luc Nancy (2000) suggests, capture the singularity (which is always plural) ‘of those politically reduced to insignificant human matter’ (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 133). Following Athanasiou and Butler (2013: 140–1), who conceptualise *eventness* as the ‘performative exercise of social antagonism within norms that act on us in ways that exceed our full awareness and control; a social antagonism that produces disruptive and subversive effects in the normalised matrices of intelligibility’, I will now analyse the (co-production) of representations through aesthetic audiovisual counter-narratives intended to oppose stigmatisation (see also Dick and Fuhrmann, Chapter 12). Do the frames of dispossession ‘become a performative occasion for various contingencies of individual or concerted actions’ (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 143) – rewriting history, repainting representations through performances? Can actors, as Butler argues in *Bodies That Matter*, create a desired world by performing bodies? The empirical studies presented below show, at least to a certain degree, processes of boundary-making undertaken by certain individuals and/or groups who do not want to be assimilated into a supposedly homogeneous category of persons with ‘Arab’ roots who are conflated with terrorists by wider populations. In this context, ‘Arab’ is an emic category used by Muslims of West African origin. Analysing their performances, we observe “‘aesthetics’” at the core of politics’ in the sense highlighted by Rancière (2004: 13): ‘Aesthetic practices are “ways of doing and making” that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationship they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility’ (ibid.). The three empirical examples show different ways of transforming perceptions of Muslims’ being and doing, instigated by aesthetic practices performed by Muslims within public, semi-public and/or virtual spaces: musical performances, religious gatherings and the aesthetic staging of (diverse, including Muslim) bodies in a fashion show. By performing their commonality (as *Harraga*) or their sense of belonging to a Sufi brotherhood (Murids) or a place of residence (district of Maddalena), the actors concerned express themselves by means of artistic practices. Through the analysis of these activist actions, I will also show

how Muslims take measures to avoid religious ascriptions in order to not be perceived first and foremost as Muslims, or, as Muslims, not to be conflated with terrorists. Indeed, since 9/11, as a reaction to stigmatisation processes, Muslims have been increasingly doing boundary work in order to distinguish themselves from terrorists. Following Lamont and Molnar (2002: 168):

Symbolic boundaries are conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorise objects, people, practices, and even time and space. They are tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality. Examining them allows us to capture the dynamic dimensions of social relations, as groups compete in the production, diffusion, and institutionalization of alternative systems and principles of classifications. [. . .] Social boundaries are objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources (material and nonmaterial) and social opportunities.

Music and Images about Harraga

My first example demonstrates how music and musical performances about *Harraga* are presented in (semi-)public and virtual spaces. During my project ‘Departures. Undocumented Mobility (Tunisia-Switzerland) and Digital-Cultural Resources after the Arab Spring’, we⁷ undertook a long-term ethnographic study in Tunisia, Italy and Switzerland, working with undocumented migrants (*Harraga*⁸) and focusing in particular on their representations of Europe. The on-site ethnography was conducted parallel with a netnography – an analysis of sounds, images and texts circulating via social networks, in particular on Facebook. The transnational imaginary that shines through the videos and self-created digital assemblages of photos, original images and

⁷ Project No. 146041 funded by the Swiss National Research Foundation (SNF), led by Prof. Dr Monika Salzbrunn and conducted with senior researcher Dr Farida Souiah and PhD student Simon Mastrangelo between 1 October 2013 and 30 September 2017. See Souiah et al. (2018) on representations in Tunisian and Algerian cultural productions about undocumented migration.

⁸ *Harraga* is of Arabic origin and literally means ‘to burn’. It can also mean ‘to free-ride’, ‘to jump a queue’ or to ‘run a light’ (Souiah et al. 2018: 155). In the context discussed here, it refers to young men who wish to travel to Europe by boat and burn their papers in order to avoid deportation to their countries of origin.

music, as well as staged self-representations such as selfies or videos from the journey to Europe by boat, reveals the central preoccupations and interests of young men who want to migrate to Europe. These comprise the following:

1. As a destination, Italy appears very frequently, evoked by national flags, logos of its leading soccer clubs, or Italian women.
2. As symbols of success, cars are very often displayed, sometimes with women (e.g. images similar to car advertisements).
3. Young men are frequently shown with symbols of physical strength, of their power (of seduction) and of risk behaviour (alcohol, sometimes weapons), thereby positioning themselves in relation to certain social and/or religious norms.
4. Apart from images of desirable European-looking women, the only female figures featured tend to be mothers weeping and suffering from the absence or death of a loved son.

The inner conflict of desiring freedom of movement yet feeling loyalty towards a suffering mother is clearly expressed. Interestingly, the extreme risks of the journey and the disillusionment experienced in everyday life in Europe are also emphasised (see Salzbrunn et al. 2015, 2018). Religious practices or values are less prominent in such material, with the exception of prayers for a safe journey, for the mother left behind and for the (future) safety of the family that will be supported by the migrant if he is successful. These findings have been presented more extensively in other publications, so here I will present just a short lyric excerpt from Cheb Rached's 'Ya Roma', which has been performed in various different ways on Facebook as well as on TV shows, and associated with images of *Harraga* (a large corpus of lyrics⁹ has been analysed in Salzbrunn et al. (2015)):

Excerpt, Cheb Rached, 'Ya Roma'/Oh Rome, Mezoued

A winter's night, we went to the sea

Without a word of goodbye, without a travel bag

⁹ Farida Souiah translated the lyrics from Arabic to French and Lisa Zanetti from French to English. I express my gratitude to both of them.

We indulged in the waves, we were not afraid of the danger
 If we have to die, we would rather die valiantly.
 O waves of the sea, calm down
 Let the boat pass through
 We arrived safely
 We arrived in Italy
 The little mom is happy. She is appeased.

 O Rome, I am coming
 O waves of the sea, do not rise [. . .]
 Do not let the boat go backwards
 Your prayer, O mom, when you pray
 I would rather die than come back
 O lights of Rome, appear

 O Rome, we are coming.
 O waves of the sea, be gentle
 In the middle of the depths, protect us

As mentioned above, the lyrics express a deep desire to travel to Rome – the protagonist would rather die than return home. Nevertheless, his first thoughts are dedicated to his mother and her protective prayers. When Nabil Louhichi sung Cheb Rached’s song ‘Ya Roma’ on a Tunisian TV show in 2012, he had attached several portraits of *Harraga* to his clothes. During this broadcast performance, he publicly expressed the suffering of all the families who had lost their sons. Indirectly, he also criticised the difficult living conditions that motivate young men to take such risks to leave their home country. Although neither Louhichi nor Rached are *Harraga* themselves, the contents of their performances are similar to *Harraga*’s cultural productions themselves.

In sum, in the fifty-four Mezoued lyrics examined, religion featured as a form of moral support for the migrant’s journey and for the family left behind, in particular the mother, the most venerated person. The *Harraga*’s activist practices range from circulating stagings and representations of their own multiple belongings via social networks, transgressing social and religious codes and defying expectations to the creation of digital assemblages and the public performance of songs. While Tunisia is known to have a

certain number of IS activists, in our ethnographic and netnographic findings we did not come across cultural productions that justify this evolution.

Drawing Boundaries to Reject External Jihad in Transnational Murid Events and in Local Muslim Festivals

The second example deals with semi-public performances of religious belonging (to a Sufi brotherhood) expressed through musical performances, prayer and discourses. As part of the project ‘(In)visible Islam in the city: material and immaterial expressions of Muslim practices within urban spaces in Switzerland’,¹⁰ we researched various ways in which a specific form of belonging to Islam is performed. At a time in which terrorist attacks were on the rise, Sufi brotherhoods, common in Senegal and popular among Senegalese abroad, represented an interesting case for studying boundary-making processes. Since the referendum in which the majority voted to ban the construction of minarets in Switzerland in 2009, Muslims have been subjected to a particularly negative populist image campaign. Moreover, regional referendums against face-veiling in 2013 (Ticino) and 2018 (St Gallen) have stoked anti-Muslim sentiment in general, although the majority of Muslim residents in those regions are of Balkan origin, and do not even wear the veil. The following example shows how Muslims from sub-Saharan African countries have responded to these growing anti-Muslim discourses in Switzerland by defining boundaries between themselves and ‘Arab’ Muslims (as an emic category) through discourses and performances.

The Murid Brotherhood in Switzerland and its Kourel Kat (Singing Circle): A ‘Bird Who Flies’

From the very beginning of the development of the Murid brotherhood, the companions of the founder, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba (1853–1927), met regularly to form a circle to recite and to share the poems he had written. Cheikh Amadou Bamba’s ideas were disseminated through religious songs. To this day, young practitioners form circles called *kourels kat* in order to

¹⁰ The project No. 143203, ‘(In)visible Islam in the city: material and immaterial expressions of Muslim practices within urban spaces in Switzerland’, was led by Prof. Dr Monika Salzbrunn and conducted with senior researcher Dr Talia Bachir-Loopuyt and PhD student Barbara Dellwo between 1 April 2013 and 30 September 2017.

sing the founder's praises, with each such circle developing its own sonority. Usually, the practitioners come from the same *daara* (praying circle in a rural environment, from the Arabic word *dār*: home, farmhouse), or *dahira* (praying circle in an urban environment and/or in a diaspora, from the Arabic word *dā'ira*: circle, field, area, zone) or are made up of members who share the same marabout (spiritual authority). According to Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's last son, the General Khalife Serigne Saliou Mbacké (1915–2007), 'The kourel is like a bird who flies, the providers are its wings and those who listen are its feathers'.¹¹ Hence, the listening audience is integral to the performativity of this musical prayer ritual.

A Message of Peace Shared in a Tense Political Context: The Khassida Jazbul Performed in front of the University of Geneva

During the visit to Geneva of Serigne Mame Mor Mbacké, a grandson of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, on a Saturday evening in 2015, a reception was held in an auditorium in a central building of the University of Geneva. Before the opening, a *kourel* took place in the square in front of the building; young men formed a rotating circle and sang. The *kourel* continued to sing for half an hour as the audience of followers arrived. When the doors opened, a hundred people entered the atrium of the building, still surrounded by the sound of the *khassaidés*. About ten people hurriedly started to film the scene from the sides of the atrium. When the members of the *kourel* entered the auditorium, they placed carpets on the floor, to the right of the podium, and continued singing. All night long, many people came and went, talking to each other, sharing news or congratulating each other on their resplendent outfits. Many Murids filmed or took pictures of the scene, including a reporter from the Murid TV channel Bichri-TV. These images continue to circulate via social networks, Whatsapp, Youtube channels and/or as digital assemblages that are screened during other visits of Murid spiritual leaders. On the evening Serigne Mame Mor Mbacké was in Geneva, videos from his previous visit to New York and images from Murid gatherings all

¹¹ A sentence repeated many times in oral Sufi culture, and often cited, e.g. in Anonyme, 'Le Kourel', *Hizbut Tarquiyyah Darou Khoudoss* [online], HTDKH, 2008, Available at <<http://www.hizboudaroukhoudoss.org/?Le-Kourel>> (last accessed 15 December 2016).

over the world were screened in order to reinforce a feeling of transnational community.

In the following section, I provide an analysis of some sections of verse from the *khassida* *Jazbul Qulūb ilā ‘Alāmil Ghuyūb’* – known as [*Jazbu*] (The Attraction of the Hearts towards God¹²). This *khassida* includes 185 verses, of which more than a third (56) refer to peace. The following verse does so in relation to the prophet Muhammad and emphasises the peace granted to his followers and his companions:

8- O LORD! Grant Peace and Honors to the Prophet who, as soon as he arrived, was promoted to the Pole of the Universe, as well as to his Favorable Family and his Companions.

Other verses praise the prophet’s beauty and describe his character. In the following verses, a moral imperative is implied in the request for peace to be granted to those who demonstrate exemplary behaviour, to the prophet and his companions, and to all Muslim women and men:

15- O LORD! Grant Peace to the Doorway of Righteousness, to the Prophet whose ascendancy is broad and who has filled us with gifts, this brave Lion among the enemies who has dissipated the danger, the Doorway leading to Eminence and Honorability [. . .]

22- O YOU in whom my hope lies! Grant, on my part, Peace to the Draped Messenger, to His Companions endowed with Perfection as well as to the entire Muslim community [. . .]

Despite the explicit mention of enemies and danger, in the speeches that followed the *kourel* performance it was the peaceful nature of the fight against the enemy that was emphasised. In the speeches – as in other stories – parallels were drawn between significant events in the prophet’s life and milestones in

¹² I refer here to the translation in French published on a Murid website: Mouride Blogger, *Khassidablog* [online], 22 November 2013. Available at <<http://khassidarek.blogspot.ch/2013/11/jazbul-qulub-ila-alamil-ghuyub-jazbu.html>> (last accessed 11 May 2017). I thank my assistant student N’Deye Maty Kane for having collected many sources after the field-work we did together in Geneva, and for translating the speech of H. E. Bassirou Sene, the ambassador of Senegal, cited in the text, from Wolof to French. Thanks also to Lisa Zanetti for the translation of this section of this chapter from French to English.

Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's biography, in particular his peaceful fight against the enemy (the French colonisers) when the latter sent him into exile.

During the evening, the theme of violence was taken up by the lecturer Mouhamet Galaye Ndiaye, director of the European Islamic Institute in Brussels, as well as by the guest of honour, H. E. Bassirou Sene, Ambassador of Senegal in Geneva. In his speech, the ambassador observed that the current situation was marked by terrorist attacks committed in the name of Islam, and took the opportunity to distance himself and the audience from such actions, by stressing the peaceful history of Muridism. Speaking directly to the guest of honour, Serigne Mame Mor Mbacké, grandson of the founder of the Murid brotherhood, he said:

Dear Serigne Mbacké, know that we, here in Geneva, you have seen how we are, you have seen which pastor leads us, the Murids, the Tidjanes and many others gather and go together, we ask you to pray that this will continue in this way, that we will continue to listen to your speeches and instructions. The so-called jihadists, who go to the mosques to kill people, to take women in their homes and rape them, to take ignorant young people to give them guns and tell them to kill their closest acquaintances first, yes, because among jihadists, they are told to kill their family first, this is the test to become a real jihadist. Whoever does this is not a Murid. What Serigne Galaye said is true, and powerful. We believe that, as long as we stay behind you and Serigne Touba, as long as we learn the khassaides, the Koran, we know that jihadists will never come from the Muridism, Allah kuli al.¹³ I think that we will never find a jihadist among the Murids.¹⁴

This speech echoes the sentiments of the lyrics sung by the *kourel* to the extent that both call for peace. The narrative of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's peaceful resistance of the colonisers is well-known among Murids, so the audience would easily recognise the allusion. On some occasions, the history of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's life is explicitly remembered and cited to call upon followers to be inspired by it and reject the outer armed jihad.¹⁵

¹³ May God forbid.

¹⁴ H. E. Bassirou Sene, Ambassador of Senegal to Switzerland, University of Geneva, 30 May 2015.

¹⁵ E.g. Cheikh Anta Mbacke Babou recalls Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's concept of 'Jihad for

In recent years, warnings have been issued against ways of thinking that come from the Arabian Peninsula. The Murids insist that they are peaceful Muslims, unlike other branches that propagate violence in the name of Islam. In the same way, in his responding speech, Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba's grandson emphasised the distinction between Muridism and the Islamic teaching that is imparted in Arabic countries (e.g. Egypt, Saudi Arabia), and explicitly advised listeners not to send their children to such countries, where they would be encouraged to stray from the right path, that is, a moderate one:

If I return on the learning process, in fact, at one point we started to notice that as soon as the children have a bachelor's degree, they would leave. By the time they came back, they brought us problems, they changed the way they dressed, they grew their beards, they wore so-called 'Islamic' clothes, and made strong progress on subjects they didn't master.¹⁶ We know very well that the bachelor's degree has a lot of positives effects on children, but, when you get to leave the country, some people will try to bring you on paths that are not yours, and you will end up saying to yourself that everything you believed in before was wrong.

Professor Galaye has already said that this was not really plausible in Senegal.¹⁷ It is for this reason that when we created the University of Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, at the beginning they wanted to call it Al-Azhar but I didn't agree, because Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba is more important, for us, than Al-Azhar. Everything was reformed. For example, every child who lives there must speak French and English. [. . .] Serigne Touba, if he made it through all this, it is thanks to of his beliefs and because he met good people. He has been Tidjane, Khadr and he went to Mauritania, he took everything that was good but he didn't look any further.¹⁸

In the speech above, Serigne Mame Mor Mbacké recalled the broad cultural education of his grandfather Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, who had been taught

the soul' mentioned in Cheikh Anta Babou (2007), *Fighting the Greater Jihad. Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853–1913*, Athens: Ohio University Press.

¹⁶ He refers to young Murid graduates known to have changed the way they dress and their ideas about Islam after continuing their studies in so-called 'Arabic-Muslim' countries.

¹⁷ Reference to armed jihadism, terrorism.

¹⁸ Serigne Mame Mor Mbacké, University of Geneva, 30 May 2015.

by intellectuals from two brotherhoods, the Tijāniyya and the Quadiriyya, without ever needing to go to the Arabian Peninsula. Emphasising the need to distance oneself from the kind of instruction imparted in Arabic countries, specifically the University Al-Azhar in Cairo, Serigne Mame Mor Mbacké mentioned that the Murid University in Senegal was named after Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba rather than Al-Azhar. Nevertheless, two references come together in the name of the Al-Azhar Touba Institute, which has educational campuses and Murid associations in Senegal and worldwide: the reference to the Egyptian University of Al-Azhar and to the Senegalese city of Touba. The Institute is mainly funded by remittances sent by Murid migrants. Touba is the capital city of Muridism, founded in 1988 by Cheikh Ahmadou Bamba, and became the second-largest city in Senegal thanks to important remittances sent by Murids from all over the world.

Murid women are not generally very visible during the most important moments of religious events, yet they do take important roles in organising religious and/or political meetings. Several women with positions of responsibility in associations have a strong convening power. In Switzerland, many international Murid organisations are led by women. Their strong financial standing and their societal status are clearly expressed by their smart fashionable clothes, precious jewellery and expensive handbags. This festive, opulent way of performing gendered and religious belonging is also part of a boundary-making process whereby they distinguish themselves from other Muslim groups, which they view as excessively conservative and out of 'Senegalese tradition', which is considered as being more liberal.¹⁹

The collective effort to make Sufi Islam audible and visible is part of a performative strategy that should be analysed with reference to intersectionality. This concept, initially developed in order to facilitate analysis of the intersection of gender, race (in the sense in which the term is used in North American literature) and class can be extended to include religion, nationality or geopolitical location (e.g. boundary-making vis-à-vis another group defined on the basis of continent of origin, even if expressed in terms of language or race) (see Crenshaw 1991: 1,241–99). Following Crenshaw, I

¹⁹ Observation of verbal and non-verbal reactions, made during another Murid assembly, when converts wearing the hijab had arrived.

believe that to understand the boundary-making that took place at the event in Geneva, it is necessary to take into account the articulation of race, class and gender in the given historical and social situation – particularly since the majority of Murids in Switzerland are highly qualified immigrants who possess greater social, cultural and relational capital than the country's average resident. Religion and gender, as well as other categories of multiple belonging, are performed individually and collectively in a boundary-making context in which such performance often expresses reactions to experiences of exclusion from certain public and/or mediated spaces. Thus, Murids in the Lake Geneva area perform (semi-)publicly their belonging to the Swiss public sphere, while distinguishing themselves from other Muslim groups by condemning them as violent and deviant, and most importantly, incompatible with the peaceful form of Islam propagated by the Murid brotherhood since its inception. As I have written elsewhere (Salzbrunn 2019a), we observe here an 'ethnicisation of religion' insofar as sub-Saharan Africans are distancing themselves from 'Arabs' (in the emic sense) and from extremely conservative Muslims by asserting the uniqueness of the way they practise their religion, claiming that the Sufi practice developed by a 'black' African is more peaceful than the school of Islam practised and taught in training centres on the Arabian Peninsula. Although Sufism has historically been characterised by rather discreet and private ritual practices, the anti-Islam political context has encouraged Murids in Switzerland to perform their belonging publicly, emphasising their specific poetical, mystical and musical heritage. To this end, religious activists create soft power through artistic practices (music, poetry, recitation, performance) – a strategy that has led them to participate in exhibitions in Lausanne and Geneva and to give a performance in the MEG (Musée d'Ethnographie de Genève). Following the dictates of situational analysis, any observations should always be considered in their specific context. Speeches made on other occasions, such as in the wake of the attacks against the Charlie Hebdo cartoonists, have focused on reminding listeners that Senegalese Muslims belong to *umma*, for example. While the attacks were condemned by most speakers, including the Senegalese President Macky Sall, cartoons have also received much criticism in Senegal in the name of Islam.

Whereas many Senegalese residents in Switzerland enjoy a good social

standing, the same is not true in Genoa, in Italy, as the following example shows.

Fashion Show in the Maddalena District of Genoa, Italy: Defying Stigmatisation

The third example deals with a public performance: a fashion show, organised by residents, tailors and vintage-shop owners in order to counter prejudiced ideas about their locality. When I arrived in Genoa in the autumn of 2017 to conduct a long-term study on art and activism, I was struck by very negative headlines in the local press, which portrayed the Senegalese population as a ‘mafia’ that was flooding the streets of the old town with crack.

Having worked for twenty years on the political and religious networks of Senegalese and their translocal social networks in Senegal, Europe and the USA, I found the negative media coverage in Genoa, associating Senegalese with mafia and drugs, a surprise. It contrasted starkly with the positive media representations enjoyed by Senegalese in New York (Salzbrunn 2004) or the images they themselves cultivate publicly in Geneva (Salzbrunn 2016). From the beginning of my stay there, I was compelled to reconsider my understanding of the local, regional and national logics of Senegalese people’s self-representations. Given that I had chosen the city of Genoa because of its vibrant and large activist actions as one of the fields to be covered as part of my project ERC ARTIVISM,²⁰ discovering the variability of representations in circulation relating to the Maddalena – one of Genoa’s most demographically diverse districts – thus created a bridge between two projects, with the performative, artistic representation of self and others as a common issue.

As we will see later, religion, or, more precisely, Islam, hardly seemed to be an issue during the preparation and organisation of the fashion show organised in the Via Maddalena. The only time religious practices were mentioned was in setting the date for the show, in order to avoid the event coinciding with Ramadan, as had once mistakenly happened in the past.

The district of La Maddalena, near Genoa’s port, is characterised by

²⁰ ‘ARTIVISM. Art and activism. Creativity and performance as subversive forms of political expression in super-diverse cities’. Available at <www.erc-artivism.ch> (last accessed 19 October 2019).

the diversity of its population. Linked to historical immigration that centred around transport nodes, like many port localities, the Maddalena saw workers from formal industries and the informal economy arrive at the port from both overseas and inland. Today, La Maddalena, part of Genova's *centro storico* – the largest old town in Europe, as the tourist office proudly informs visitors – also has the highest percentage of residents with an academic degree. This indicates that the area is already showing signs of gentrification processes, of which artists and intellectuals are ambivalent precursors.

As already mentioned, Maddalena's media image is tainted by local press reports that hold the 'Senegalese Mafia' responsible for flooding the district with drugs. At the entrance to one of the streets leading to the old town, there are still traces of a message from the Second World War that warns soldiers about sexual diseases (transmitted by prostitutes) and against violence. Some contemporary tourist guides also advise readers that it can be risky to walk the streets, some of which are almost too narrow for more than two people to pass. Nonetheless, more and more groups of cruise ship tourists now pass through the historical centre because Via Garibaldi, listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site with its many museums and palaces from the Renaissance period, is just a stone's throw from Via Maddalena. The basements of the buildings in Via Maddalena house numerous artisan workshops, including many tailors and fashion designers of West African (mainly from Senegal, but also from Ivory Coast) and Ligurian origin. In the same street and those nearby there are also many vintage stores, which are run either by charitable organisations or by individuals and address a range of clientele in terms of purchasing power. In 2017, dressmakers and shop managers came up with the idea of coming together to organise a fashion show on Via Maddalena. One of the motivations was the desire to counter perceived associations of the neighbourhood with crime and danger, and to value and celebrate the diversity of its residents, in terms of their origins, status, social class, and so on. I followed the preparations for the second show in autumn 2017, together with members of the ERC ARTIVISM team (Raphaela von Weichs and Pascal Bernhardt), with whom we filmed the activities.

From the outset, the fashion show seemed to me to be a form of political performance, a staging of self and otherness, a way of staging diversity and commonality – the sharing of a common neighbourhood. The shots filmed of

the preparation work revealed ‘what [was] at stake’ (Lallier 2018) in the performance exercise, particularly at the moment when bodies and new clothing came together.

As we filmed the preparations, we asked the (non-professional) models how it felt to wear the clothes. A young man of North African descent, who had experienced some setbacks in his teens, commented that when he donned a silk suit from the 1960s it made him ‘feel important’. The whole experience of rejection, of being looked down upon as he had been at times during his youth, seemed to be forgotten the moment he stepped into a suit representing a different status. Another participant in the event, a former political refugee from Morocco known locally as the ‘white wolf’ for his generosity, also radiated joy and pride, announcing to camera that he loved the neighbourhood ‘more than anything’. Later, Cheikh, the Senegalese boss of a sewing workshop, proudly traced the migratory route of his family of dressmakers: from Senegal via Ivory Coast to Italy. For him, the event was above all an opportunity to show his creations to a wider public. We filmed Cheikh in his studio, while he worked diligently on a suit:

It’s a job I grew up with. It’s now 28 years of work. I started in our country, Senegal, and I did it in many African countries before coming here. We did it in Mali, we even had a sewing workshop there. We did it in Togo, Nigeria, Cameroon, we did a lot of countries. In Africa, everyone sees that it is a job of Senegalese.

Since one of the aims of the fashion show’s organisers was to value the skills and work of tailoring, the common profession emerged as a rallying point that seemed more important than the origins or religious affiliation of the people involved. Nevertheless, religious practices did become relevant when, as in the spring of 2019, the event took place during Ramadan. The common desire to publicly showcase the fashion creations ultimately prevailed over criticism of the scheduling. In addition, a critical attitude towards the globalised fashion industry and in favour of championing local creations and second-hand circuits brought the protagonists together.

Just as individual shots triggered statements about how the body and mind dwell in clothing, the shooting of the event itself reinforced the staging of oneself. Dances, acrobatics, exotic make-up with white lines on the

cheeks, all kinds of gestures such as those expressing joy or greetings were performed in a theatrical fashion by everyone living in the neighbourhood who was transformed into a model for a day. The representation of the self, of one's attachment to the neighbourhood, to the locality, appeared to be paramount – far more important than the performance of one's origins. To live and to perform the joy and pride of being the protagonist of the day in the Maddalena district was an opportunity to assert one's place in this place, a particularly important experience for people affected by the growing racism in Italy, especially (first- and second-generation) refugees. The activists, engaged in representing their neighbourhood and fighting against racism, used performance art – a fashion show with masquerade, dance and music performances – to counter the stereotypes disseminated by local media in relation to the whole district as well as to specific groups ('Senegalese', 'refugees', 'immigrants'), by appropriating public and media space.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed three different creative strategies of boundary-making established by Muslims with different origins who reside in different places. I was able to offer a nuanced analysis of the situated politics of belonging (Yuval-Davis et al. 2006) because I did not pre-define any supposedly homogeneous group as the subject of my research, nor did absolutist conceptions of religion or migration narrow the field of my interest. Instead, I explored the interrelations between art and activism, focusing in particular on the use of art in activism in the context of the growing stigmatisation of Muslims by certain media.

Frequently, the process of creating academic representations about migration and religion begins with the definition of research subject/questions, approach and methods. This procedure is problematic in a number of ways. Firstly, there is the risk that researchers' preconceptions will shape the subject they want to investigate. Secondly, in the process of translating the project to make it easier for participants to understand, a hegemonic form of othering – by which migrants are reified as a distinct, supposedly homogeneous group – informs how migration is represented in the course of interaction with the subjects, if migration or a specific form of religion is emphasised as the key issue. Thirdly, when the results are disseminated, if migration or religion are

over-emphasised as cause and/or effect, the self-fulfilling prophecy of reification is completed with the reception process.

In the *Harraga* example, music, video performances and digital assemblages circulated via social networks represent the values, desires, and transgressions of social norms of those who create them. The staging of risky behaviour (alcohol, physical force and so on) does not stand in contradiction to prayers for a safe journey to Europe. Producing or referring to musical productions in which *Harraga* feature as adventurous and courageous protagonists is a way of countering preconceptions and gaining recognition through the arts. Whereas moral and/or religious values like respecting one's parents, in particular the mother, are implicitly or explicitly part of the *Harraga*'s references, engaging in an outer jihad was not a relevant theme for the population we worked with during our ethnographic research.

The two subsequent empirical examples focused on specific events within urban spaces. Attending events allows us to observe what is important for a particular population residing in a specific place. Whether organised as a disruptive form of performance within public space or an event that refers to issues already supposedly overcome – such occasions have the potential to incite the creation or foster the maintenance of groups around a common political goal. Experiencing racism in a local, regional and national context of growing xenophobia in Genoa has, for instance, led to local resistance movements in which the religion or origin of the participants are not central to their politics of belonging (Yural-Davis et al. 2006). The protagonists' representation of local life through the fashion show has contributed to changing the way knowledge production is situated, challenging the hegemony of printed media and establishing counter-images within public space, disseminated via social media and films. Following Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2018), this way of pushing further the actor-centred approach might contribute to fostering the 'end of the cognitive empire', making way for alternative epistemologies. Hence, the rather hegemonic nature of the concept of 'participation' (by whom to what, from which perspective?) can be constructively overcome by researching the performative (Butler and Athanasiou 2013) impact of a disruptive and/or unpredictable event (Amiotte-Suchet and Salzbrunn 2019) in public space.

From a methodological point of view, our work with the camera also

highlighted how bodily postures were transformed by wearing particular clothes for the fashion show in Genoa. The recovery of dignity that took place when the clothing and the models became one was clearly visible in our footage. Here, in the words of Rancière (2004), politics (of recognition) are obviously aesthetic.

In the case of the Murids' festive event in the Lake of Geneva region of Switzerland, Murids' own self-representations have already been circulating in social networks and media for some time. The event, particularly the moment of Cheikh Amadou Bamba's grandson's arrival, was documented by a dozen cameras operated by Murid professional filmmakers as well as amateurs. Just as images from his previous visits all over the world were screened during the event, the images from Geneva will be projected at future events worldwide, demonstrating that Muridism is a global phenomenon. Emphasising that the Sufi Islam practised by Murids is peaceful and condemns armed outer jihad and disseminating that (audiovisual) image is a key objective for Murids, especially since 9/11, as we have shown in different ethnographic studies (Salzbrunn 2004, 2016).

In a context of stigmatisation and exclusion by certain media, especially since the strong increase in the popular and political influence of the far right in Italy since 2018, as well as, to a certain extent, in France, the desire to counter preconceptions by celebrating the value of 'urban diversity' (Reuschke, Salzbrunn and Schönhärl 2013) is stronger than ever. Talking about professional trajectories, as the Senegalese tailor does in a locality that others portray as a drug dealers' milieu, is a way of counter-performing othering images of oneself not only individually but also collectively. Both the Senegalese tailors in Genoa and the Murids in Geneva are keenly aware of the importance of publicly staging alternative expressions of belonging. These artistic performances and their mediatisations are part of a media battle within which we, as researchers, also participate. Hence, to answer the question raised in the introduction to the present chapter, actors have used the 'frames of dispossession' as a 'performative occasion' (Butler and Athanasiou 2013: 143) to rewrite history and to create their own image, visible within public space.

Finally, creating disruptive artistic performances like fashion shows in a stigmatised urban space or religious musical recitations in a very secular

urban environment are ways of using art as a political tool. These forms of activism are spectacular and disruptive in their local contexts and beyond, producing counter-narratives and countering stereotypes related to ethnic, national or religious belonging.

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ISIS is often described as a terrorist organisation that uses social media to empower its supporters and reinforce its message. Through 12 case studies, this book examines the different ways in which Jihadi groups and their supporters use visualisation, sound production and aesthetic means to articulate their cause in online as well as offline contexts.

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