

ISRM - Institute for the Study of Radical Movements

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# Working Paper Series

01/13

“You Are Our Future!”

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Muslim Youth Cultures in Germany and Salafi ‘Pop-Jihad’

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## **About**

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Berlin, Feb. 2012

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## Abstract

For many adolescents living in Germany labelled as “Muslim Kids“, religion is an important part of their identity. However, only a small minority defines themselves primarily by their religious background. The author shows that the segment of these primarily religiously defined Muslim adolescents actually splits in many different subcultural milieus. The religious orientations align with different confessions, internalised dogmatics, political and ideological positions and therefore form a very diverse and complex field. These different scenes are partially strictly separated from each other but overlap in other cases. In general the Muslim youth movement is very dynamic and fluent and constantly readapts to the changing surrounding environment. As Salafi and Jihadi groups and milieus have tried to utilize or occupy Muslim youth groups and currents for their own cause, an in-depth analysis about both parts is necessary to fully understand Jihadi recruitment strategies and radicalization processes, to correctly assess the threat of Jihadi home-grown terrorism and to be able to identify possible partners against Jihadism within the Muslim community in Germany. This Working Paper presents an overview about Muslim youth cultures and their relationships to Salafism in Germany. The author draws her main arguments from over a decade of practical work – counselling families, coaching institutions and working with drop outs from the radical Jihadi milieu. The Working Paper aims to be an introduction into the field of Salafism in Germany and will be followed by other complementing studies.

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## About EXIT-Germany

EXIT-Germany is the leading German Deradicalization and Disengagement Program (DDP) and one of the most experienced and successful organizations in this field worldwide. Founded in 2000 by the former criminal police officer and criminologist Bernd Wagner and the former neo-Nazi leader Ingo Hasselbach, EXIT-Germany is part of a larger NGO network, the Centre for Democratic Culture (ZDK Zentrum Demokratische Kultur gGmbH). Specialized in helping mid- and high-level neo-Nazis escape the movement, dismantle the ideology and reintegrate into a pluralist society, EXIT works side by side with sister NGOs active in the field of Islamism and left-wing extremism. The success of EXIT-Germany has been acknowledged by several institutions, most recently the German government<sup>1</sup> and the European Commission/European Social Fund<sup>2</sup>.

## About the Institute for the Study of Radical Movements (ISRM)

The Institute for the Study of Radical Movements (ISRM) was founded in 2012 as the research division of the Centre of Democratic Culture (ZDK) Berlin. It combines the knowledge and experience of EXIT-Germany with the ASTIU (Arbeitsstelle Islamismus und Ultrationalismus), the leading institution on Islamism in Germany. The ISRM commits to the core principles of the ZDK – the advancement of a democratic culture and human rights. The ISRM aims to support these principles by applying the highest scientific standards to its work.

The ISRM Working Paper Series includes short introductions to various topics related to radical movements, with high practical relevance.

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<sup>1</sup> BTS-DRS 17/9119 <http://dipbt.bundestag.de/dip21/btd/17/091/1709119.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://ec.europa.eu/esf/main.jsp?catId=466&langId=en&featuresId=388&furtherFeatures=yes>

## I. Introduction

Between March 11<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> 2012 not only the whole French society held its breath: Mohammad Merah, a 23-year-old Frenchman with Algerian family background had killed seven people, including three children, and barricaded himself in a house near Toulouse. After over 30 hours of negotiation with the police, he was shot and killed by a police sniper. Merah had described himself as a "holy warrior" and claimed that he was associated with "al-Qaeda".

A German native from Bonn - the 30-year-old Jihadist Abu Adam al-Almani (Mounir Chouka) - praised Mohammad Merah as the "Knight of Toulouse" in an audio message recorded in the Pakistani region of Waziristan<sup>3</sup>, which appeared in early April. Chouka called Merah's murders a "revenge for the vicious and bloody crimes of the French army" and a "response to the crimes of the Jews, who have over a million Palestinian children on their conscience." Muslims who participated in the funeral processions for the victims and distanced themselves from Merah and his killings, were characterised by Chouka as Muslims who have turned their backs on their own religion. But Allah, according to Chouka, wanted that "you underline your religion with blood. First, with the blood of the enemies and then with your own blood!"<sup>4</sup>

Chouka's message in turn caused the 30-year-old German Muslim and Islamic scholar Muhammad Sameer Murtaza to respond. In his celebrated essay "Beyond of Eden (Jenseits von Eden)" - which was published on the website [www.islam.de](http://www.islam.de) - he calls on Muslims to "engage the roots of violence in the name of God." "Until today," Murtaza criticised, "the majority of Muslims have resisted to advance into the heart of darkness and to provide a religious-historical explanation for the terror in the name of Islam." In his article he consequently puts his intellectual and historical analysis of the theological roots of terror in the name of Islam to an open debate. When interviewed by the editors of the "Islamic Newspaper" about the reasons for the "rather vague" distancing from the terrorist attacks by Muslim representatives, Murtaza refers to the lack of a "discussion culture" (within Islam) among Muslims in Germany, because an intellectual elite just started to form and still is in its infancy. "On the other hand, we must not overlook that most Muslims who are active in associations, are volunteer officials in the first place and not scholars or scientists" he added as a limitation. Many officials were completely overwhelmed with the challenges, but did an exceptional job. But Murtaza also saw a change towards more professionalism among the organizations and associations. "And an intellectually different calibre is advancing to the leadership positions." However, Murtaza could not deny himself a small and rather sarcastic remark. He was curious,

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<sup>3</sup> Released by the Jundullah Studio - the propaganda division of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan

<sup>4</sup> See for example <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZInqiHnRtY4> (February 2013)

"how the so-called youth organizations 'Muslim Youth in Germany' and 'Lifemakers' actually want to respond to this development, as they seem not to be present any more."<sup>5</sup> Murtaza's statements point to two important factors for the study of Islamism and Muslim culture in Germany alike: the generational shift rapidly happening in all Muslim organizations and the development of a vibrant Muslim youth culture (cf. Nordbruch, 2010) courted and partially occupied by radical Jihadi groups and preachers. This process has left traditional Muslim organizations behind as they failed to address the adolescents' needs adequately, which turned out to be a valuable opportunity for Jihadi radicals to influence young Muslims with an own, highly modern and dynamic youth culture – customized for young Muslims and converts. Contrary to some misconceptions (e.g. Sirseloudi, 2012), Islamism – understood as a “modern ideology that turns traditional Islam into a sustained and systematic program that supports social and political activism” (Tol, 2009: 134) – in Germany does not “primarily manifest itself in a legalistic form of political Islam in a small part of the Turkish diaspora community” (Sirseloudi, 2012: 818), but has formed a very dynamic social movement adapting to almost every part of Muslim culture and communities in Germany.

## II. Young, German, Muslim

"Now we're talking!" was an online blog's confident title administered by the Muslim youth magazine "Cube-Mag". In early 2010 the first edition of the German magazine went online – at that time entitled "Muslim - The Next Generation". Meanwhile the fifth edition was published with a print run of 2,500 copies. Young Muslims between 18 and 25 have teamed up to create this magazine in order to "finally no longer sit silently and listen to what others think how a Muslim really should be, what we should think and how we should act like."<sup>6</sup> Although the project is funded through sales and advertising by now, it still is primarily supported by the voluntary commitment of its various authors. There are young people, "who are mostly born and grew up in Germany. They went to school here, are making their final exams, studying or working already. Their religion – Islam - is what unites and moves them to be active."<sup>7</sup> “What might makes us special is that we are young, we are creative, and that we identify with the society in which we grew up, and try to shape

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<sup>5</sup> Islamische Zeitung, Islamwissenschaftler Muhammad Sameer Murtaza zum Einfluss radikaler Strömungen, 22.04.2012, <http://islamische-zeitung.de/?id=15706> (February, 2013)

<sup>6</sup> „Psssst, über solche Themen redet man doch nicht!“, <http://islam.de/19814> (February, 2013)

<sup>7</sup> Vgl. „Über uns“ auf: [www.cube-mag.de](http://www.cube-mag.de) (February, 2013)

the Muslim identity," the marketing manager Nabil Chabrak describes the editors of his magazine in an interview with *Muslime-TV*<sup>8</sup>.

The "Cube-Mag" is neither a typical lifestyle magazine nor an Islamic theological journal. The authors address both Muslims and non-Muslims with their articles and offer a diverse and even self-critical insight into "the themes and ideas that move, concern and stir our generation." Even inner-Islamic issues usually tabooed are addressed in order to advance an exchange with their own parents and religious idols. Confidently the magazine tries to deal with the myths that have grown around Muslim boys and girls, or with stereotypes, which they had to face constantly. In addition it tries to analyze the political developments in the Arab countries and the perceived restriction of religious freedom in European countries when it comes to Islam.

The main editor of the magazine is the 21-year old student Yasmina Abd el-Kader. She has already participated in Bremen in the Muslim youth initiative "Lifemakers". The credo of the "Cube-Mag" - to participate in discussions within the society using a Muslim perspective and to give Muslim youths a voice - is ultimately the journalistic implementation of the "Lifemakers" approach.

The main concept for the "Lifemakers" was developed by the "famous Arabic TV Imam" - the Egyptian television preacher Amr Khaled. In his television shows - which since 2004 are broadcasted both in the Arab world and in Europe - Amr Khaled specifically addresses Muslim adolescents and encourages them to participate progressively in their respective societies. He strengthens the self-esteem of young Muslims by telling them that they have something to offer to their environments. Very soon small groups and networks were created in many places calling themselves "Lifemakers" and distinguishing "themselves as social actors with campaigns to support the homeless, religious consultancy in prisons or in the health sector – often directing their activities to both Muslim and non-Muslim segments of society" (Nordbruch, 2010: 6). In Germany the movement started to form in 2005 and included about 400 active Muslim adolescents between 16 and 30 years after a very short time - including a high proportion of girls and young women. Meanwhile, the initiative "Lifemakers" has indeed become less important as a structure, although the underlying ideas of Amr Khaled are still implemented in many different forms.

### III. Islamic Diversity

While some Muslim adolescents came together to form new initiatives and networks, others tried to find their place in traditional Islamic associations. Mainly four Muslim umbrella associations are currently present in the public debate: the Islamic Council ('Islamrat' - IGMG - Milli Görüş),

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<sup>8</sup> <http://muslime.tv/?p=1241> (February, 2013)

Central Council of Muslims ('Zentralrat der Muslime' – including Sunnis and Shiites, Turkish and Arabic members), DITIB ('Türkisch Islamische Union der Anstalt für Religion e.V. – representing Turkish-Sunni 'State-Islam') and VIKZ ('Verband der Islamischen Kulturzentren e.V. – Turkish-Sunni). The organizational spectrum is nevertheless very diverse and includes far more than the traditional mosque associations. In the Berlin district of Neukölln alone a research project found 46 distinct associations of 18 different categories and incorporating six different religious and religious-national currents of Islam (Dantschke, 2009). Additionally, how adolescents are involved and included in these administrative bodies differs strongly. In some cases they have practically taken over management positions from the elderly, but in other areas and bodies the older generation still struggles to share responsibilities with their designated successors.

A recent study about the "Islamic Community Life in Germany" commissioned by the German Islam Conference notes that "in about half of the surveyed communities an intergenerational change already happened insofar as the head of the associations come from the younger generation or members of that age cohort dominate the organization" (Halm, Sauer, Schmidt, & Sticks, 2012: 98). This succession generation usually is already in their 40s. More significant information about the involvement of young people can therefore be obtained by looking into the organizational differentiation of these associations and communities. 83% of the surveyed communities have their own youth department (ibid.: 73). Unfortunately the study only discusses the role of the Imams and religious officials when it comes to the non-religious sector services in these youth departments. There is almost no information about the complex organizational structures within the large associations DITIB and IGMG regarding the board members who are responsible for youth work. The authors of the study focus on the Imams and come to the conclusion that especially in VIKZ "they [the Imams] are overrepresented in being active in both the religious and non-religious children's and youth work (72.6%)". Accordingly the study claims that "the VIKZ seems to put a great emphasis on youth work and to entrust this task to their Imams. (...) In contrast, the DITIB (65%) and IGMG (63.9%) imams interviewed are slightly less active in these tasks, but they in turn have a higher proportion of Imams offering only religious services to children and adolescents" (ibid.: 357). At this point a closer look at the board members of the youth departments of both organizations would have been far more informative.

When asked about their non-religious activities, 37% of the surveyed employees responsible for religious services stated, "that they do sports with adolescents. Second place with 34% are activities in the artistic and/or cultural field. By tutoring or homework assistance 27% of them support the youths. The unspecified category 'other' is named by at least in 17%" (ibid.: 360). The Imams from DITIB and IGMG stated "to be engaged effectively in the children's and youth work with athletic,

artistic or cultural contributions” disproportionately often. The authors concluded that these officials “preferred activities that can be practiced even without detailed knowledge about Germany and the German language” (ibid.: 360). With that they also pinpointed one of the main causes of the difficulties faced by both organizations to adapt to the needs of young people socialized in Germany.

Many of these Imams also feel overwhelmed and not competent enough to deal effectively with the variety of non-religious problems in children's and youth work, for example family problems (e.g. violence in the family, generation gap) as well as drug and crime problems. Consequently the study found that a “majority of the interviewed religious officials expressed a strong interest in further education and training on these issues” because these activities “had probably no priority in their original training.” Most of the Imams stated this interest in the areas of teaching methods and educational youth work: DITIB 82.1%; IGMG 81.4%; VIKZ 91.4%, other non-Turkish communities 93% (ibid.: 400).

For the complexity of Muslim youth cultures in addition to the different religious interpretations and connections to Islamic groups, the social stratification also plays an important role. Ethnic/national references for example are mostly replaced by religious creeds in rather middle-class, educated and socially integrated families, while backgrounds with lesser education and integration often lead to a mixture of religion and national origin. Political conflicts in these families’ countries of origin tend to dominate the national orientations of adolescents in these milieus. Among young people of Turkish origin the combination of ethnic/national and religious orientation is the result of an environment characterized by various Islamic organizations or religious understanding of their parents' house, which can be called the “Turkish-Islamic synthesis”. Origin, Turkish language and culture, are accredited with an almost religious significance and lead to strong “self-ethnicizing” (Nordbruch, 2010: 8) processes. A strong recurrence of the country of origin among the association boards reinforces this trend, but is increasingly rejected by young people interested in social problems.

Within this diverse spectrum strong efforts exist to overcome the internal segmentation and arrive at a real and not just superficial “Islamic unity”. The basis for this attempt is a pan-Islamic interpretation of Islam freeing itself from nationality, language and culture. The unifying element in this case is solely religion, which is why these groups are very pragmatic in using the most common language for communication: German. Although dominated by young people of Turkish or Arab origin, these groups are highly multinational in their membership and attract young German converts of both genders. This environment is divided into several sub-scenes.

#### IV. Adolescents as a part of traditional association work: Milli-Görüş-Youth

As part of probably the most contested and oldest conservative/fundamentalist Muslim organizations in Germany - Milli-Görüş - the largest youth association belonging to the Sunni pan-Islamic movement is still the Milli-Görüş-Youth. The membership numbers of this organization (IGMG Gençlik) amount to about 15,000 more or less active boys and girls<sup>9</sup> in Europe (about 70% in Germany). Although this organization is still strongly influenced by Turkish linguistic and cultural frameworks among its membership, the underlying ideology - created by the Milli-Görüş leader Necmettin Erbakan who died in February 2011 at the age of 84 - is aimed at pan-Islamism and comprised at its core of a Turkish interpretation of the Arab Muslim Brotherhood's ideology. While the Mother's Movement in Turkey lost a lot of influence since it suffered the split into reformers and traditionalists in the summer of 2001 and the traditionalist Erbakan-wing - the Saadet Party - fell into historical insignificance since 2010 due to the death of its ideological idol and the subsequent internal tensions, the European arm of the movement, which is still connected to the Saadet party (IGMG), only suffered a marginal decline in membership numbers. How long the IGMG chairman Kemal Ergün, who was chosen before Erbakan's death, will be able to maintain the unity of the IGMG with the present religious-political orientation remains to be seen.

Especially in the well educated parts of the Milli-Görüş-Youth the traditional Turkish cultural elements more and more disappear in favour of a European and conservative interpretation of Islam. The dependence on the Mother's Movement is by now openly challenged by some young IGMG functionaries.

The overall European concept of Milli Görüş concedes one central task to the younger generation: adolescents should be active as 'good Muslims' and shape the image of Muslims in every society - an image that should be a 'perfect' and 'positive' one. In 2006 the IGMG launched a youth initiative, interestingly aimed primarily at adults who are supposed to pay more attention to adolescents, because "there are tens of thousands of young people we still need to reach exposed to many problems. (...) It is not enough to organize them, we have to include them into our community and educate them for the future and society."<sup>10</sup> The closely related project "Round Tables 2000" was held simultaneously Europe-wide, aiming to reach neighbours and friends who are invited for conversations at a local level. At the meetings various Islamic topics are discussed, in

<sup>9</sup> Only boys starting with the age of 12 are admitted to the IGMG youth organization. Girls become members of a separate organization within the women's wing of the movement.

<sup>10</sup> Friday Prayer (Hutba), „Gesprächskreise für Jugendliche“, 24th of November, 2006, [www.igmg.de/islam/freitagspredigt/artikel/2006/11/24/413.html?L=%20%2Fphprojekt%2Flib%2Fconfig.inc.php.html](http://www.igmg.de/islam/freitagspredigt/artikel/2006/11/24/413.html?L=%20%2Fphprojekt%2Flib%2Fconfig.inc.php.html).html (February, 2013)

particular to strengthen the "sense of community and brotherhood". Parents are encouraged to ask their children and other young people to participate in this program. "We as Milli Görüş want to support the youth in every respect. (...) It is our greatest task to educate them to diligent, ambitious and well-behaved people."<sup>11</sup>

In 2008 the youth department of the IGMG regional association "RuhrA" started the project "Yıldız Gençlik" (star-youth) to prepare adolescents (young men from the age of 17 years and older) for leadership roles in the organization. "The project has the objective to support young Muslims - in addition to education and job training - in the field of religious education and to expand their general knowledge. The project leaders are hoping that the participants at the end of their training will become role models for their generation, using the acquired knowledge while occupying important positions in the association", is claimed by the IGMG youth department<sup>12</sup>. According to their statement, this program is now being implemented in other regional associations of the IGMG, such as Cologne, Hanover, northern Ruhr and Düsseldorf, and received "extensive recognition by the executive board of the IGMG". Both on Facebook and on YouTube Turkish-speaking promotional videos and short reports, as well as numerous photos can be found about this project, which includes educational and recreational trips, the famous "Yıldız camps", and trips to Turkey<sup>13</sup>. According to the chairman of a regional IGMG association's education department these trips give a unique opportunity for adolescents to "spend their vacation in a meaningful way under the supervision of professional educators and teachers."<sup>14</sup> The annual report of the Federal Internal Intelligence Service (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz) for the year 2010 mentions the "Manual for Yıldız Youth". This handbook carries the ideological backbone of the "Milli-Görüş Movement", according to the intelligence report: "The 'Just Order' (Adil Düzen) and 'Mission and Vision of the Milli-Görüş Movement' are both part of the curriculum."<sup>15</sup> Taking a closer look on the website [www.yildizgenclik.de](http://www.yildizgenclik.de) of the IGMG youth department in Freiburg-Donau the connection to the Milli-Görüş ideology also becomes clear through the daily newspaper "Milli Gazete".

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> IGMG-Jugendabteilung, Recep Demiray, „Das Interesse am Projekt ‚Yıldız Gençlik‘ wächst“, April 25, 2009, [www.igmg.de/nachrichten/artikel/2009/04/25/das-interesse-am-projekt-yildiz-genclik-waechst.html](http://www.igmg.de/nachrichten/artikel/2009/04/25/das-interesse-am-projekt-yildiz-genclik-waechst.html) (February, 2013)

<sup>13</sup> E.g. [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zquYge2JsgM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zquYge2JsgM) (February, 2013)

<sup>14</sup> [www.igmg.de/nachrichten/artikel/2012/01/16/bildungs-und-erholungsreise-yildiz-camp-stiess-auf-grosses-interesse.html](http://www.igmg.de/nachrichten/artikel/2012/01/16/bildungs-und-erholungsreise-yildiz-camp-stiess-auf-grosses-interesse.html) (February, 2013)

<sup>15</sup> Verfassungsschutzbericht des Bundes für das Jahr 2010, p. 268, [www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Broschueren/2011/vsb2010.pdf?\\_\\_blob=publicationFile](http://www.bmi.bund.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Broschueren/2011/vsb2010.pdf?__blob=publicationFile) (February, 2013)

## **V. Bund der Alevitischen Jugendlichen in Deutschland e. V. (Alliance of the Alevi Youth in Germany)**

Unlike Milli-Görüş the Anatolian Alevi pursue a more cooperative approach, similar to the youth organizations of other political parties. In Germany several Alevi organizations exist with the largest and most representative being the "Alevi Community Germany Association (AABF)". They cooperate with the "Association of the Alevi Youth in Germany (BDAJ)", an autonomous organization of Alevi youths aged between 16 and 27 years. In this organization young people independently gain experiences and some of them professionalize in order to take over leading functions in the Alevi community later.

The approximately 500,000 Anatolian Alevi (Turks and Kurds from Turkey) in Germany are subsumed as "Muslims" regardless of their self-definition. They in turn see themselves partly as a separate denomination within Islam or an own religion that emerged from or has been influenced by Islam, existing separately. Historically, the Anatolian Alevism is a special syncretic form of Islam on the basis of pre-Islamic and mystical Shiite Islamic influences. Alevi do not pray in the mosque but use 'Cem-houses' for their religious and social community activities instead, in which men and women take part together. For Alevi the Quran is only the transcript of revelations, which may be read critically. They do not fast during Ramadan and generally reject a dogmatic interpretation of religion, as well as the Sharia. For a long time the Alevi have been stigmatized and persecuted by the Sunni majority as heretics. This discrimination continued in Germany and consequently led to young people with an Alevi identity distinguishing themselves from other adolescents who define themselves primarily as Muslim, Sunni or Shiite.

## **VI. Muslimische Jugend in Deutschland (MJD – Muslim Youth Germany)**

The "Muslim Youth in Germany" (MJD) is a nationwide German language based organization aiming at Muslim adolescents and adults between 13 and 30 years of age coming from well educated and socially-integrated parts within the German society - including many from bicultural backgrounds and converts. The organization presents itself as an autonomous and independent youth organization. Although this view does not quite correspond to reality, the MJD is after all the largest organization of socially committed Sunni conservative "Pop-Muslims" - a term introduced by Julia Gerlach (2006) referring to Muslim youth culture uniting an Islamic identity, a belonging to the German society and modern lifestyle elements. This Islamic 'pop-culture' combines lifestyle elements with the "desire to establish Islam as an integral part of the German society" (Nordbruch, 2010: 5).

The MJD was founded in 1994 resembling the British "Young Muslims"<sup>16</sup>. The first chairman was Muhammad Siddiq (Wolfgang Borgfeldt), a German convert and director of the association "House of Islam (HDI)" in Lützelbach. This association supports the MJD until today, including the annual meetings or the "brothers and sisters" camps. The MJD however gained the unfavourable reputation as being an youth and elite oriented organization for the political-Islamic spectrum due to personal connections between former MJD-Chairmen<sup>17</sup> and organizations which are associated with the Muslim Brotherhood - especially the "Islamic Community in Germany" (IGD)<sup>18</sup> – and the recommendation of various authorities from this spectrum as speakers in the local district manual of the MJD, as well as the religious literature published through MJD's former publishing house "Green Palace".

The MJD is divided into local districts called the "Shura" by the board of directors and the CEO "Amir". The number of registered MJD-members ranges from 600 to 900 and at the annual meetings regularly more than 1,000 Muslim adolescents, including a high proportion of young women, signed up. Although male and female members of the MJD travel together to regional meetings, the conservative Islamic gender segregation is maintained in principle and practice. Consequently girls and boys have their own youth camps, where the sense of community and group cohesion is to be strengthened. The core of MJD youth work is the effort to reconcile the religious self-definition as a believing and practicing Muslim with everyday life in Germany. Neither is seen in opposition to each other. Elements of urban, non-religious youth cultures, such as hip-hop and graffiti, are well integrated and filled with religious content. The youth work of MJD is highly professionalized, as can be seen in the manuals of the local districts and their instructions for a successful organization of youth groups<sup>19</sup>.

Both the Milli-Görüş Youth and the MJD are part of a European network, which also includes the youth and student organization FEMYSO and the European Fatwa Council (European Council for Fatwa and Research - ECFR) with its headquarter in Ireland. This council is directed by one of the most influential scholars of the Arab Muslim Brotherhood, Yusuf al-Qaradawi. During a recent interview with ufuq.de the current MJD-Chairman Hisham Abul Ola strongly tried to play down the nature of his organization's involvement in this network together with the alleged political and ideological orientation: "You may think of the ECFR and its ideological roots what you want – it is

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<sup>16</sup> Youth Department of the Islamic Society of Britain, see: [www.isb.org.uk/pages06/home.asp#](http://www.isb.org.uk/pages06/home.asp#) (February, 2013)

<sup>17</sup> E.g. Khallad Swaid

<sup>18</sup> See for example Verfassungsschutzbericht Berlin für das Jahr 2010, p. 184, [www.berlin.de/imperia/md/content/seninn/verfassungsschutz/vs\\_bericht\\_2010\\_deutsch.pdf?start&ts=1310032941&file=vs\\_bericht\\_2010\\_deutsch.pdf](http://www.berlin.de/imperia/md/content/seninn/verfassungsschutz/vs_bericht_2010_deutsch.pdf?start&ts=1310032941&file=vs_bericht_2010_deutsch.pdf) (February, 2013)

<sup>19</sup> [www.lokalkreis-handbuch.de](http://www.lokalkreis-handbuch.de) (February, 2013)

undeniable that it is one of the few organizations, which, at least in some areas, provide satisfactory answers for religious Muslims in Europe". When asked about Qaradawi's positions on extramarital sexual intercourse and homosexuality as serious sins, which should be sanctioned with drastic physical punishment - including the death penalty – and that suicide bombings in Israel were legitimate, the MJD-chairman Abul Ola explained that his organization "never called Qaradawi an important authority for us. (...) We have only referred to the ECFR in few questions - for example on issues of travel, music and participation in elections. In other questions where we do not directly refer to him, we have an own position. In some cases, his views do not affect us as a German youth organization. This is especially the case with foreign policy issues."<sup>20</sup>

## VII. Salafi Groups

Far more distanced from the non-Muslim environment and very uncompromising in their understanding of Islam are Salafi groups, influenced by fundamentalist Saudi Arabian scholars. They propagate the absolute sovereignty of God in all aspects of life and are based on a model of "fair ancestors" (al-salaf al-salih) and thus refer to a fictional "original Islam", a supposedly pure Islam in the time of Prophet Muhammad and his followers in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> century. Very characteristic for these groups are the missionary zealotry regarding the proselytizing of Muslims and non-Muslims (Da'awa), the devaluation of all who do not follow their dogmatic interpretation of Islam<sup>21</sup>, and the extreme rejection of the Shiites and Islamic mystics (Sufis).

The basic principle of Salafi thought (Aqeedah - Statement of Faith) is the concept of "al-Wala` wa`l-Bara". Literally translated "loyalty and abstinence for Allah" and means that loyalty should only be directed towards Allah and his laws. Everything that stands in contrast with Allah's commandments (as Salafis understand them) requires strict rejection and abstinence from devout Muslims. Within radical Salafi groups this principle is not only interpreted as rejection and exclusion, but enhanced to hatred against everything "non-Islamic". Salafis place a high value on the adherence of conservative ethics and morality: strict dress codes, gender segregation and the prohibition of extramarital intercourse are dogmas aiming to "proof" the moral superiority "of Islam" over the democratic society which is perceived as decadent and materialistic. Only a life in the service of God and "free of sins" guarantees the privilege to enter paradise. In addition radical Salafi groups propagate the use of violence as a legitimate tool to fight the "enemies of Islam".

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<sup>20</sup> ufuq.de, „Der Islam ist unsere Religion, Deutschland unsere Heimat“, Newsletter Nr. 17/May 2010

<sup>21</sup> Including to declare other Muslims to be infidels (Takfir).

Every Muslim, according to them, is obligated to wage Jihad (understood as "holy war") when "Islam" becomes oppressed or gets attacked anywhere in the world.

In Germany the Salafi movement became visible to the general public through very aggressive proselytizing campaigns between 2004 and 2005 after the first Salafi preachers became active – invisible to the public - almost five years earlier and established nationwide networks between 2002 and 2004 (cf. Wiedl, 2012: 17). By now this full grown “social movement” (ibid: 10) primarily attracts adolescents with and without immigration background and stemming from Muslim or non-Muslim families.

Salafism is not a homogeneous movement, but a collective term for several different groups and ideological orientations with fluid transitions in between. Consequently different types of Salafi groups have been identified in international research. Probably the most widely used typology by Quintan Wiktorowicz (2006) separates the Salafi movement into three currents: purists, politics, and Jihadis. Following Wiedl (2012: 13-14) this typology leaves out certain phenomena of German Salafism which could be portrayed as hybrids of Wiktorowicz’s three categories. For this Working Paper however, the author chose to establish a more differentiated typology with four categories instead. Still the ‘Purists’ living strictly dogmatic as ‘religious fundamentalists’ in the original sense of the word and rejecting violence as well as the preaching of hatred are the first type. Purists prefer to refrain from political activities, even if they privately deem a religious political order to be the most desirable system. The second category can be called ‘Mainstream’ (Wiedl, 2012: 14) or ‘non-violent political-missionary’ (Dantschke, Mansour, Müller, & Serbest, 2011: 12-13) Salafism comprised of the majority of Salafis in Germany. The main driving forces in this category are political action, and above all, the aggressive spread of Islam (Da'awa) - the Salafi interpretation of course. Democracy as a system is openly rejected and characterized in propaganda as a way of unbelief that leads straight to hell. However, this part of the movement does not legitimize violence or openly promotes a coup d'état. Rather democracy would turn out to be obsolete if only enough people find the "true faith", which is why non-Muslims and Muslims who do not follow the Salafi path yet have to be "enlightened". To the third and most dangerous category – ‘Political-Jihadi’ – belong (among others) the young preachers of the group "Die Wahre Religion (The True Religion)", "Dawa FFM" (banned in March 2013) and "Millatu-Ibrahim" (banned in June 2012): they take the next step and go further than the political and missionary mainstream Salafis in legitimizing violence. Their argumentation is not only based on exclusion but also the massive devaluation even of moderate Salafis through defamation and hate. As, supposedly, Muslims all over the world face discrimination and Islam is under attack, any "true Muslim" is called upon to

defend their faith with violence - in the form of armed Jihad. This category constitutes the transition to Jihadi-Salafism – the fourth category - to those who are no longer just "talking" but acting.

The Internet and social networks are filled with German and Turkish-language videos of Salafi lectures, clips of religious propaganda songs (nasheed/anasheed) or ideological writings. Whether through multi-day seminars, regular lecture afternoons, information desks in pedestrian zones, free distributions of German translations of the Quran, or other major events - the Salafi preachers quickly became a severe challenge for all Muslim communities, as they are able to speak to teenagers in a way lacking by traditional Imams. These charismatic authorities<sup>22</sup> provide teenagers with a clearly defined identity (or 'role model', cf. Wiedl, 2012: 31) and a sense of self-importance through their dichotomous worldview of "right" and "wrong", "good" and "evil", and the claim to represent the "only correct" interpretation of Islam. At the same time they appeal to these adolescents' sense of justice by drawing a picture of the global Muslim community as being the victim of hatred and aggression. Each political conflict is interpreted with the scheme of "War of the West (the infidels) against Islam and the Muslims." Salafi preachers argue constantly that if Muslims fight against this permanent discrimination and oppression, then this can only be a struggle for justice (for an in-depth analysis of Salafi argumentation see: Dantschke, et al., 2011). Using this method they try to provide to teenagers a way out of a perceived futile and pointless life without hope for a better future. At the same time they give an explanation for experienced disappointments and/or exclusion - in family, school, social or political environments. In short these groups and preachers establish a "set of rules and unambiguous guidelines, provide orientation and a sense of community and belonging" Nordbruch (2010: 4; for the importance of strict rules see also Wiedl, 2012: 31). In general important factors influencing the attraction to Salafi groups, as well as the specific style of Salafism chosen by the adolescents, are "the family context", "the use and consumption of the media", "social status, educational background and gender" (Nordbruch, 2010: 2). Emancipation and rebellion against parents and established traditions may also be important to understand the turn to Salafism by some adolescents (Dantschke, et al., 2011; Nordbruch, 2010: 4; Wiedl, 2012: 32-33).

Practical counselling work with relatives of young radicalized Jihadis provides additional information about the attraction of adolescents to these groups: "information and knowledge", "truth and authority", and a general "appreciation" are regularly the most important factors (Dantschke, et al., 2011: 28-30).

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<sup>22</sup> The former professional boxer Pierre Vogel may be the best known, but is actually only one of many.

Referring to a hadith (saying) of the Prophet Mohammad reading: "Islam began as something foreign and will return as something foreign. Paradise is for the foreigners", they reinterpret the experience of exclusion and alienation many Muslim teenagers are familiar with into something positive when they join Salafi groups and thereby solve the friction between several conflicting identities (for an in-depth analysis see El-Mafaalani & Toprak, 2011) understanding that adolescents who neither feel being part of their families' religious/ethnic community nor of the German society are in desperate need of a 'bridging' identity. The sense of alienation is glorified and romanticized and the own group is seen as the vanguard of Islam. In consequence 'Al Gharieb', meaning "the stranger" (plural: al Ghurabaa), is taken up as a self-reference by young and confident recruits when they have entered the movement. Even the companions of the Prophet Mohammad (as-Sahaba) were treated as aliens in their time, as seen by Abu Dujana, a preacher of the radical Salafi network "Die Wahre Religion (The True Religion)". "The prophet was stoned, the Sahaba were killed, they were driven out of their country, but they have dealt with it through strength," he said in one of his many speeches to teenagers. Abu Dujana's main goal is to immunize young people against all external influences, such as doubt and fear. "If you choose the path of Allah, do you get scared? Of what? You will receive the greatest reward by Allah, you will go to heaven if Allah is pleased with you. And there will always be aliens but they will become fewer aliens. Because to belong to that category you have to be chosen, you have to earn it."<sup>23</sup> It is indeed a very attractive offer for young people provided by Abu Dujana: you can belong to a selective, exclusive group that is characterized by steadfastness, endurance, independence and indomitability. You can be a member of the winning team. Consequently the perceived "superior identity" of a social movement understanding itself as elite is crucial to understand some adolescents' attraction to Salafism (Dantschke, et al., 2011; Wiedl, 2012: 31).

Estimations about the membership numbers in the Salafi movement range up to 4,500 but how many of them are Salafi oriented adolescents is unknown. According to the Internal Intelligence Service (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz) the number of Jihadi Salafis is currently hardly exceeding 850 (with an "Islamist-terrorist potential") with about 139 individuals counted as imminently dangerous. However, in these numbers the 'Purists' are not included and currently no reliable studies about the numbers of Salafi individuals exist outside the Intelligence Service<sup>24</sup>. The importance of the different Salafi groups is however not based on the number of their followers. Most importantly their presence and offers via New Media structures accounts for the impact of these groups. In this regard a small minority executes a clear and massive advantage over the

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<sup>23</sup> Abu Dujana, „Die Fremden“, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=am-Uesfn720](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=am-Uesfn720) (part 1-3) (February, 2013)

<sup>24</sup> See for example: <http://www.taz.de/!107973/> (February, 2013)

Muslim majority in Germany. Teenagers and adolescents who search online for information about Islam will most likely end up on pages with Salafi backgrounds.

The New Media also provides anyone with the opportunity to be active. Whether Internet, social networks and mobile devices, such as iPhones and MP3 players: at least in the virtual space the need for attention can be satisfied. Transferring the concept of 'Pop-Islam' from Gerlach (2006) a genuine youth culture emerged that can be called "Pop-Jihad". For many young people this culture functions as a main catalyst, because for them it works as a form of expression incorporating the maximum of protest and separation from families, peer groups and society.

This sub-cultural setting becomes dangerous for the society when a personal crisis, confusion and/or the search for meaning create the feeling for some individuals that the virtual protest is not sufficient any more. The "Pop-Jihad" created its own iconic characters very early, for example the former 'Gangster Rapper' Deso Dogg, who now calls himself Abu Talha al Almani. Born in 1975 as the son of a German mother and a Ghanaian father in Berlin's Kreuzberg district as Denis Mamadou Cuspert, the former rapper underwent a far reaching transformation from a confused and disappointed kid to a radical Salafi provocateur. His life story is the source of his authenticity and credibility among many young followers of the movement. He speaks to them out of his heart talking about hopelessness, emotional coldness and the drift into crime and drug addiction. Cuspert tactically uses his life story in a very careful interpretation as he is very aware of him being a role model for these youngsters. In propaganda songs and video presentations he asks the teenagers to follow his path and become active: "Do not fear them - even if we are here in Germany and can not die as we would like to (on the battlefield); but we still can be active: through provocation and throwing bombs on the Internet. Because Allah gives happiness for the heart only to the true believers."

### **VIII. Between Powerlessness and Activity**

In contrast to the socially integrated and well educated Islamist-oriented adolescents who structure their entire daily life in accordance with their political-ideological or dogmatic religious orientation and who live out their convictions including activism, the mostly disintegrated and lesser educated teenagers who are drawn to radical Islamist groups define their affirmation mainly rhetorical. They deduce a feeling of superiority from the positive reference to radical and terrorist groups fighting the 'Jihad', their leaders and "martyrs". In many cases this is the expressed compensation of an experienced powerlessness and hopelessness, as well as the escape from everyday life. This

compensation mainly takes place online, an important part of which are published videos about radical Salafi and terrorist violence. In everyday life the references made by these specific adolescents are typically not religious behaviour or the practice of religion, but rather a habit of emphasizing masculinity and strength in the form of aggressive verbal fights along the line "Muslim" - "non-Muslim".

Only a very small but hard to quantify number of these teenagers move beyond the rhetorical and more formal self-identification. They not only obtain audiovisual propaganda material via the Internet, but also some of the numerous religious-ideological writings and instructions and internalize them. At the same time they connect with each other in chat rooms, creating a virtual community which gives them the feeling of belonging to a strong global community, even if they are very lonely in everyday life. The importance of online communities and the Internet in general for Jihadi radicalization and 'homegrown terrorism' has been studied extensively. Just to name few examples, the renowned radicalization study of the NYPD Intelligence Division (Silber & Bhatt, 2007) claimed to have identified the Internet as a "driver and enabler for the process of radicalization" (ibid, p. 83). The Internet, according to the authors, affects every stage of the radicalization process. In the "Self-Identification" phase, radical and "unfiltered" ideology is provided to the recruit via the Internet as well as the opportunity to meet and network with like-minded individuals. In the second "Indoctrination" phase, the person adapts the radical worldview, which is enforced through the "veil of objectivity" of the Internet. In the third "Jihadization" phase, the Internet serves as the "enabler", mainly providing technical information about targets and methods. (ibid.) This last aspect has been pointed out by many authors, arguing that even without any formal contact to any terrorist organization, individuals, through training manuals, videos and other material available online could become "virtual partners" (Kohlmann, 2008) and commit terrorist acts by simple self-study. In short the central factors influencing Jihadi radicalization seem to be more effective and unhindered communication, networks, transmission of propaganda and knowledge, as well as the construction of a collective identity. These factors are supported by Maura Conway (2006) - who classified terrorist use of the Internet into information provision, financing, networking, recruitment and information gathering - and Köhler (2012) studying the Internet's importance for right-wing extremist radicalization processes.

However, the Internet, especially social networks and the wider blogger scene, is also a space for progressive debate and the development of new approaches towards identity: patchwork-identities with strong ethical positions that are mainly but not exclusively derived from religion. These young Muslims are very self-confident and united through a strong selfless commitment - to society and to Muslims in particular. They are inspired by discrimination and rejection through society rather than

discourage. Characteristic for this Muslim youth culture are elements of pop culture, a rather conservative understanding of religion, as well as a social and political commitment. One can observe the establishment of a small but fairly confident elite, that will either revive the traditional Islamic organizations when they get a chance, or fundamentally alter the face of "Islam" in Germany in all its forms, with which these organizations will have to deal with. The debates associated with 'Sarrazin' and the question of "whether Islam belongs to Germany or not" together with related exclusionary debates during the past year have mainly hurt these dedicated groups of young Muslims and somewhat slowed down the momentum of this development.

The murders executed by the young French Mohammad Merah and the tens of thousands free copies of the Quran distributed for free in several German cities by a radical Salafi network<sup>25</sup> in April 2012 resulted in massive media coverage of Salafi groups and ideology and revived a debate still present in the German public. Salafism is perceived as the main threat to the German society, disregarding the far larger numbers of militant neo-Nazis, the recent discovery of the right-wing extremist terror cell 'National Socialist Underground (NSU)' and a long history of right-wing terrorism in Germany. The missing recognition of Salafi diversity and different groups within the movement leads to misperceptions and potentially ineffective or counter-productive policies. This Working Paper therefore starts to give a brief overview about Salafi and Muslim youth cultures in Germany – a field of research almost completely unexplored by academics and thus fairly unknown to the public until Salafi groups distributed the Quran in 2012.

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<sup>25</sup> „Die wahre Religion“, „Dawa FFM“ und „Millatu-Ibrahim“

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