



LA CIRCULATION DES PERSONNES
**ISLAM AND GENDER IN THE BOUNDARY
WORK OF YOUNG ADULTS
IN SWITZERLAND**

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Abstract

In many European countries, cultural and religious diversity is increasingly discussed as being a fundamental problem. This paper addresses this issue by applying the theoretical perspective of *boundary work*: On behalf of a mixed-method-study with young adults, we explore how public discursive constructions about 'differences' are used and interpreted in daily life in order to constitute groups and define the boundaries between them. The data shows that a majority (Swiss and second generation youth of Italian, Spain, French or Portuguese origin) constructs a bright boundary against 'Muslims' by mobilizing specific ideas about religious practices and by underpinning them with gender equality arguments. The Muslim minority youth are not able to tackle this boundary because of its bright nature; therefore, they develop individual strategies of repositioning within this stratified boundary system. We argue that in this transnationalized context established forms of domination emerge based on the intersection of religion and gender.

Keywords:

Boundary work

Religion

Gender

Muslims

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1. INTRODUCTION

As a result of migration and transnationalization, societies have become more diverse in regard to their religious and ethno-cultural composition. This diversity is often perceived as fundamentally problematic by European governments, media and (most) political parties and notably so when Islam is at stake (Vertovec and Wessendorf, 2010, Foner and Alba, 2008). In Switzerland, emotionally charged public debates are common when it comes to the question of wearing the *burqa* or the headscarf. The Swiss voter's ban to the building of minarets in 2009 acquired even international attention. The question of how 'differences' are socially (re)produced under such conditions and which role the category of religion plays in these constructions is therefore of high scientific importance. This issue is the focus of this article and we apply the theoretical perspective of *boundary work* in order to gain answers. By *boundary work*, we understand a form of social organization of horizontal and vertical differences which are created, reproduced and modified by different individual and corporate actors (Nation-states, Media, individuals, etc.) and which is closely linked to social inequality and domination. Religion in general, and nowadays Islam in particular, are crucial categories for the construction of boundaries. Mainly since 9/11, Muslims - Switzerland being no exception - are perceived as a threat caused by their 'cultural difference', a broad-brushing of Muslim actors can be observed as well as a 'muslimization' of immigrants (Allenbach and Sökefeld, 2010, Behloul, 2005, Ettinger and Imhof, 2011). This perception has, as will be shown, triggered the formation of new boundaries. In this article, we intend to explore how actors contribute to this process of constituting and re-configuring groups by defining the boundaries between them. It will be shown, based on a study with young people living in a French-speaking Swiss canton, how public discursive constructions about Muslims were used, interpreted and modified by young adults in their day-to-day lives when it comes to drawing boundaries between *in-groups and out-groups* (Tajfel, 1981). Concretely, we depict the ways young people create and maintain boundaries by mobilizing specifically conceived ideas about religious practices and representations and by underpinning them with gender arguments.

Our article contributes in two ways to the emerging theoretical agenda of the 'boundary paradigm': Firstly, while most studies dealing with questions of boundary making concentrate on the role of *ethnicity* (among others Bauböck, 1998, Bail, 2008, Wimmer, 2008, Barth, 1969) or to a lesser extent on *gender* (Gerson and Peiss, 1985)(own publication) we maintain that *religion in intersection with gender* actually plays a crucial role in such processes of distinction (in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu (1982)). Secondly, we intend to advance the theoretical agenda by contributing to an 'agency-led' understanding of boundary making, focusing on young adults and their boundary strategies.

The first section outlines our theoretical concepts and the methodology followed in the study. Afterwards, we investigate how 'diversity' (not only religious) is discussed in public, how it is anchored in the constitution and within policies and which relevant categories of 'difference' emerge in this specific Swiss context. We show how this dominant discourse about 'diversity' is embodied by the young people and how religious arguments are used to mark a new boundary between 'us' (Swiss, second or third generation migrants of Italian, Portuguese, Spain or French origin) and the 'Muslims'. This boundary work is underpinned with 'gender equality' arguments. The investigation continues to explore how the stigmatized minority – the Muslims - engage, contest and react to these exclusive boundaries to gain recognition and to advance their claims to moral superiority. The study finds that for the minority it is not possible to tackle the exclusive boundary work and to question the logic lying behind it. In conclusion, it is argued that in trans-nationalized contexts old established systems of domination which are intrinsically linked to religion are re-mobilized and made to interact with other categories of difference, particularly gender.

2. BOUNDARY WORK: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

The idea of *boundary work* has come to play a key role in important lines of scholarship across social science and it opens up new theoretical insights into the organization of social differences (for an overview see Pachucki et al., 2007). Social differences and corresponding boundary processes are historically constructed in specific contexts and are variable, hereby involving a broad range of actors. For the theoretical approach of this study, it is crucial to understand the processes involved in the making of boundaries: How do actors draw, activate, blur or dissolve boundaries and how do they mark these emerging boundaries? In general, boundaries are understood to have both *social and symbolic dimensions*. Following Lamont and Molnar (2002: 168) symbolic boundaries are defined as “*conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people and practices. [... They] also separate people into groups and generate feelings of similarity and group membership*”. On the other hand, social boundaries are defined as “*objectified forms of social differences manifested in unequal access to and unequal distribution of resources and social opportunities*” (ibid). In their daily interactions, the actors are involved in struggles over social distinctions and categorizations because of symbolic boundaries that can shift. When symbolic boundaries are agreed upon by the majority, they can, however, take on a constraining character and can become social boundaries (ibid: 168).

Boundary making is necessarily relational as *in-groups* and *out-groups* are the result of a twin process of *group identification* and *external social categorization* (Jenkins, 1997). On the one hand, *group identification* refers to the ways individuals differentiate themselves from others by drawing on criteria of similarity and shared belonging within the *in-group*. Such communality is a form of monopolistic social closure; it defines membership, eligibility and access. For the closure of group boundaries to operate, any “cultural stuff” (Barth, 1969: 15) can provide a basis and resource: language, ritual, kinship, lifestyle, religion or gender representations. Boundary making refers to subjectively meaningful differences and similarities which do not signify real conformity, but which are central to communalization (*Vergemeinschaftung*), an idea that goes back to Max Weber (1996 [1922]). The second process, *external categorization*, is intimately bound up with power relations and relates to the capacity of one group to successfully impose its categories of ascription upon another group of people, and to the resources which the categorized collectivity can draw upon to resist that imposition, if need be.

Finally, for our issue it is also of pertinence that boundaries can be of different qualities which have diverging outcomes: In the words of Alba (2005:21) boundaries can be “blurred” or “bright”. “Bright” is a boundary when “*the distinction involved is unambiguous, so that individuals know at all times which side of the boundary they are on. Others are ‘blurry’, involving zones of self-presentation and social representation that allow for ambiguous locations with respect to the boundary*”. The brighter a boundary, the higher the potential that we have to deal with a *social* boundary in the sense of Lamont and Molnar.

Following these ideas, we first examine which categories of ‘differences’ are of relevance in the local context of Neuchâtel, concretely in its constitution and policy towards migrants. Second, we analyse how young people – embedded in this specific discursive context - identify and define themselves in terms ‘differences and communalities’ and how they are identified and defined by others in terms of categories. In other words, which groups emerge out of the data as a result of the boundary work in place, and how are these boundaries marked?

3. CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

Corresponding to our research question, which aims at revealing how differences and communalities are produced in interaction and relationally by defining boundaries between groups, we did not choose a specific religious or ethnic “community” as the starting point for the enquiry. Instead, following a kind of *post-ethnic* approach avoiding the pitfalls of methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2002) and going beyond the ‘ethnic (or religious) lens’ (Glick Schiller et al., 2006), we selected a specific geographic locality – young people in a Swiss Canton – in order to examine which social categorizations with corresponding boundaries are brought up by a variety of respondents. The canton of Neuchâtel has roughly 172,000 inhabitants and a long immigration history. It is for this reason that today Neuchâtel has a highly diversified population: 23% of the residents are foreigners representing 145 nationalities. Immigration has not only altered the ethno-national composition of the population, but also led to religious diversity. Historically, Neuchâtel was Protestant; this was a matter of concern to the old aristocracy of Neuchâtel, local families and Huguenots who had been ennobled by French rulers and Prussian monarchs in the 18th century and lost their power after the Revolution in 1848 (Emery et al., 1991). The immigrants arriving here since WWII from southern Europe (Italy, Portugal and Spain) were mostly Catholics, unqualified workers engaged in the local watch industry, while those recently immigrating since 1990 also included Muslims. In 2009, there were as many Catholics (36.7%) as Protestants (36.6%) and 3.7% of the residents were Muslims. The Muslims living in Neuchâtel come mainly from the Balkans (Kosovo, Bosnia, and Turkey), and a small number come from the Maghreb (Tunisia or Algeria).

The study was based on a mixed-methods approach (Creswell, 2003). First, a telephone survey was conducted with 400 young adults between the ages of 16 and 19 years old. In order to be representative, the sample was drawn from the Resident’s Registration Office. The sample composition can be read in Table 1. The young people we interviewed were mostly born in Switzerland and the non-Swiss nationals are mainly members of the second generation (1.7% are first generation migrants, meaning that they arrived in Switzerland over the course of their life and spent less than 5 years in Swiss schools). Among the Muslims, 32% are naturalized, half of them (52%) are not Swiss and were born abroad pointing to their more recent immigration history.

In a second step, the study applied an ethnographic approach with youngsters of the same age: members of the research team spent one to three days per week during four months in four different classes conducting participant observation, biographic and semi-structured interviews with the young people. The schools represent varying qualification demands and are positioned differently in the labor market’s prestige hierarchy. Switzerland has a dual-track educational system and our work spanned both tracks: we worked in one upper secondary school (students will have an academic baccalaureate which entitles them to later study at the university level); we included one class doing a commercial apprenticeship (which gives them a federal vocational baccalaureate and entitles them to go to what are called “universities of applied sciences”); we worked with apprentices, specifically telematicians and tinplates. They will get a federal vocational and training diploma (VET); and we worked with one class that was enrolled in elementary vocational training, which does not entitle them to a VET diploma but only to a certificate, which has little recognition on the labour market (see Table 1 for the sample). In the lower ranked classes, we find more students of migrant origin (given their social class background and the power of the Swiss school system of reproducing social inequalities) than in the upper ones. Nevertheless, all classes have been heterogeneous in terms of national origin and religion.

While in the observations and daily interactions among the young people, categories like ‘foreigner’, ‘migrants’ and ‘women and men’ appeared very often – and were performatively used in order to challenge each other – religion was not present as a category, nor was it observable. This can be explained by the secular character of the schools, and by the idea that is put forward by the young people that religion should be private (see further down for

more details). Therefore, we conducted in each class a focus group to discuss religious issues with the young people, and used some of the results of the quantitative survey as input. The analysis presented below is based on the data collected from the quantitative survey, on these four focus groups and on 36 qualitative interviews – biographic interviews, but also interviews dealing with ethnic and religious issues – conducted during pauses or after lessons within the school building. The ethnographic research data was transcribed and coded with the help of Atlas.ti. In an iterative process, the most important abstract concepts were developed and regularly discussed among the members of the research team (“peer debriefing”) (Flick, 2006). The quantitative data was analysed with SPSS.

Table 1: Sample

Sample quantitative survey (n=404)						
	ALL		Majority		Minority	
Religion	%	n	%	n	%	n
Protestant	40.1	160				
Catholic	30.8	123				
No religion	18.8	75				
Muslims	6.3	25			100.0	25.0
Other religion	4.0	16				
Total	100.0	399			100.0	25
Nationality	All		Majority		Minority	
Swiss	86.9	351	90.5	343	32.0	8
Italian	8.9	36	9.2	35	4.0	1
French	6.2	25	6.6	25	.	.
Portuguese	5.4	22	5.8	22	.	.
Other EU-25/EFTA	2.5	10	2.6	10	.	.
Kosovo	2.2	9	.	.	36.0	9
Spain	2.0	8	1.8	7	4.0	1
Other former YU, SU, Europe	2.0	8	0.8	3	20.0	5
Latinamerica	1.5	6	1.6	6	.	.
Africa	1.2	5	0.5	2	12.0	3
Macedonia	0.7	3	0.3	1	8.0	2
Other	2.3	10	1.9	7	12.0	3
Total*	122.0	493	121.6	461	128.0	32
Nationality II	All		Majority		Minority	
Swiss by birth	78.0	315	83.1	315	.	.
Naturalized Swiss	8.7	35	7.1	27	32.0	8
Other nationality, born in Switzerland	6.7	27	6.1	23	16.0	4
Other nationality, born abroad	6.7	27	3.7	14	52.0	13
Total	100.0	404	100.0	379	100.0	25
Generation	All		Majority		Minority	
Swiss	77.5	313	82.6	313	.	.
First Generation	1.7	7	0.8	3	16.0	4
Second Generation	20.8	84	16.6	63	84.0	21
Total	100.0	404	100.0	379	100.0	25
<i>* Double nationalities included</i>						
Sample (ethnographic study)						
	Interviews		focusgroups			
Upper secondary school	7	1				
Commercial apprenticeship	16	1				
Apprenticeship: telematicians and tinplates	9	1				
Elementary vocational training	4	1				
Total	36	4				

Out of the quantitative as well the qualitative data emerged the definition of two groups, which are separated through a strong boundary by the young people, so that we can speak of *majority* and *minority* youth (presented in Table 1). The majority group includes Swiss, but also young people of second or third generation Portuguese, Italian, French or Spanish. The 'others' are defined as Muslims. We will show this boundary construction further down in detail, but it is important to introduce this main result here, as we will present some of the data along this line of *majority* and *minority* youth.

4. IDENTIFYING A DOMINANT DISCOURSE: REPUBLICAN OPEN-MINDEDNESS TOWARDS ETHNO CULTURAL DIFFERENCE – PUT TO AN END WHEN IT COMES TO ISLAM

The first question we need to answer is how diversity is perceived in this specific context, and which categories of difference emerge in public debates and policies.

The analysis shows that the canton of Neuchâtel is characterized by a strong political republican commitment to open-mindedness towards cultural differences. What at first glance seems paradoxical – republican and cultural recognition at the same time – is declined in public policy as follows: The first article of the constitution of Neuchâtel (of September 24, 2000) states: “*The Canton of Neuchâtel is a democratic, secular and social republic and guarantees fundamental rights*“. In the «Charte de la citoyenneté», a document summarizing the underlying principles of the republic and canton of Neuchâtel, which is sent to all newcomers in the canton, one can read: “*This means that the Canton of Neuchâtel is a State that guarantees its citizens fundamental freedoms and rights (a liberal State), a State in which people participate in the formation of the common will and the exercise of power (a democratic State), a State that grants its citizens a certain degree of social protection (a social State), a State in which there is no official religion but where religious freedom is the rule (a secular State). (...) Foreign residents in Switzerland are subject to the same legal framework as Swiss citizens. However, if they come from other cultures, they have no legal obligation to adapt to the Swiss lifestyle*». The political, universal and republican attitude is further emphasized by the fact that Neuchâtel gives foreigners, as 5 of the 26 cantons of Switzerland do, the right to vote and to be elected. The objective of ‘cultural recognition’ is mirrored in the denomination of the local service institution responsible for migrant integration; it is called “*service for multicultural cohesion*”. There is also another positive connotation of cultural diversity in the “*Charte de la citoyenneté*” which states “*Only tolerance and open-mindedness can ensure the balance within mixed communities (sic)*”. In other words, in this dominant discourse on the public-policy level, constructions of ethno-cultural difference are embraced by the idea of a universal and republican citizenship.

From the interviews, one can observe that the young adults living in Neuchâtel have fully imbibed this dominant discourse, which we label here as “*republican open-mindedness towards ethno-cultural difference*”. Many of them reproduced it during interviews, discussions and observations because they not only harboured a strong tolerance towards ethno-cultural diversity, which they considered enriching, but also forcefully condemned and opposed racist discourse and action. Reproduced here is a student’s quote, which is quite illustrative: “*I hope that my children will be open, that they will be proud to be Swiss, because it is important to love the country, but that they are open towards the rest and accept difference. I think you will not go very far if you are closed-minded and if you are not opening up towards other cultures. I think other cultures are very enriching.*”

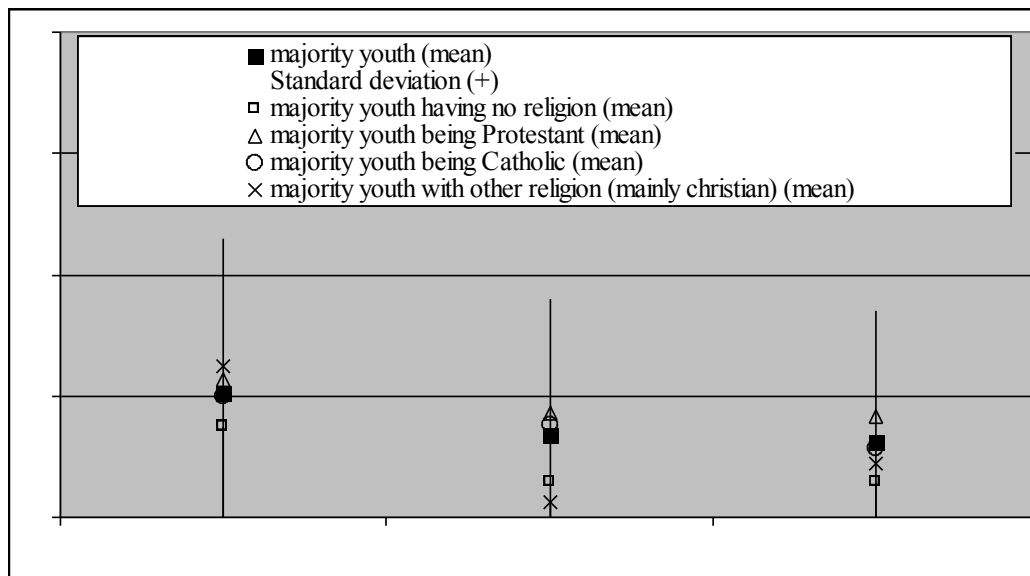
Furthering the analysis, we see that this dominant discourse, which is embodied by the young people is structured by a two-fold connotation: ‘difference’ is defined along ethno-cultural axes by mobilizing an essentialized notion of culture (cultures in plural), assuming that the boundaries of ethnic community, its identity and culture, coincide in an unproblematic way. Yet, such cultural difference is not perceived as something which would separate people *per se*: on the contrary, this difference is bridged by a republican, liberal (French) concept of citizenship (Brubaker, 1992, Touraine, 1997). The open-mindedness towards (essentialized) perceived cultural difference is combined with the idea that all human beings have the same potential and therefore the same rights and duties (as political participation), introducing citizenship as moral value. In other terms, while the category of “national cultural differences” *draws* boundaries between Swiss and what is perceived as culturally different groups, the republican ideas *blur* these boundaries at the same time.

Nonetheless, as soon as it is not ethnic, national or cultural but *religious difference* which is

at stake, this discursive open-mindedness comes to its end, in the dominant discourse but even more pronounced among the young adults. Let's first turn to the public domain: Neuchâtel is a secular republic – as stated above - and one of only two cantons in Switzerland where a strict separation between the state and the church is established. It defines its “laïcité” by the fact that public institutions are separated from the church, that there is no state religion and that the government recognizes religious freedom. Interviews with school teachers and directors of the schools made it clear that in this secular environment, religion is not a category which can gain recognition in public or in schools; on the contrary, religion is delegated to the private sphere and the schools are very proud of being religiously blind towards their students. Thus, it seems as if religion would not be a category of relevance for boundary making as it is just a kind of ‘non-topic’, but the story is in fact more complicated: For the young people, religion is not only something that does not belong to the public sphere, but it is also a category that brings their open-mindedness towards ‘cultural others’ to an end, particularly when Islam is at stake. The qualitative interviews bring to light this importance of religion as a boundary marker. After positive evaluations of ethno-cultural differences have been brought in during the interview by one of our respondents, the interviewer went into detail asking: *“Is it important for you that your girlfriend would be a Swiss or a French?”* The young men answered: *“No, because for me, my girlfriend could be of any nationality, she could be Japanese, Chinese, Congolese or American, it does not matter at all as long as I have a good feeling and I really love her”*. Later on, as religion was the topic under discussion, the interviewer asked the young man if he could imagine that his children would not be Christian. The interviewer questioned thus: *“Let's imagine that your wife would be Muslim and that this would be important for her. Could you imagine that your children would be Muslims?”* The young man replied: *“That they would be Muslims, yes, but that they would practice, certainly not.[...] They could be baptized as Muslim, so that when they communicate their religion, they would say, ‘I am Muslim’.* But I do not think that I could accept when they would practice, because really, the Muslims are quite extreme. That's what I see, what I hear and what I know from people I meet. This religion is very extreme. There is no pork, there is no birthday, and all this is just really too extreme for me”. Out of this quote we see not only that this student is religiously speaking quite illiterate (no birthday for Muslims, etc.) and ignorant – both can be important elements for boundary construction – but also that ideas of cultural tolerance or cultural enrichment fade away when it comes to Islam.

The results of the quantitative survey underline the importance of religion as a marker for boundaries – in spite of its seemingly non-importance in public space. The young people were asked how important it is for them that their spouse would be of the same skin colour, ethnic origin and religion. The response had to be on a scale of 1 (‘unimportant’) to 5 (‘very important’). The following graph shows the mean values of the majority youth (excluding the data of the 25 persons who labelled themselves as Muslims) and the (positive) standard deviations. It makes clear that ‘religion’ is significantly more salient (mean=2.0) than ‘ethnic origin’ (mean=1.7) and ‘skin colour’ (mean=1.6). Having the same religion is the most crucial criterion when it comes to partnership selection which is private in its character and which can be understood as an establishment of boundaries. The means are distinguished further between the various religious affiliations of the majority youth. However, the graph shows no difference in this specific pattern. ‘Being of the same religion’ is the most salient criterion for all young people when it comes to the question of love, even for those without a religious affiliation.

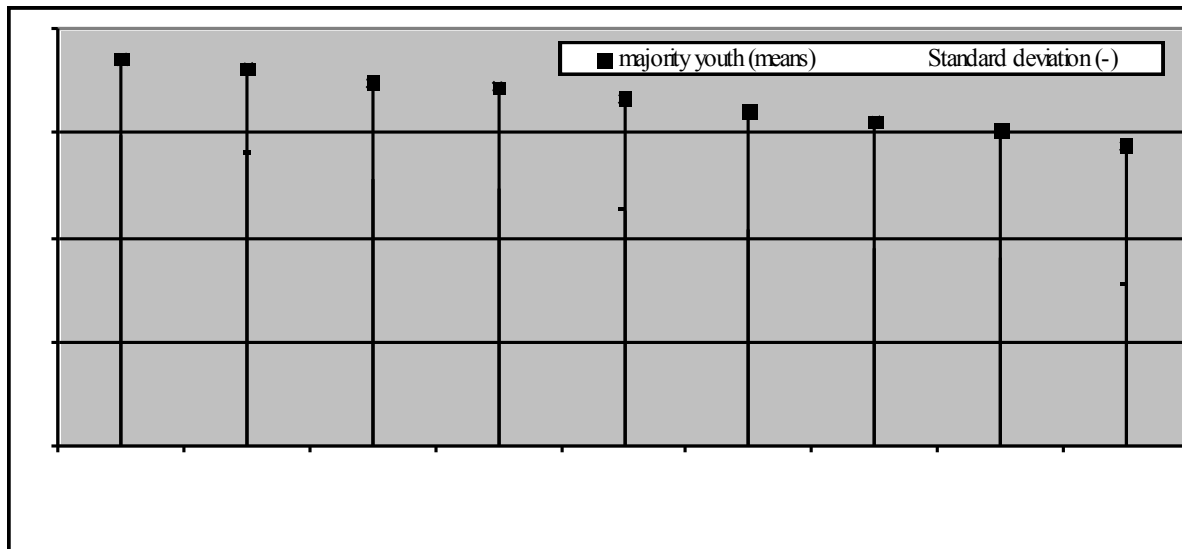
Graph 1: Boundary work through partnership selection: Significance of religion, ethnic origin and skin colour (1 'unimportant' – 5 'very important')



Moreover, the data shows that it is, above all, Islam that young people find problematic and which they cannot relate to the universalistic ideology or to cultural enrichment. We also asked the young people in the survey what they think about their brother or sister getting married to different types of persons (a Swiss, foreigner, Italian, Black, Jew, Tamil, Turk, Kosovar, or a Muslim). The following graph illustrates the nature of response: a clear social hierarchy of Swiss people on the top, followed by Italians, foreigners in general, and blacks. Muslims, in contrast, are the least favoured in that they appear at the bottom of this hierarchy. They are the *out-group par excellence* and excluded – when asked about marriage – from potential familial linkage. It is not surprising that nationalities connected mainly to Islam are also positioned at the bottom (Turks, Kosovars). In the qualitative interviews we had similar results: To have a spouse of Christian origin is seen by the young people as unproblematic, while marriage with a Muslim is perceived *a priori* as a problem, as can be seen from what this female student said: “*I think, I could not date a Muslim, so, I think he must still be of Christian religion*”. Her answer is also striking, as historically in the Neuchâtel context there existed a ‘bright’ boundary between the Protestants and the Catholics. A few generations ago, a marriage between a Catholic and a Protestant was problematic. Furthermore, the established former aristocratic families were all Protestants and Protestantism meant established membership which went along with status, power and prestige of a social system, which even today displays certain traces (own publication 2009). However, the boundary between Catholics and Protestants had already started to blur, according to our analysis, when our interview partners were children. It seems as if the blurring was recently reinforced since the new category of Islam appeared. At first glance, the young people continue to clearly distinguish between Catholics and Protestants in the interviews. This is related to their biographic experiences during childhood and in school. During those days, religious classes were organized separately and the difference between the two confessions appeared, therefore, ‘natural’. Some interview partners whose parents belonged to different confessions – one catholic and one protestant – also reported in the interviews that the two religious faiths were differently expressed at home during their childhood. But meanwhile, this former boundary between Catholics and Protestants has radically blurred, as young people today categorize Catholics and Protestants simply as “Christians”, emphasizing the *similarities* between the two confessions. At the same time, the young adults position this new overarching category of Christianity against Islam, which is now seen as ‘different’. The following quote from the focus group’s interview conducted

with a student in the upper secondary school illustrates this boundary shift: “For example, the difference between a Catholic and a Muslim is huge while the one between Protestants and Catholics is little; here everyone is, after all, more or less in the same basket.”

Graph 2: Boundary work as social distance: Attitudes towards sisters or brothers marriage (1 ‘I do not agree’ – 5 ‘I do agree’)



In sum, ‘ethno or national cultural difference’ is a category which is important for boundary making in the dominant discourse. This kind of ‘cultural difference’ is normatively positively loaded and accompanied by the idea of republic citizenship. Religion is in this secular environment a kind of paradox double-blinded category: On one side, the category seems of no importance for boundary work as the public institutions morally have to be blind towards religion. On the other side, it reveals that for the young people religion is a crucial marker of difference when it comes to private issues – like love and partnership: Marrying somebody of the same religious background, concretely meaning not marrying a Muslim, is a mean for boundary drawing. In this way Islam brings to an end the tolerant attitude towards cultural difference and produces social closure. But, how do the young adults mark the boundary towards Muslims?

5. DICHOTOMIZATION OF “US” AND “THEM”: THREE NORMATIVE IMPERATIVES IN THE MAJORITY DISCOURSE

Turning to the majority youth, one finds from the present analysis of the data, three axes over which the boundary towards the Muslims is established (see Table 2). These axes are closely linked to ideas about religious practices and they are intertwined with normative ideas about religion – that’s why we call them “moral imperatives”. By loading the social categorization with moral connotations, the young people position the two constructed groups in a hierarchy: the *in-group* is considered morally superior, and the “others” morally devalued. Additionally, gender representations are mobilized to categorize the ‘Other’. The argument of the ‘oppression of the Muslim women’ is particularly a topic which crosses the three axes and the boundary between “Us” and “Muslims” is drawn specifically from the viewpoint of gender equality. With regards to Muslims, there exist – in the view of these young people of the majority– hierarchical gender relations where men have more authority than women and where men dominate women, while they identify themselves with equal gender relations. The non-equality of gender among the Muslims is opposed to the ideal of

gender equality in Switzerland. The boundary between the *in-group* and the *out-group* is thus produced intersectionally (Anthias, 2002, Crenshaw, 1994) and simultaneously through the two categories of difference in religion and gender. This way, women become the signifier, as will be seen, for group status and group boundaries.

Graph 2: Moral imperatives legitimating religious boundaries

„US“	Axes of dichotomization: <i>Normative imperatives using gender as “cultural stuff”</i>	„THEM“
Religion should be voluntary and a question of personal choice. Religious convictions are individualized (religion „à la carte“, bricolage).	<i>autonomy and freedom with regard to religious issues</i>	Religion is a constraint and limitation of personal freedom (especially for women). Religion dictates fixed and strict rules.
Religion should be private, invisible. One does not speak about it and/or show it. Religion is detached from social institutions.	<i>secularization/ “laïcité”</i>	Religion is public and demonstratively celebrated (headscarf, minarets) and is related to institutions.
Religion should be practiced very moderately	<i>Moderate practice</i>	Religion is extreme and causes conflicts and other problems
<i>Women as signifier for group status and group boundaries</i>		

The first *moral imperative* is for *autonomy* and *freedom* with regard to religious issues. In these young people’s view, religious convictions must be voluntary, optional and subject to personal choice. Christianity, according to the interviewees, guarantees these choices; Islam, on the other hand, is linked to constraints and limitations of personal freedom. Another aspect that goes along with this moral imperative is the idea of individualization of religious practice. Social scientists observe that, in Western societies, religion was submitted to a fundamental transformation insofar as it has become more and more individualized. Keywords are religious “bricolage”, religion “à la carte”, or “do-it-yourself” religious belief (Stolz and Baumann, 2007, Willaime, 1995). Such forms of religiosity are, as the interviews demonstrate, quite typical of these young people of both the minority and the majority. What is surprising, however, is that the young people of the majority not only live this kind of individualized religion, but also develop a moral idea that only such religious behavior is, normatively speaking, “good”. They thus categorize the Muslims on the other side of the boundary – the “wrong” side – presuming that strict rules and constraints are against this moral imperative and responsible particularly for women’s submission. The personal sacrifices associated with Islam are connected most notably to the question of the headscarf, or in general to the inferior position of women. In other words, gender is brought in as the central argument when the young adults explain why Islam does not allow personal autonomy and freedom. Following is an example of a student’s reaction to this issue: “For example, consider those women who have to wear a headscarf. I can tell that they do so only to oblige somebody. In Christianity, nobody is obliged to do something you do not want.”

Something similar occurs with regard to the second moral imperative which we label here as *secularization*. Again, one is confronted with a phenomenon that has been identified as a crucial marker of religious transformations in the context of modern societies (Berger et al., 1999). Secularization, in the sense of a decline in social and institutional importance of religion (Campiche, 2004, Davie, 1994), is positively valued by the young adults who do not deny that religion might be important in personal spheres. In the interviews, young people say that religion should be lived in private, invisibly, and that one should not speak about it or show it. This idea of secularization is adopted by the young adults as an indicator of positive behavior with the status of a moral imperative (Casanova, 2004). Religion should – in this line of argument – be lived outside the public space and not be linked to public institutions; all other ways of living one's religion are morally depreciated. Minarets, for instance, which are used by the young people as markers for public display of deference, and are depreciated. The headscarf in particular, which is part of many discourses by the youths of the majority, is interpreted as a visible and public sign of religion: women showing their religion by wearing a headscarf are considered by the young people interviewed as not behaving according to this imperative of secularization, and, therefore, they classify such women as belonging to the other side of the boundary. One quote illustrates this point quite well:

"I think that the Catholics and the Protestants [practice] a religion that is not very demonstrative; for instance, we do not have a headscarf, or other things, and this is different from other religions". The secular ideology we find in Neuchâtel in public and political discourse doubtlessly influences this normative imperative.

The third normative imperative is related to the dichotomization between what the young adults call *'moderate' as opposed to 'extreme' practices*. The latter is in the first place attributed to Islam, but also in general to all persons who live their religiosity 'extremely'. One apprentice, when asked whether he could live with somebody who is religious, replied thus: *"Yes, but not in excess, this means when it comes to ban certain things. If it does not disturb, then it is ok"*.

To the same question, another student responded thus: *"They are these extremists. And yes, in certain populations, they are more extremists than in Christianity. They are bad, this is my opinion"*.

It is obvious that the boundary work of the young people is at this point anchored in the discourse that relates Islam to fundamentalism, and extreme religious practice is criticized. Further, Islam is related to constraint and loss of autonomy, besides religious wars and religiously motivated conflicts. And again, this extremism is articulated by projecting the position of Muslim women, as illustrated by the following quote of a student who spoke about the religion of future children:

"Yes, I think that religion could play a role. There are some things, I do not want. I would like that my children would be a bit catholic, like me, or another similar religion, for instance, no Muslims. If one day, I would have Muslim children, it would disturb me that they would be caged. I am not at all Muslim, and then, they would have this pride of wearing the headscarf. I see this as a negative aspect for the women, because she is completely oppressed".

The social categorizations at work in this three-pronged boundary work lead to a bright boundary between the established and the outsider Muslims, reinforcing similarities within the *in-group* that produces cohesion. When it comes to gender, this communalization is performed by the young people in the interviews by mobilizing the idea that their "own" women can live religion the way they wish through choice and freedom, can do this privately, and can do it enjoying equal position with men. These categorizations not only encourage communalities inside, but also raise barriers against outside participation and establish a clear hierarchization, as the *in-group* is considered superior: being morally superior regarding religion means establishing gender equality, not subordinating women. Thus, the established in-group closes ranks against the Muslims. One might speak here of social

closure which is conducted on behalf of moral ideas about women's status and behavior. What is striking with regard to these moral imperatives – but what corresponds at the same time to the subjective character of marking boundaries – is that they do not in any case reflect the “truth”; they are merely social categorizations that do not have to be reflected in the behavior of the members of the *in-group* or of the *out-group*. Firstly, gender equality in Switzerland is far from being a fact, and actual data concerning the differences of salaries or activity rates between men or women give a clear message. Secondly, the ideas which are put forward by the majority youth do not correspond to the religious behaviour of the Muslims living in Neuchâtel, at least our quantitative data reveal other patterns. Muslims have the same diversified attitude towards religion as all other young people and live a highly individualized form of religiosity (own publication 2009). Among the surveyed Muslims, 52% never pray (among Catholics this is 45%, and among Protestants 53%), while 40% pray at least once a week (11% among Catholics and Protestants). 16% of the Muslims mark their religious belonging by wearing a religious symbol (this is the case for 9% of the Protestants and 21% of the Catholics), however, often it is not a ‘demonstrative’ headscarf but another, quite modest religious symbol (like the hand of Fatma, a page of the Coran, etc.). On the other hand, data shows that religion plays a more important role for the Muslims in different domains of their life than for other youngsters in Neuchâtel (i.e. in discussions with friends, with regard to eating habits, or to the education of their future children). However, the Muslims in Neuchâtel are not an exception: other young people of the second generation, particularly Catholics, also show a greater interest for religious issues than the young people of Neuchâtel origin.

6. COUNTERSTRATEGIES: DO OUTSIDERS ACCEPT THE MORAL IMPERATIVES?

How does the minority – the young people who classify themselves as Muslims – deal with these normative ascriptions and social closure? Do they call into question this “bright” boundary? Or, do they rather conform to it? Before addressing these questions, some caveats have to be added: this chapter basically draws upon five of the 36 interviewed people, all male, who consider themselves Muslims. Nevertheless, the data we have is sufficiently rich to provide some insight into their boundary strategies.

The most salient outcome can be summed up as follows: the minority youth do not tackle the established boundary, nor do they call into question its moral imperatives or the belief in the “subordination of Muslim women”. Rather, they develop other strategies, which we term “outsider strategies”. Their reactions can be interpreted as attempts to deal with normative devaluation and stigmatization to achieve some form of recognition (Taylor, 1992). Furthermore, they try to get rid of the social position they are allocated in this stratified boundary system. *Grosso modo*, one can identify two sets of responses: The first set of strategies could be summed up under the heading of *individual boundary-crossing* or *assimilation* (Zolberg and Woon, 1999: 9). The young students wish to change their own position in the boundary system by stressing their similarities with the established *in-group* while simultaneously demarcating themselves from the “Others”, namely their own group. Through this strategy, they attempt to be accepted by the majority. It is an attempt to cross the boundary without calling into question the boundary system as such. Different examples can serve to illustrate these intentions. One student underscores, for instance, his Swiss surname, and another makes reference to his phenotype, which he considers the same as that of the *in-group*. A student from the upper secondary school underlines the fact that he never speaks about his religion in school, given the secular character of the school. Sometimes the youngsters refer directly to normative imperatives in their endeavours to cross the line. One pupil distanced himself from the subordination of women in Islam by bringing in “his culture of origin” which, although Muslim, would not require women to wear a headscarf. A similar strategy can be seen in the following quote. Here, an interview partner

emphasizes the fact that he has a lot in common with Switzerland because his own country changed by adopting the norms of gender equality:

“Because the problem is that [my country] is now developed; it is getting modern; the Bosnians are getting modern. Earlier it was like this: the woman stayed home, worked in the kitchen and brought up the children. And, it was the men who brought in the salaries. I mean, it is true that sometimes it was still like this, especially my uncles. But now, we are a new generation, I, my cousins, we all want our women to work so that they also earn money. [...] I do not know if it is also because of Switzerland that we changed in this direction. Maybe this is the case, because in Bosnia, the question might be put differently. But in Switzerland, we made efforts to adapt... to everything, actually. So we got modern”.

He views himself and his gender representations as having been transformed from one pole – “tradition” – to the other – “modernity”, the former being negatively connoted and the latter positively. Obviously, such ideas – or this kind of boundary work - are embedded not only in the Swiss context but also in a global context, and must be read as closely related to global power structures (King, 2002). What should be noted for the purpose here is that these young people do not call into question the moral devaluation of either Islam and the related gender inequality or the three imperatives.

The second set of strategies does not aim at boundary crossing. Rather, the young people remain within their own *in-group* (the *out-group* in the eyes of the established group). Yet, they try to invert the characteristics that have been negatively connoted in the discourse of the majority, in an instantiation of what Wimmer (2008: 1037) calls *normative inversion*. The young Muslims re-evaluate their cultural origins positively and present them as a source of cultural enrichment. In doing so, they mobilize the republican discourse of ethno-cultural tolerance: they improve their own situation by highlighting the positive values of ethno-cultural difference that they embody and thereby attempt to undermine the boundary system’s implicit hierarchy. Here is an example from an interview with a student in the upper secondary school:

“Let’s say, first, it is another country, a country I like very much. In any case, I am not ashamed of saying that I am Bosnian. For me this is actually something to be proud of, something which makes me different from the others. [...] I think it is enrichment in cultural terms. We have other values and norms than the ones that have been inculcated upon us in Switzerland. This allows us to have other horizons, rather than being just imprisoned with friends from here. This allows us to have other opinions. This is really a diversification ».

It is important to note that these strategies were developed from a position of exclusion and normative devaluation of their religious belonging. This weak position does not allow challenging the social categorizations and moral imperatives of the majority discourse. Interestingly enough, the Muslim youth does not defend Islam as such, nor do they develop strategies that are directly related to Islam – although in the *majority* discourse the boundary is drawn through the category of religion. They neither defend “their women” nor call into question that gender equality is a fact in Switzerland. The young people are probably aware that they would have no chance to be heard or to improve their social position if they react in this register. For them, the boundary is too “bright” to blur it. In addition, revaluation of religion in the secular context of Neuchâtel is almost impossible: Under the condition of “*laïcité*”, it is difficult for the category of religion to find its place in public. Yet, other categories of difference – particularly ethno-cultural differences - are recognized and valued in this particular context, which also explains why the youth of the minority try to re-introduce them in their strategies as a replacement to the religious ones.

7. A DOUBLE PARADOX OF GENDER INEQUALITY

The results of this research demonstrate that ideas about morally approved (imagined) behavior regarding religious practices are important in boundary work. Those are underpinned by homogenized ideas about women’s position vis-à-vis men, which creates

new forms of social closure and domination. In other words, the ongoing transnationalization of social realities changed the rule of the game whereby new symbolic and social boundaries are created and maintained, and inequalities and domination are produced. The introduction of the category “Islam” results in a new configuration within the boundary system, and one can witness, in the words of Elias and Scotson (1965), a new category of outsiders. The public and media discourses about “Islam” develop an incredibly strong force as they give the young people the arguments for marking their boundaries – which is striking given the small number of Muslims living in Neuchâtel.

The minority does not have the means either to tackle this established “bright” boundary or to call into question the established moral ideas about “what is a good religion” and about women’s status within the two groups. Instead, they develop strategies that allow an individual to reposition themselves within the framework of this stratified boundary system.

However, (at least) two questions remain unanswered: Firstly, it is evident that in this case of boundary work, the category of religion is linked with ethnicity. The case study reveals that religion might have partially displaced ethnicity, or at least overlapped it, because religious and ethnic boundary work have one important communality in that they both mobilize a reified and essentialist idea of culture. Theoretically and empirically, the question of the relation between ethnicity and religion within boundary work could only marginally attract the attention of scholars (for an exception see Mitchell, 2008, Ruane and Todd, 2010) and should be further investigated.

Secondly, the young people interviewed in this study referred not only to moral ideas about a good religion, but also to gender representation for marking the boundary and establishing a specific boundary system. More specifically, the norms that are expected to regulate women’s behavior become one of the means for determining and defining group status and boundaries. But why does gender figure so prominently in this boundary work? This example is obviously not the only one where such processes occur; literature is replete with evidence that gender and ethno-religious boundary work are intimately connected. Scholars reporting from different parts of the world confirm that reified cultural differences have been linked to reified perceptions of gender relations and that these ideas are mobilized to legitimate hierarchical boundaries between ethno-national or religious groups (Brunner et al., 2009, Korteweg and Yudakul, 2009, Nader, 1989). So, how should one explain that it is women - and much less men, not the intellectual elite, not the workers, etc. – who are politically and strategically instrumentalized when it comes to demonstrating the “superiority” of the in-group? One tentative response to this question comes to mind: Research has shown that policing of women is one of the main means of asserting moral superiority, as women become the signifier for the whole group (own publication 2010); (Espiritu, 2001). This process is closely intertwined with specific representations of “male” and “female” that are the outcome of the construction of a dichotomous and “bright” boundary between women and men. Women are seen as being responsible for the continuation of the “cultural line” of a group, and for maintaining group boundaries by marking cultural difference. In this discourse, women are implicitly reduced to their “natural” function as birth-givers and educators of children, and they are held responsible for the fact that these children will be socialized into the culture of the group, thereby maintaining group boundaries. Scholars have demonstrated for decades that this kind of gender representation is in its essence sexist and mirrors the established gendered system which developed historically in Western societies (Moore, 1988, Scott, 1986). Thus, one could turn the argument of the majority discourse on its head: paradoxically, majority discourse mobilizes a sexist system of gender representation to blame the “Others” for gender inequality. One might call this phenomenon the “*double paradox of gender inequality*”: established forms of gender representation and hierarchy are mobilized by the majority – “women as guardians of group boundaries” – to construct the “subordinated Muslim women”.

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