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Within and Beyond the Community: Tensions in Muslim Service Provision in Switzerland

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Abstract: Muslim religious professionals are caught between the expectations of the community they serve and belong to and the expectations of the society they live in. Drawing on Helmut Plessner's notion of "antithetical tensions between community and society", this study addresses questions of how Muslim religious professionals experience these tensions and how they cope with them. The data presented are based on semi-structured interviews conducted as part of exploratory research on Muslim service providers in the Canton of Zurich, Switzerland. The findings show that Muslim religious professionals have to deal with community-related challenges such as generational differences, social change and fragmentation, together with outside influences including radicalisation and challenges related to society. Given the recurrent debates on Islamic radicalisation and terrorism in media and politics, they are expected to prove they are peaceful and loyal citizens, even though they are more often than not accused of not being integrated into society. Muslim religious professionals work strenuously, often on a voluntary basis, to do justice to expectations from both sides and try to be non-provocative by engaging in low-profile activities. Finally, they reach out to the wider society, e.g., by participating in inter-religious dialogue and, therefore, engage in bridging activities.

Keywords: community; society; service provision; Islam; Switzerland

1. Introduction

Historically, Muslim immigrant associations in Western countries have arisen from Muslims' desire to create a religious infrastructure for the practice of Islam. Thus, these communities are primarily concerned with fulfilling religious and cultural needs as well as ensuring the transmission of Islam to future generations. With the emergence of debates on integration and religious policy, Muslim communities entered the sphere of public attention and were faced with corresponding expectations. As a result, they feel obliged to fulfil many different tasks regarding integration, social education, media communication and prevention of religious radicalisation. This also affects the profile of imams and other religious professionals.[1] While the increased public attention opens up opportunities for Muslim communities to gain social and, where relevant, legal recognition, the pressure of expectations from different sides is greater than ever. This can lead to tensions between the expectations of community and those of wider society—especially in contexts where immigrant communities are conceived as a potential obstacle to social cohesion at the societal level.

We conceive that one of the most important roles of Muslim communities is service provision, the addressees of which are not only the community members but occasionally also the wider society. These services are usually organised by associations which, according to legal requirements, are non-profit oriented, democratically structured and follow a specific purpose. In other words, Muslim communities coalesce around Muslim associations to benefit from their services. In turn, these services contribute to the consolidation of the communities. Thus, a dialectical relationship exists between communities on one hand and

service provisions by associations on the other. These services can be religious or social. They stand at the juncture of both community and societal expectations. Our focus will therefore be on the following questions: How do Muslim religious professionals experience the antithetical tensions between community and society and how do they cope with them? How does communalisation, in the sense of building up communal identities and collective practice, take place within Muslim communities? What internal challenges do these communities face? How do Muslim religious professionals address the generational gap among their rank and file? How do they deal with disruptive outside influences? And how do they navigate through divergent expectations of their communities and the wider society?

This article is based on qualitative, semi-structured interviews conducted as part of exploratory research on Muslim service providers in the Canton of Zurich, Switzerland, in 2019. Commissioned by the Directorate of Justice and Home Affairs of the Canton of Zurich, the research project was part of a larger study on religious communities that lacked constitutionally based legal recognition[2] (Baumann et al. 2020; see also Schneuwly Purdie and Tunger-Zanetti 2021, pp. 650–51). As well as delivering a detailed description of the services of the organisations studied, the research showed that the organisational work and social and religious services of these organisations, despite considerable diversity, are mostly carried out on a voluntary basis by their members and religious staff. This is not surprising: other studies also show that the resources of established Christian communities and non-established communities of other denominations diverge greatly (Engi 2018; Stolz and Monnot 2018, pp. 105–6; Rudolph et al. 2009, pp. 16–17).

The Canton of Zurich is the region with the biggest Muslim population in Switzerland (FSO Federal Statistical Office 2021), with roughly 100,000 of its inhabitants self-identifying as Muslim. Accordingly, there are over 70 Muslim associations in this canton (Baumann et al. 2020, pp. 53–55) with highly diverse profiles.[3] Zurich also stands out for the endeavours of its administration to seek mutual understanding and even partnership with Muslim associations. The latter point gains an even greater weight when contrasted with the recurring waves of Islamophobia at the national level (cf. Baycan and Gianni 2019; Gianni 2016; Cheng 2015; Feddersen 2015).

During the analysis for the commissioned study, we noticed that the interviews revealed references to community, as well as to society and areas of tension in between. For this article, we have therefore selected five interviews with six Muslim religious professionals from the original interviews to answer the above-mentioned research questions. They reflect the spectrum of activities in Muslim communities and therefore also offer a diversity of perspectives (see also Section 4 on methodology).

2. State of Research

The following section on the state of research focuses on the community and societal orientation of Muslim service providers and the tension in between. We are particularly interested in research on services for communities, which can be both inward-looking and directed at society in a broad sense. This is what we try to capture by referring to bonding activity and bridging activity, building on Putnam (2000) and Stepick et al. (2009; see Section 3 for more detail). The state of research concentrates on Switzerland because we assume that the orientations of the services for communities are shaped, among other things, by the nation-state context, i.e., by the specific historical (cf. Tunger-Zanetti 2018, p. 667), political (cf. Cinalli and Giugni 2013) and legal framework (cf. Süess and Pahud de Mortanges 2017) in Switzerland.

2.1. Community or Society? Orientation of Muslim Communities

In Western contexts, Muslim organisations have evolved beyond their religious focus to offer a range of services (Banfi 2018; Peucker 2017), particularly in the social sector, providing "opportunities for civic engagement" (Peucker 2017, p. 52). This is also linked to a generational change (Barylo 2018, pp. 138–40). As a result, their orientation towards the common good has become more prominent (Schmid and Sheikhzadegan 2022, pp. 273–74;

Peucker 2016, pp. 294–95). In the context of Switzerland, the expectation that religious communities contribute to wider society proves to be particularly pronounced. In various cantons, such as Zurich, religious communities are also financially supported by the state (Engi 2018). Today, however, this is no longer legitimised by the historical role of the churches, but on the basis of a social benefit in the areas of welfare, culture and education (Engi 2018, pp. 278–80). In the Canton of Vaud, a new form of legal recognition has been introduced which is called "recognition as a body of public utility" (Schneuwly Purdie and Tunger-Zanetti 2023, p. 672). Thus, one can speak of a utilitarian perception of religious communities by the state (Pahud de Mortanges 2015). As a result of this paradigm change, services provided by religious communities that are not yet legally recognised, including Muslim ones, can also be perceived as useful by the state. Social service provision thus also proves to be a mode of acceptance and potential financial support (Engi 2018, p. 284). This context also forms the background for activities of Muslim communities in different fields.

Studying four Muslim youth groups in Switzerland, Tunger-Zanetti and Endres (2018) have shown that these groups try to cope with an inhospitable societal environment that disputes, or even denies, their claim to be an integral part of Swiss society. The coping strategies of these groups mainly consist of bonding activities to provide social recognition and feelings of belonging for their members. Occasionally, however, they also resort to bridging activities such as engagement in charitable projects, information programs and even public protest (see also Endres et al. 2013). Focusing on bridging activities, Biasca and Chatagny (2022) studied a public breaking of the fast organised by a Muslim youth association in French-speaking Switzerland. They have shown how the association downplays its religious traits at the event and concluded that this strategy in the public space aims at a recognition of the humane and civic aspect of Muslims, beyond their religious affiliation (Biasca and Chatagny 2022, para. 54). A recent book on Islamic organisations in Western Switzerland (Banfi and Gianni 2023) comes to a similar conclusion, namely that Islamic organisations sought to translate their religious worldview into practices that are consistent with secular views, thus enabling them to engage in bridging activities, such as welfare services for both Muslims and non-Muslims.

In their case study of Tasamouh, a pioneering Muslim association which aims at tackling radicalisation of Muslims in French-speaking Switzerland, Schmid and Brodard (2020) have shown that due to its intracultural social work approach, this organisation has managed to propose "original solutions based on community approaches and the identity-based skills of its members" (Schmid and Brodard 2020, p. 307). This enables the organisation to work with people it would not otherwise reach. It therefore targets the community, but it does so consciously within the framework of societal expectations, as it explicitly defines itself as "a specialist in the prevention of radicalisation" (Schmid and Brodard 2020, p. 305).

While the latter article deals with Muslim communities at the local level, Monnot (2016) has analysed two levels of action of Muslim communities in Switzerland: the local as well as the supra-local level of cantonal federations. With regard to the local level, he has shown that Muslim communities remain invisible "to obtain the respect of the immediate environment, the neighborhood and the local authorities" (Monnot 2016, pp. 61–62). They therefore focus on bonding and communalisation. Monnot interprets remaining discreet as a strategy of resistance, to preserve prayer spaces and protect small gains (Monnot 2016, pp. 54–55). According to him, it is rather the supra-local level of cantonal federations that attempts visibility (Monnot 2016, p. 55) and therefore employs bridging activities. Schmid et al. (2022) examined five Muslim associations in Switzerland with regard to their local and transnational ties. The study similarly shows that in four of five cases, cantonal federations play an important role in the bridging activities of associations, even at the local level. However, there are also bridging activities conducted by the communities themselves, such as collaborations with schools or the police or interreligious dialogue initiatives.

Overall, the studies referred to show that Muslim communities in Switzerland engage in both bonding and bridging activities. In the latter, they employ certain strategies to

meet the expectations of the broader society. We will discuss studies that address these expectations in more detail in the next section.

2.2. Community and Societal Expectations Addressed to Religious Professionals

With regard to Muslim service provision, studies almost exclusively examine the expectations of different stakeholders towards imams (Schmid 2020; Vinding 2018; Müller 2017; Rudolph et al. 2009). Other religious professionals who work in Muslim communities, in areas such as administration, youth or women's group leadership, tutoring or conducting mosque tours, are hardly considered in these studies. There are also expectations towards Muslims in general, but these mainly come from society, as will be explained below. Relevant stakeholders are, on one hand, Muslims themselves. On the other, media, politics and administration are the main societal stakeholders that express expectations towards imams (cf. Schmid 2020).

Concerning Muslim expectations, relevant studies show that Muslim expectations of imams are diverse (Akça 2020; Müller 2017); they are supposed to be "multi-functional and flexible, fully aware of the social context and able to address the specific needs of groups such as youth or women" (Schmid 2020, p. 78). At the same time, they are also seen as bridge-builders into wider society (Aslan et al. 2015, p. 152). However, the expectations of different generations within Muslim communities are often contradictory, so imams also have to mediate between them (Eser Davolio et al. 2021, p. 14).

With regard to societal expectations, we will first consider media and political debates. Studies show that Muslims are problematised (e.g., Ahmed and Matthes 2017; Törnberg and Törnberg 2016) and that there is often little differentiation between Muslims and terrorists who consider themselves Muslim (von Sikorski et al. 2022; Matthes et al. 2020). In Switzerland, distancing and problematising reporting was on the rise until 2017 (Ettinger 2018). This has been mainly explained by an increasing focus on radicalisation, which can be accounted for by a global securitisation of Islam and Muslims, i.e., their framing as a threat. Robert M. Bosco (2014) shows, however, that it was central to the respective governments of the UK, France and the US after the attacks of 11 September 2001 that the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq as part of the "War on Terror" not be interpreted as a war against Islam or Muslims in general. The narrative established in this context distinguishes "radical Islam" from "moderate Islam" (Fox and Akbaba 2015; Bosco 2014; Cesari 2012) or "good Muslims" from "bad Muslims" (cf. Cheng 2015; Birt 2006; Mamdani 2004). This results, above all, in the expectation that Muslims denounce terrorism and radicalisation and present themselves as peaceful and loyal citizens (van Es 2021, 2018; Otterbeck 2015).

Accordingly, the question of the compatibility of Islam with the democratic and secular rule of law often becomes central (Behloul 2007, p. 30). In Switzerland, this has found its way into the law, although at first glance it sounds religiously neutral (Achermann 2016, p. 100). The Federal Act on Foreign Nationals and Integration, FNIA (2005), states in Art. 26a para. 1a on so-called religious caregivers[4] and teachers that they must be familiar "with the social and legal value system in Switzerland" in order to be admitted. Since the article also states that they must impart this knowledge to their communities, it represents an obligation on the part of religious caregivers (in our case, imams) to act as a bridge between Swiss society and their communities (Müller 2017, p. 76).[5] With regard to imams, it becomes apparent at this point that they are seen both as a potential risk and as bridge-builders, as well as agents of integration (Schmid 2020, p. 80). Thus, an overlap between the debates on Islam, security and integration becomes visible. As Gianni (2016) highlights, integration in this context is mostly understood as a unilateral adjustment of Muslims.

As has been shown, there are still relatively few studies on Muslims' expectations of religious professionals in their communities. The few studies that exist mainly relate to imams. Much more is known about broader social expectations of Muslims. The available research shows that (a) they are caught between the bonding demands of their communities and the expectations of the wider society and (b) that imams play a crucial role with regard to the manifold functions of Muslim organisations.

3. Sensitizing Concept

In the following section, we develop a sensitizing concept for our study. With this term, Herbert Blumer (1954) tried to capture the necessity of openness of sociological concepts for qualitative social science research. A sensitizing concept "gives the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look" (Blumer 1954, p. 7). It is in this sense that the following concepts shall be understood and applied.

A distinction between processes of "*Vergemeinschaftung*" (communalisation) and "*Vergesellschaftung*" (sociation) goes back to 19th century German sociology. It was Ferdinand Tönnies who, in his seminal work *Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft* (Community and Society; Tönnies 1887), distinguished between two basic forms of social life. By *Gemeinschaft*, he understood a social entity based on personal relations such as family, kinship or neighbourhood and by *Gesellschaft*, a social entity based on rational relations as common in market exchange, organisations or legal structures (cf. Lichtblau 2011). Tönnies argued that modernisation would promote urbanisation, thus gradually leading to a demise of rural communities and the strengthening of society as the primary framework of integration, even though he did not dismiss the possibility that, in the future, new forms of community could arise.

Drawing on Tönnies, Max Weber ([1922] 2019) elaborated on these two forms of social life. In contrast to Tönnies, however, he did not advocate a linear, evolutionist approach to these concepts (Neumaier and Schlamelcher 2014). He rather spoke of the coexistence of two processes of communalisation (*Vergemeinschaftung*: integration in *Gemeinschaft*), based on the emotional interconnection of individuals and sociation (*Vergesellschaftung*: integration in *Gesellschaft*) based on the interconnection of individuals through rational considerations. Yet another scholar joining in the debate was the German philosopher Helmut Plessner. While Tönnies had an almost nostalgic view of community, Plessner ([1924] 1999) advocated a rather pessimistic stance, cautioning that community, despite its evident merits, could also foster fanatism and radicalism. This sceptical view is similar to Putnam's (1994) critique of bonding social capital (see below).

Since WWII, social scientists have applied a variety of concepts, be it integration/ assimilation in the Parsonian tradition, inclusion/exclusion in system theory, subaltern/ postcolonial theories in critical sociology, etc., to analyse community/societal tensions. Majority–minority conflicts, including those concerning migrant communities, have also sparked hot debates on multiculturalism among social philosophers. These all show that conflicting processes of communalisation and sociation still occupy social scientists and philosophers to this day.

In this article, we primarily draw on the Tönniesian/Weberian distinction to analyse the situation of Muslim organisations in Switzerland.[6] Thereby, we use "communalisation" to refer to the incorporation of Muslims in their respective ethnic/religious communities and "sociation", to their incorporation in the host society. This dichotomy has much in common with the two forms of social capital put forward by Robert D. Putnam (1994, 2000): bonding and bridging. Putnam's core idea is that social networks have value because of "the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam 2000, p. 16) and he demonstrates that societies that build on generalised trust are more efficient (Putnam 1994). While bonding social capital "is good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity" (Putnam 2000, p. 20) and therefore corresponds to communalisation, bridging social capital is "better for linkage to external assets and for information diffusion" and "can generate broader identities" (Putnam 2000, p. 20). The latter is thus in line with sociation. Putnam also draws attention to the fact that bonding social capital can lead to strong out-group antagonism and social inequalities (Putnam 1994, pp. 18–19). Accordingly, it is possible to speak of services of religious communities that have more of a bridging function, that is, they "link immigrants to the broader civic society" and are likely "to promote a sense of civic responsibility, overcome divisiveness and insularity, encourage

not only tolerance but cooperation" (Stepick et al. 2009, p. 15). Activities with a bonding function, on the other hand, provide support and solidarity within the community, but they do not "reach very far into the broader social world" (Stepick et al. 2009, p. 15).

On a final note, community has experienced a substantial change from its initial rural form into very different forms of communalisation in (post-)modern societies. First and foremost, the contemporary community is not necessarily based on spatial proximity. As Bradshaw remarks, "[t]oday, it is useful to define community in terms of the networks of people tied together by solidarity, a shared identity and set of norms, that does not necessarily reside in a place" (Bradshaw 2008, p. 13). Furthermore, communities of today can be based on different identity markers including "religion, nationalism, ethnicity, lifestyle and gender" (Delanty 2018, p. 229). Despite these developments, however, the sense of belonging, solidarity and emotional bonding are as essential to the contemporary community as they were to rural communities in earlier times.

Against this theoretical background, our study investigates the question as to how Muslim associations in Switzerland experience the "antithetical tension between community and society" (Plessner [1924] 1999, p. 99). On one hand, they are expected to meet the needs of their members for solidarity, normative integrity and collective identity (communalisation/bonding). On the other, they have to build relationships with the wider society and meet its expectations such as calls for integration, cooperation and dialogue (sociation/bridging). The latter processes especially require diverse interactions with a variety of social actors outside the community, such as local and state authorities, neighbourhoods, actors of other religious communities, media and many more.

4. Methodology

A qualitative research design was chosen for the commissioned study. Initially, semi-structured interviews (Brinkmann 2014, pp. 286–89) were conducted with 14 religious professionals. The original selection of the interviewees was based on a preliminary, exploratory, questionnaire-based survey with over a hundred religious professionals in about forty Muslim communities in the Canton of Zurich. This survey was designed to obtain an overall view of service provision in Muslim communities. A descriptive analysis of the survey data showed, among other things, a remarkable diversity of services provided by Muslim professionals. The data also revealed that the division of labour between professionals was rarely clear-cut and that in many cases one professional was responsible for more than one service. From the initial interviews, we have selected for this article five interviews with six persons that represent the different services in Muslim communities: Besim, an imam who holds a representative position in a Muslim umbrella organisation; Mustafa, a part-time imam and a religious educator; Yusuf, the president of an association and a religious educator; Maria, a Shiite convert and the leader of a women's group and a youth group; and Ahmed and Ismail, two leaders of a youth group that were interviewed together. The selection is based on purposeful sampling, thereby attempting, firstly, to include different roles (imam, religious educator, administrator, leader of a women's group and leaders of a youth group) in the sense of maximum variation (Patton 2002, pp. 234–35) and secondly, to have information-rich cases (Patton 2002, p. 230). The heterogeneity is not only achieved in regard to their different roles in Muslim organisations, but also concerning the ethno-linguistic background of the interviewees. Moreover, with Maria, there is not only a Shiite woman, but also a convert in the otherwise Sunni and Muslim-born sample. In order to avoid an overrepresentation of roles, the two other women in the greater sample, both Sunni religious educators, are not included in the sample. The interviews were conducted in German, with all English translations provided by the authors.

For the analysis, we coded the interviews in a team of two researchers. The three main categories were derived from theory: a category, "community", referring to communalisation, a category called "tensions" relating to the tension between community and societal expectations and a category we called "beyond community". We decided against the term sociation for the last category because it could give the impression that the respective

services are exclusively directed at the wider society. However, this is not the case, as they are also aimed at the community. Therefore, "beyond community" seemed a better label for this category. The subcategories of these main categories and their dimensions were then coded inductively, i.e., by open coding (Strauss and Corbin 1998, pp. 101–21). The coding process was accompanied by constant discussions in the team and memos documenting ideas, reflections and considerations. Accordingly, this also led to re-examination and recoding of the data, as Strauss (1987, pp. 18–19) envisaged the coding process.

For this article, the category "tension" was analysed with all its subcategories and dimensions, such as "context", "demands and support" or "multiple belonging". Further, we only analysed two subcategories of "community" and "beyond community" that emerged in both these main categories, namely "services" and "challenges". Services in the category "community" include the following: daily prayers, Friday sermons, festivities, religious education, rites of passage, youth activities, spiritual care in the community and women's meetings. Challenges we found in this category were volunteer work, funding and finances, languages, generational differences, change, fragmentation and unity and the internet. In the category "beyond community", we identified the following services: leisure activities, counselling and activities towards the common good. Challenges mentioned in this category are: volunteer work, funding and finances, prevention or resolution of conflicts in society and inclusion/exclusion. There were many other subcategories that could not be considered due to the scope of the article.

5. Results

5.1. Community: Services and Challenges

Communalisation takes place, among other things, through a broad variety of services (cf. Baumann et al. 2020, pp. 103–4) that are carried out in Muslim communities and thereby foster incorporation into their respective communities. Several services emerged from the material. First and foremost, they encompass religious acts such as daily prayers and Friday sermons. As Maria, the leader of a women's group, emphasises: "And the time when we meet must always be around prayer time". Furthermore, festivities around Islamic holidays are celebrated together: "We do an *iftar* together (. . .), which is for the whole community", explains imam Mustafa. Other important areas of activity in Muslim communities are religious education and rites of passage for birth, marriage and death: "of course, there are important stages in the lives of community members, during which the imam accompanies them", says imam Besim. Religious education is, on one hand, offered for adults, as is the case with the women's group, in which the leader gives a talk on a topic at each meeting. On the other, it is often children who are taught: "Every Sunday we give classes for children", says imam Mustafa, "at the moment we have over sixty children attending". Furthermore, Muslim communities often offer youth activities. This can take the form of free use of the premises, as Yusuf tells us: "So teenagers, for example, come every Friday night. Whether girls or boys, mostly Friday evening, because Saturday and Sunday are free (. . .) Young people are practically autonomous". The activities can also be organised and guided, as this statement by Maria shows, who additionally organises excursions for young people: "On the Sura 'the bee', (..) the Sheikh[7] can give a lecture on the subject and we would visit a beekeeper who would show us how honey is made". Some communities also offer free tutoring for children, which enables them to pass the entrance exam for high school that still exists in the Canton of Zurich, as imam Mustafa explains. Another important task carried out by Muslim communities is spiritual care or chaplaincy within their communities: "I always say, if you want, you can come to the mosque in the evening, then we can talk, but I am not one who only reads the Qur'an, I want to talk to them [too]" (imam Mustafa). Spiritual care within the community may include visits to the sick, as president Yusuf points out: "for example, if someone is in hospital and is having an operation, then we go and visit them". There are, of course, also women's meetings: "the aim was to allow women to come together with their questions and concerns, without the presence of men and simply to have an exchange" (Maria). Women's meetings can also

take the form of a get-together with coffee and cake and children playing, which imam Mustafa is very supportive of: "Our idea is that the mosque does not have to be a place that we can only use for prayer, but that we can also use for other things". Finally, there are also communities such as Yusuf's that offer leisure activities such as cinema evenings or cultural trips. As can be seen from this catalogue of various activities, different groups are involved in the community at all stages of life, thus achieving a comprehensive communalisation and forging bonding of social capital, providing crucial support (Putnam 2000, p. 20) in diverse ways. Communalisation therefore revolves around community life, which goes beyond mere obligatory prayers (cf. Lichtblau 2011, p. 457).

But of course, this communalisation does not take place without friction. Several challenges related to communalisation were mentioned in the interviews: the high percentage of volunteer work, which is strongly linked to the issue of finances, the issue of the language(s) used in the community, generational differences and the question of how to deal with change, the tackling of fragmentation and unity and the influence of the internet. The interviewees first and foremost mention the high percentage of volunteer work needed to be able to offer all these services in the first place. Volunteer work is therefore highly relevant for communalisation to happen at all. Imam Mustafa, for example, tells us:

> No, I am the only imam there. I am not 100 percent employed in the mosque, only 20 percent, only for Friday (. . .). Otherwise, I work something else, I work as a roofer 80 percent. (. . .) But still, in the evening, I am almost always there after work. (. . .) At home I have to prepare a lot, I read a lot (. . .) for my presentations that I give in the mosque. (imam Mustafa)

As imam Mustafa points out, this situation is also at the expense of his family, because he simply does not have enough time for everything. He is also in the mosque on weekends, although he is only paid for Fridays. Similarly, Yusuf estimates that he devotes about fifteen or sixteen hours a week voluntarily in his position as president. Many of the associations can only offer very limited paid positions. Yusuf sees this, for example, at the cantonal Muslim umbrella organisation, "which, with its 20 percent [paid] position, cannot cover all the demands and concerns of the media or authorities at all, although there is a huge need". Ahmed, one of the youth group leaders, perceives the problem of volunteer work to be closely tied to finances:

> And yes, the difficulty here is again, every mosque association is struggling, or almost everyone is struggling to survive. Then you don't have much time to do other things as well. And it always really comes back to the same thing, that it's voluntary and that the finances are lacking. And because of that, so much time and also potential is lost that could be better used. (Ahmed)

Because mosques are mostly financed through membership fees and donations, a certain amount of awareness is needed on the part of the members, as imam Besim explains: "In other mosques, I know that the imams get a rather poor salary because people do not have the feeling that they have to contribute anything". He knows many imams, he states, that take on part-time jobs or have to carry out the profession of imam part-time, "because the salary one gets in a mosque is far too low". President Yusuf confirms that this is the case in his association (see also Eser Davolio et al. 2021, p. 9). Scarce finances can also complicate finding proper premises for an association, as imam Mustafa describes: "we are looking, we hope to find something, it is very difficult, very difficult (. . .) if we find something, it is also very expensive".

Another bundle of difficulties is intertwined as well: the issue of the language(s) used in the community, generational differences, fragmentation and unity and how to deal with change. Ahmed, one of the two youth group leaders, summarises the difficulty of the generational differences as follows:

> There are of course generational differences, so people who are here in the first generation have a different goal or vision than the second or third generation. We rather really see ourselves as part of this society. Some of the first generation still

> dream of returning and therefore have a strong focus on their country of origin, whereas with us, the focus is always more on Switzerland. (Ahmed)

Imam Besim agrees, pointing out that the younger generation's perspectives are quite different. However, it is not so much a matter of a decreasing number of believers, which remains more or less the same, he assures. Rather, it is "new questions that are now occupying people's minds" (imam Besim). Besim is adamant that an imam must recognise these developments and keep up with them. As mentioned earlier, generational differences are also reflected in the issue of language: "the young people who were born here, they don't understand Islam in their mother tongue because they grew up here, speaking Swiss German", says Maria. She describes how this manifests itself within her community:

> A sheikh comes from Lebanon or Iraq. (…) then the program takes place in Arabic, as it does now during Ramadan. And the young people, they sit in the mosque, (…) they are on their smartphones. Because it's not their language. (Maria)

Therefore, her community tries to find imams who speak German so that the young people are not left behind. Thus, it is recognised within Muslim communities that the national languages of Switzerland are becoming increasingly important, in order not to lose the second or third generation.

According to the interviewees, using a language spoken in Switzerland can also have a unifying effect in another way. Imam Mustafa always translates the Friday sermon, which he delivers in Albanian, into German, so that everyone can follow, because "for the last year or two, we have also had many other nationalities attending". Maria even states explicitly that "it simply has to happen on the basis of the German language, otherwise there is no community", referring to the broader community of (Shiite) Muslims in Switzerland. This communalising effect beyond one's own language group is precisely the point that the youth group is addressing:

> We offer the young people German as a language, not Turkish, not Urdu, not Albanian, but German. Exactly. In that way, everyone should feel welcome. Especially the generation that is growing up here. (Ismail)

The youth group therefore consciously counteracts the fragmentation of Muslims along linguistic lines that is still very prevalent today. Imam Besim, for example, notes that exchanges between imams take place mainly within ethno-linguistic groups, but hardly across. Maria makes a similar observation: "So there are three or four Shiite mosques within 30 metres, because they are still attached to their country of origin". She therefore advocates for more unity: "Only when those who lead can detach themselves from that, only then will there be one voice for all Shiites. There is no other way." These issues can be summarised under the keywords of fragmentation and unity. They refer to whether communalisation takes place within linguistic boundaries, for example, or more broadly and comprehensively with regard to Muslims of different origins, languages or even orientations.

The issues of language and generational differences also point to transformations and change that are not always easy for the community as a whole. Imam Besim notes that change is taking place and that an adjusted response is required: "I notice that this is a serious issue because people are losing the connection to their own imam, this relationship of trust within the community has also weakened". This is confirmed by youth group leader Ahmed who points out that there is a need among his generation for "imams who have grown up here, who know our situation and who speak German well". Maria has a similar view; she thinks the imams of tomorrow will come from the next generation and will therefore have a good knowledge of "Swiss law, Swiss society, Swiss culture, traditions and Islam". But change takes time and that is why she rather expects the next generation to make this change happen. There is therefore currently a kind of tension in Muslim communities between actively embracing changes that are already taking place and clinging to an imaginary status quo.

A last challenge that is mentioned mainly by the two imams is the internet as a source of knowledge about Islam. It makes sense that this point is only taken up by the two imams

because knowledge is the resource for imams to claim a position of authority (Vinding 2018, pp. 243–4). Imam Besim finds it challenging that there are people who would rather trust an anonymous preacher on the internet whom they have never met than him, even though he has taught them a lot about Islam. Imam Mustafa sees it similarly; he also values the transfer of knowledge through personal contact higher than from unknown people: "It is better that the knowledge comes from us, with whom people are in direct contact, and not from strangers or various organisations on the internet", he says. If believers have questions and search for answers on the internet and then go to the imam with the relevant information, the imams must have appropriate answers so that the believers remain in the community and do not turn away from it, imam Besim thinks. Believers sometimes turn to the imam with a particular question, while, as imam Besim explains, "As an imam, you have to keep the whole picture in mind and be able to locate particular aspects". The internet is therefore identified as a specific challenge by the imams.

5.2. Beyond the Community: Services and Challenges

As already indicated in the quotes above from the two youth group leaders Ahmed and Ismail, the services of the youth group aim beyond the narrower sense of community. However, there are also services in other Muslim associations that are oriented towards the broader society. We will first discuss the specific case of the youth group before we look at the other associations.

The youth group's activities are aimed at Muslims and "anyone else interested", as they write on their website, so this kind of communalisation primarily encompasses young people and is not just directed at Muslims (at least in theory). As the quote by Ahmed in the previous subchapter indicated, they see themselves as part of society, which is reflected in the target group. This indicates that the project seeks to meet the expectations of second- and, possibly already, third-generation Muslims. Many of the activities offered by the youth groups are related to leisure activities: excursions, game nights, debate nights, playing table tennis, table football, Playstation or having a meal together, as well as annual youth camps. The youth group provides a room where young people can also be creative artistically, as Ahmed tells us. The idea of the youth group is that young people organise activities on their own:

> And for example, one of our latest programmes is called Chill n' Çay[8] and it's really organised by young people, so there are about five, six people, all between 16 and 20. (...) Next time they want to discuss environmental protection and it's really such an independent thing that doesn't have much to do with the board, with us. We just keep looking to see where they need support, where we can help. (Ahmed)

In addition to these general leisure activities, it nevertheless seems to be important for the group to give some space to the Muslim component, which can be considered as faith-centred activities, to draw on Sider and Unruh's (2004) typology of faith-based organisations. For instance, they organise a weekly *iftar* (Muslims' fast-breaking meal) during Ramadan that is open to all. To name another example, they offer a fortnightly Sunday breakfast, which is accompanied by the morning prayer. In this way, targeted Muslim services are built into the broader offer.

Furthermore, the older board members also take on a kind of counselling activity: young people can ask them questions, be it regarding vocational training, personal problems or questions on relationships and love, but also religious questions. In those cases, they sometimes refer them to imams if they do not know the answer, Ahmed says. This counselling activity has a lot to do with the fact that people who give advice are themselves "Muslim Swiss" or "Swiss Muslim": "It helps sometimes to have friends who, yes, who understand what you've been through. For many people, this is a first time. A first time to be understood", Ahmed explains. This points to the area of tension between community and society in which these young people are situated, which we will deal with in the next subchapter.

In addition to leisure activities and counselling, the youth group also conveys the idea that one should be active oneself, "that one should not only live for oneself, but that one should do something for society" (Ahmed). This kind of activity could be considered to be oriented towards the common good. For example, the youth group organises a blood collection campaign about three times a year, which Ismail describes as "something for society, simply to raise awareness that we are not just in our room, but there for the whole of society". This bridging function is clearly verbalised in Ismail's statement. At the same time, the youth group emphasises that it understands itself as part of society, addressing not only Muslims but also "anyone interested".[9] This does not mean that other Muslim associations do not see themselves as a part of Swiss society. Unlike them, however, the youth group leaders specifically state their self-understanding as a part of Swiss society.

The challenges the youth group faces are similar to those mentioned above: the two youth group leaders mainly point to the high proportion of volunteer work and the question of funding. Ismail explains that he and Ahmed have been working voluntarily for the youth group for eight years, in addition to school, job and family, and that it is very time consuming. The high proportion of volunteer work brings with it specific difficulties: "A lot depends on individuals, so if one of us drops out, the whole thing starts to wobble a bit," says Ahmed. People therefore have to be constantly motivated to keep on performing volunteer work. What has been built up and achieved so far is thus easily endangered and not secured for the long term. This problem is strongly linked to funding. Ismail notes that a lot of knowledge is lost and therefore wishes for a paid position "because then the know-how, the energy, the effort remains. This is no longer lost when someone is tired". Ahmed and Ismail point out that there is a need on the part of society for their services. They are, for example, repeatedly asked by schools whether they could give a lecture on the topic of Islam:

> We would love to do that. But it is simply not possible. Well, all of us work and during school hours, it is very difficult for us to come to school and present for two, three or four hours. (Ahmed)

Mosque associations also ask the youth group whether they can organise something at their premises, but again there is a lack of time and resources. "We are limited by the fact that we are simply not subsidised as such," concludes Ismail. Their room was made available to them by the city of Zurich and is partially subsidised, but they have to finance the remaining rent and all other costs through donations and membership fees. With regard to the two challenges of volunteering and funding/finances, it can be concluded that a target group that reaches beyond Muslims could enhance their chances of receiving subsidies, especially with regard to the rental costs of the premises. However, this would only improve the overall situation regarding volunteering and finances to a limited extent.

We turn now to the services provided by other associations, which in one way or another go beyond their respective Muslim community to also target the broader society. President Yusuf explains that a few times a year, school classes come to his association for a guided tour when covering Islam in school. Thus, associations like his provide a service so that parts of the larger society receive a better knowledge of Muslims and Islam in Switzerland. This service includes so-called Open Mosque Days too. Other examples of services given by the interviewees are more focused on specific instructions for the community concerning societal issues. Imam Mustafa, for example, makes interacting in society a topic in his lessons:

> How we can deal with neighbours, not disturbing and things like that, then we also teach how to deal with others (. . .) because our children go to school with children of different nationalities, different cultures and different religions (. . .) I find that very important, because we live in one country, multicultural you can say. (Imam Mustafa)

Accordingly, this could be seen as a service aimed at avoiding or resolving conflicts in society. Imam Mustafa also recounts how the community is very careful not to disturb

the neighbourhood and therefore does not conduct morning prayers: "we always try to be quiet, to be good with people, also to be very open". This can be understood as a very specific strategy to avoid potential conflicts (cf. Monnot 2016). At the same time, one can also say that the community tries to set an example of what it teaches the children. Maria, to give another example, shares how she explains to the women in her group how to talk to their children's teacher at school when it comes to a faith-related issue: "Then I show them how to do it, really a way that I know from my own experience". She goes on to describe how she tries to answer questions in the women's group that concern society—for instance, how to deal with school trips during the fasting month—and thereby transform conflicts. "You always have to find a compromise or a solution, talk to each other before you judge the other", she states. As becomes clear from these examples, the services mentioned here are mostly about establishing relationships with the wider society and developing a bridging capacity. With the exception of the guided tours and the Open Mosque Days, the interviewees do not directly address the broader society as a target group. This stands in contrast to the activities of the youth group that almost always target the society.

Interestingly, the main challenge mentioned in the interviews in relation to society is the issue of inclusion/exclusion. On one hand, this is discussed on a societal level. Yusuf negotiates the question of inclusion/exclusion in terms of support: "And when after sixty years politicians only now think of doing something, that kind of hurts". Therefore, this issue is also very much about a feeling of not belonging. Even the youth group, which is open to all interested people, is often seen as a "foreigners' club", as Ahmed says, and is therefore pigeon-holed. Imam Besim raises the question of the status, significance and integration of Muslim communities in society, which, in his view, is a highly political issue in Switzerland. He explains this using the anti-minaret initiative as an example:

> People did not want or do not want the [Muslim] communities to be visible in society and that is why they banned the minarets, then the communities closed themselves off and they are somewhere in industrial areas. And today there are more and more voices saying that the Muslims have to show themselves, they have to open up, and ten years ago you forbade us to open up, to show ourselves. (Imam Besim)

This statement expresses the ambivalent situation in which Muslim communities and Muslims find themselves: whilst they are not supposed to be too visible to the outside world, they are reproached for withdrawing and expected to open up (see Dellwo and Salzbrunn 2019; Monnot 2016; Gonzalez 2015). These are therefore partially contradictory and conflicting expectations on the part of society.

On the other hand, inclusion/exclusion is also negotiated on an individual level, for example, when the headscarf is considered a visible sign of a Muslim woman. Some women experience difficulties at the workplace because of it. Maria also talks about women being harassed on the street. She points out the gendered dimension of this aspect: "Regarding Muslim men, you just don't see that they are Muslims". So, there are contradictory and conflicting expectations on the part of society that need to be dealt with by religious professionals. At the same time, the expectations of society partly contradict those of the community.

5.3. The Antithetical Tension between Community and Society

As shown in the previous two subchapters, there are challenges in communities that already reflect, in some way, an antithetical tension between community and society. The second and third generations, in particular, are more embedded in Swiss society, often speak the national language better than their second language and have different perspectives and questions than the first generation, as has already been pointed out. This point is best illustrated by the following statement from Ahmed:

> Can I be a Muslim and Swiss? Can I be a Swiss Muslim? Is that something that works? Can I be Albanian and Swiss and Muslim at the same time, for example? (Ahmed)

These questions, raised by youth group leader Ahmed, are an expression of a tension between the expectations of (a part of) the Muslim community and the expectations of Swiss society. The identity formation processes of younger generations take place within this area of tension, because identity, as an ongoing construction process through interaction and communication, is always dependent on social knowledge systems and thus also on different expectations (Bosančić 2014, pp. 131–62). Young people have to balance these different expectations and negotiate their own way through. Ismail suggests, however, that their youth group acts as a support in this process of orientation: "We have seen that it bears fruit, it achieves something. The young people identify [both] with Islam and Switzerland". The youth group therefore facilitates young people reaching a state of multiple belonging. It is probably precisely this process of identity formation and negotiating of belonging that distinguishes these generations from the first generation.

Imam Besim frames the tension between community and society in a different way, when he points out that it is important "to be aware of where you live, what importance that has, how you deal with it". In other words, he expects his fellow believers to have an awareness of the context, of the living conditions in Switzerland and prerequisites of Swiss society. It is this awareness that can help to weigh up different expectations and find coping strategies to deal with them.

Furthermore, the interviewees express different demands that would make it easier to deal with this tension. First and foremost, they mention support from the cantonal authorities:

> I expect that, on one hand, one sees that (...) 100,000 people are present (...) that they have corresponding needs and that when these needs are also positioned with the authorities, with the state, that the state also supports them. (Imam Besim)

In his view, it is therefore both a matter of recognising the Muslim presence in Switzerland and of concrete support. A tangible vision for imam Besim would be support to create structures, i.e., umbrella organisations. This is in line with the state of research discussed above (see Section 2.1): it is often umbrella organisations or federations that have a bridging function. The youth group is already supported by the city of Zurich and repeatedly submits applications to the cantonal integration fund for specific projects like their annual camp. President Yusuf sees the activity of the Zurich government with regard to the Muslim communities at the moment of the interview as a positive sign. However, he adds: "But it also shows that only when someone [in the community, authors' note] is active, will something like this come about".

6. Conclusions

Muslim organisations are faced with a variety of challenges: they are chronically understaffed and underfinanced. They therefore resort to volunteering and risk being criticised for being unprofessional. As many studies show (see Section 2.2), much of the burden lays on the shoulders of imams, whose role is often overestimated, both by intra-community and external stakeholders (cf. Schmid and Trucco 2022, pp. 86–93; Schmid 2020, p. 88). But as we have shown in this study, other religious professionals within Muslim communities also bear the burden.

Muslim communities are caught up in divergent processes of communalisation and sociation, torn between community consolidation and loyalty to the wider society. They have to deal with community-related challenges such as generational differences, issues of social change and fragmentation, as well as outside influences such as radicalisation and Jihadist appeals, especially through the internet. They also have to deal with society-related challenges. First and foremost, Muslims are expected to integrate into wider society. However, in Switzerland, integration is often understood as a unilateral adjustment. Calls for integration even sometimes have Islamophobic overtones. Furthermore, due to processes of securitisation and a focus on radicalisation and terrorism in media and politics, Muslims are expected to present themselves as peaceful and loyal citizens, familiar with the social and legal system in Switzerland. Therefore, they are often faced with criticisms

of being either too visible or too invisible, which, as we have been able to show, is often perceived by Muslims as a sign of exclusion. In addition to the critical public discourse, the particularly strong political expectation in Switzerland that religious communities should provide a general benefit to society proves to be a catalyst for their service provision. In contrast to countries with a stronger link between the state and religious communities (Banfi 2018, pp. 33–35), the prospect of social recognition and potential state support stimulates Muslim communities to engage in society-oriented activities (Schmid and Sheikhzadegan 2022, p. 269).

Muslim communities try to address these challenges by adopting the following measures and strategies: the mostly voluntary religious professionals work to the point of exhaustion. In addition, communities adopt procedures from the wider society such as family camps, youth programmes popular in society, etc. They try to be non-provocative (and therefore also invisible in some way). For instance, they sometimes give up morning prayer in order not to wake up the neighbours. Finally, they reach out to the wider society by participating in interreligious dialogues or by serving the common good, which represent engagement in bridging activities.

To conclude this article with some theoretical reflections, Tönnies's distinction between community and society has stood the test of time, as has Plessner's assumption that there is an antithetical tension between the two (Delanty 2018, p. 225). However, Tönnies's prediction that modernity would lead to a demise of community has not come true, with communities still being an integral part of contemporary societies. Moreover, an evolutionary process has transformed communities from their initial rural form into new forms of communalisation including migrant communities embedded in multicultural societies which are constantly challenged and re-shaped by majority–minority conflicts as well as geographical mobility, internet influences, transcultural, transnational and virtual contacts and networks. To highlight two main characteristics of contemporary communities, they are, firstly, not necessarily spatially bounded, and, secondly, they can be based on different markers of belonging. Our findings show that community can play an important role in generating a sense of solidarity, identity and belonging among its members (cf. Delanty 2018, pp. 225–38).

They also clearly show the significance of religious professionals in preserving and developing Muslim communities. In this sense, the importance of collective action should be highlighted when theorising processes of communalisation. As Green (2008, p. 50) has argued, "[c]ommunity theory may benefit from directing more attention to the work that people collectively do to shape community life". Looking at the activities of religious professionals in Muslim communities helps to also explore multiple strategies to face up to and reconcile tensions between society- and community-orientation.

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Notes

[1] We use the term "religious professional" to refer to any person who carries out religious, social or educational tasks in the communities within the framework and on behalf of the specific community, whether on a volunteer or paid basis, e.g., imams, leaders of youth and women's groups, board members, chaplains, or persons who provide tutoring services (Baumann et al. 2020, p. 39; cf. Vinding and Chbib 2020, p. 5; Yuskaev and Stark 2014).

[2] The legal recognition of religious communities in Switzerland falls under the competence of Cantonal authorities rather than Federal ones. Full recognition is granted only once it is incorporated into the constitution of the respective canton. For a detailed discussion of the legal status of Islam in Switzerland, see Süess and Pahud de Mortanges (2017).

[3] For an overview of the highly diverse mosaic of Muslim communities in Switzerland, see the volume edited by Monnot (2013).

[4] This term is specific to Swiss law. It could describe what we call here religious professionals, but is in fact exclusively used for imams, priests, rabbis, monks, etc., thus, for the person that is central in spiritual and ritual practice (cf. Achermann 2016).

[5] However, this obligation can be considered incomplete, as the article of the law only regulates third-country nationals, but does not apply to religious caregivers from Switzerland or the EU.

[6] Most recently, there has been a different take on the double term *Vergemeinschaftung/Vergesellschaftung*. Referring to the current debate on the situation of migrants in Germany, Faist and Ulbricht (2014, p. 4) argue that the growing tendency to replace the German term *Integration* (integration) with that of *Teilhabe* (participation) is a misleading one, as these two terms refer to distinctive issues: whereas integration refers to *Vergemeinschaftung*, including feelings of belonging to and identification with a society in its totality, participation is about *Vergesellschaftung*, in the sense of instrumental consideration of benefits, be it in the market economy or through the exercise of civil, political, social and cultural rights and duties.

[7] With Sheikh she meant a Shiite cleric or imam whom she usually invites to give a lecture.

[8] Çay—in slightly different spellings and pronunciations, here the Turkish word—means tea in different languages, e.g., Arabic, Turkish, Persian and Albanian.

[9] Whether this is actually the case remains unclear.

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