

Unframing Muslims?

Students report

Deconstructing Frames through Reflexivity.

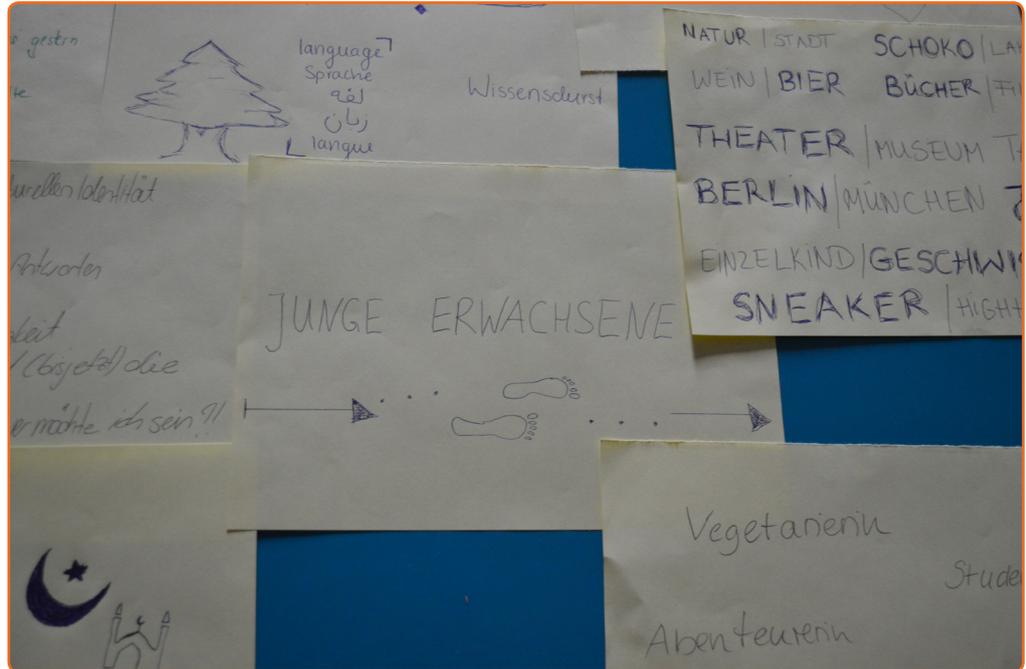
Fiona Katherine Smith

Muslims and Muslimas currently find themselves in the centre of a political debate as to whether Islam is part of Europe. In Germany, the so-called 'Muslim Question' became more pronounced in 2016 after the attacks in several cities on women by men identified in the media as 'Muslim', referring to their background as 'German-Iranian' or 'Tunisian refugee'. These mediated categories invoked an aspect of 'integration' and added further to the constructed frames of reference surrounding Muslims and Muslimas living in Europe. Is it possible to deconstruct these frames altogether and, in doing so, learn more about Muslim identities?

These questions on the construction of identity in a strongly politicised space are addressed in the Interdisciplinary Project Tutorial 'Unframing Muslims? Reflexive Ethnographies of Youth Identities in Berlin', supported by the Arbeitsgruppe Projektstudien. The Tutorial aims to recognise, constructively break apart, and translate such frames into a positive cultural dialogue. To do so, the group members have been participating in a preparation phase broken into three blocks: Framing, Identity, and Method. Each group member has been tasked with thinking critically about their own identity, as well as the process in which data will be collected.

As part of the preparation phase, we looked at the construction of cultural identity according to Stuart Hall. Hall wrote that there are two ways in which cultural identities are created: through group similarities and shared (historical) experiences, and through differences between groups. As an experiment, each group member was asked to use a small piece of paper to define his or her identity.

The results varied per chosen



Who are you? Participants try to fit their identities on a single piece of paper.

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medium, with some choosing to draw, and others to write. Through this exercise, we got onto a discussion about the way in which identity is categorized and the aspect of intersectionality.

Through group consensus we have decided to make short videos in which we offer people from all backgrounds a space to portray their self-defined identity. These will range from interviews to recordings of performances by musicians and other artists active in Berlin. The videos will then be uploaded to an online forum which will serve not only as an archive for the whole project, but also as an opportunity for the participating artists to gain publicity by linking the video to their own website or social media page. Commented key quotes and summaries of in-class discussions will also be posted in the forum in order to give the project as much transparency as possible. Through reflexive ethnography, we will hopefully be able to avoid the typical ethical problems which occur when writing about people. The idea is to criticise every aspect of the process with regard to positionality, bias, and racism, and to ask ourselves the same question we will ask the research participants: who are you?

'Unframing Muslims?' will also run in WS 18/19, continuing with its second phase of research. For further information and to register please contact Fiona.katherine.smith@hu-berlin.de

Zur Autorin:

Fiona Katherine Smith ist studentische Hilfskraft für den Querschnittsbereich Islam am IAAW und studiert Regionalstudien Asien/Afrika im Bachelor. Im Rahmen der Arbeitsgruppe Projektstudien der HU leitet sie auch im SS 18 und WS 18/19 das Projektstudium 'Unframing Muslims?'.



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