

Religion and Diasporic Dwelling: Algerian Muslim Women in Ireland

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Abstract

This article will look at the different conceptions of 'home' as narrated by Algerian Muslim women living in Ireland. It explores the dynamic processes of their self-identification(s) and their different forms of (re)creation of diasporic home(s) influenced by their religious, cultural, social and economic environment. I will use Thomas A. Tweed's notion of 'crossing and dwelling' to analyse these essentialized identity constructions that become manifest in Tweed's four 'chronotopes': the gendered body, the domestic home, the imagined homeland and the transnational and global cosmos. The conscious or unconscious negotiations and implications for belonging to a specific identity or community that can be observed among Algerian women in Ireland will be examined, together with the different pre- and post-migratory social, political and religious factors that influence such negotiations. This ethnographic study is the first of its kind and fills a gap in the study of Muslim migrants in Europe.

Keywords

Muslims, migrants, women, identity, Salafism, Europe

Author affiliation

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Introduction¹

This article will look at the different conceptions of ‘home’ as narrated by Algerian Muslim women living in Ireland. It will explore the dynamic processes of their self-identification(s) and their different forms of (re)creation of diasporic home(s) influenced by their religious, cultural, social and economic environment. Home is here not only understood as a geographical and national term but also as a symbol of identity and belonging to a specific religious, ideological, ethnic and/or political community after migration.² The collected interview data as well as my observations of the Algerian women’s daily life activities illustrate their use of religion to construct a clearly defined essentialized understanding of identity in the diaspora. I will use Thomas A. Tweed’s notion of ‘crossing and dwelling’ to analyse these essentialized identity constructions that become manifest in Tweed’s four ‘chronotopes’³: the gendered body, the domestic home, the imagined homeland and the transnational and global cosmos.⁴ The conscious or unconscious negotiations and implications for belonging to a specific identity or community that can be observed among

¹ This article is part of an ethnographic study on Muslim migrant women in Ireland. It is part of the research project ‘History of Islam in Ireland’ funded by the Irish Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS) and the Department of An Taoiseach at the Study of Religions Department at University College Cork in Ireland. I would like to thank James Kapalo for providing feedback on several drafts of this article.

² Here belonging is also understood as an emotional attachment and feeling of home. On the topic of belonging see N. Yuval-Davis, ‘Belonging and the Politics of Belonging’ in *Patterns of Prejudice*, 40:3 (2006), 197-214.

³ Tweed borrowed the term chronotope from the literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. The term describes the way literature represent time and space. Tweed uses the term to describe the translocative and transtemporal aspect of religion illustrated mainly through his four mentioned categories. See T. A. Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling. A Theory of Religion*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press 2006, 64 and 158.

⁴ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 97-122.

Algerian women in Ireland will be examined, together with the different pre- and post-migratory social, political and religious factors that influence such negotiations.

This ethnographic study is the first of its kind and fills a gap in the study of Muslim migrants in Europe.⁵ In this article, I will concentrate on Algerian women's understanding of diasporic home(s)⁶ – drawing some comparisons with Egyptian migrant women in Ireland – because throughout our conversations 'home' in the sense of a national, religious, political, social and gendered home has been emphasized by these women. The women's distinctive historical, political, religious and in particular colonial background, which they emphasized throughout our conversations and meetings, influences the women's understanding of their national, religious and gendered identity in Ireland. Therefore, in analysing their narratives it is important to look at the lives of these women not only after their migration but also before they migrated to Ireland. The socio-cultural and political changes in their country of origin are also important when analysing their current understanding of their identities and their conceptualizations of 'home' in Ireland.

⁵ This article is based on participant observations and 18 in-depth interviews conducted in Arabic with Algerian women in Cork and Dublin between September 2009 and September 2010. I obtained contact with the women by joining them in their weekly Friday prayer times and afternoon activities as well as their weekend religious classes. Through these visits personal relations have been established in which trust has been achieved to the extent that I got invited to their houses and their private gatherings. To avoid any ethical matters, the anonymity of my interviewees has been protected by neither mentioning names nor personal information in this article. In all of our meetings the purpose of my presence and of the conducted interviews was known to the women. The citations below are my own translations. In some cases, where it is important to show the particular expression of thought, I have added to the English version the Arabic transliteration.

⁶ This article is part of a larger research project on Islam in Ireland in which I studied other Muslim women groups such as Irish converts to Islam, Iraqi Shiis as well as Sudanese women in Ireland. The scope of this article does not allow me to discuss all *Salafi* and Muslim Brotherhood- oriented groups in Ireland. However, parallels can be observed between the analysis of the *Salafi*-oriented Algerian women in this article and my analysis of *Salafi*-oriented Irish Converts to Islam. On Irish converts to Islam, see Y. Shanneik, 'Conversion and Religious *Habitus*: The Experiences of Irish Women Converts to Islam in the Pre-Celtic Tiger Era' in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 31:4 (2011), 503-517. On the demographic profile of Muslims in Ireland, see O. Scharbrodt, 'Islam in Ireland: Organising a Migrant Religion' in O. Cosgrove, L. Cox, C. Kuhling and P. Mulholland (eds.), *Ireland's New Religious Movements*, Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing 2011, 318-336.

Crossing and Dwelling

This article will rely on Thomas Tweed's understanding of the relation between religions and movement. Tweed argues that religions are not static and monolithic but change over time (for example, from one generation to the other), place (for example through displacement) and are influenced by different cultural practices (such as rituals and habits) and organic processes (such as gender and emotions). These cultural practices and organic processes are interconnected with socio-economic, historical, political and educational factors which 'allow the religious to map, construct, and inhabit ever-widening spaces: the body, the home, the homeland, and the cosmos.'⁷ Religions orientate and help believers to position themselves in various situations and in different times. He argues that religions give believers a sense of belonging and orientation in different spaces within their bodies, their immediate environment as well as in transnational and cosmic spaces. Tweed uses his theoretical framework to analyse the role religion plays in the lives of Catholic Cuban exiles and migrants in Miami as manifested in his four 'chronotopes'. Tweed highlights that 'crossing' and 'dwelling' are characteristic of people in the diaspora and are very much embedded in religious beliefs and practices. In the following, I will illustrate Tweed's understanding of his four chronotopes followed by an explanation why his theoretical framework is useful for my own analysis of Algerian women in Ireland.

Religions alter, form, define and position bodies in spatial and temporal orientations.⁸ However, religions also set domestic spaces expressed in the home. Tweed understands the home as a dwelling space whose 'imagined boundaries ... contract and expand across cultures and in different semantic contexts.'⁹ He defines home in the sense of the German term *heimat*¹⁰ referring to any space in varying scales, small or large that is intimate and that 'provides bodily needs – shelter, sleep, sex, healing, and food – and usually, though not always, is inhabited by some members of the family.'¹¹ The homeland is described by Tweed as the natal or the motherland.¹² It is a geographical understanding of the homeland referring to a territory that is inhabited by people sharing common histories, practices, habits, languages and religions. The last dimension mentioned by

⁷ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 84.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 98-103.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹² *Ibid.*, 110.

Tweed is the cosmos, which goes beyond the geographical homeland's borders. It is an imagined and constructed understanding of the entire universe: '[R]eligions not only map the contours of the terrestrial, subterranean, and celestial realms; they also orient devotees temporally and spatially by creating cosmogonies and teleographies that represent the origin and destiny of the universe.'¹³ The cosmos also represents a global, transnational identity that is defined and marked by and through religions.

These four chronotopes work very well in analysing Tweed's Cuban research group since it highlights the 'deceptive' essentialized and static understanding of a clearly definable Cuban Catholic identity in the diaspora. Reviewers of Tweed's book confirmed his success in analysing the Cuban immigrants and their religious identity construction manifested in his four chronotopes. Tweed has nevertheless been criticized for going beyond his ethnographic research – moving from the local to the global – claiming to have achieved a new broader theoretical framework that would provide a new theory of religion.¹⁴ However, Tweed's definition of religions as 'confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries'¹⁵ demonstrates how his theory can be applied to other transnational religious groups. As Kim Knott states: 'This definition has substantive and functional elements that enable it to be tested in relation to different religions in various contexts.'¹⁶ The narratives of Algerian women in Ireland and my observations of their daily lives highlight themes of movement, location, relation and position – themes that Tweed engages with in his theory of religion.¹⁷ Tweed's theoretical framework serves my analysis well since, as with the Cuban diasporic group in Florida, the diasporic identity of Algerian Muslim women in Ireland is formed by their religious understanding expressed in body, home, homeland and the cosmos.

¹³ Ibid., 116.

¹⁴ A. W. Hughes, 'Boundary Maintenance: Religions as Organic-Cultural Flows. On Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling* (2006)' in M. Stausberg (ed.), *Contemporary Theories of Religion. A Critical Companion*, London & New York: Routledge 2009, 209-223 and A. W. Hughes, 'Crossing, Dwelling, and A Wandering Jew' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77:2 (2009), 406-412.

¹⁵ Ibid., 54.

¹⁶ K. Knott, 'Spatial Theory and Spatial Methodology, Their Relationship and Application: A Transatlantic Engagement' in *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77:2 (2009), 414.

¹⁷ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 5. See also Knott, 'Spatial Theory', 420.

The central thesis of this article, based on the collected interview data as well as my observations, is that Algerian women in Ireland use religion to construct a clearly defined essentialized understanding of identity in order to feel secured and protected in a new diasporic environment. These essentialized identity constructions become manifest in Tweed's four chronotopes: the gendered body, the domestic home, the imagined homeland and the transnational and global cosmos. However, as Tweed suggests with his notion of dwelling, the four chronotopes are in constant movement and therefore hybrid and constructed.

The Algerian women are able to highlight differences through these four chronotopes. These differences both separate and distinguish the different religious, ethnic or cultural groups within a society but lead at the same time to 'various forms of interaction or communication.'¹⁸ The four chronotopes include specific symbolic 'border guards'¹⁹ that characterize people as belonging or not belonging to a particular collective homogenous group that speaks with a 'unified cultural voice'.²⁰ They classify the people who are within or outside the borders. They define the *us* and *them* and set social distances.²¹

Tweed argues that '[o]ne of the imperfections the religious confront is that they are always in danger of being disoriented.'²² Algerian Muslim women migrants and refugees whom I interviewed in Ireland try to overcome this danger of being disoriented by constructing an essentialized and univocal understanding of their religious and political identity. Through this essentialized identity they construct visible as well as invisible borders within Irish society, and also within the Muslim communities, defining who is 'saved' and who is not. In the following, I will introduce two major groups among the Algerian women in Ireland who label themselves consciously as belonging to a specific clearly self-defined group of Muslims – either to a *Salafi* or to a Muslim Brotherhood understanding of Islam.²³ I will use

¹⁸ A. Rapoport, 'Identity and Environment. A Cross-Cultural Perspective' in L. S. Duncan (ed.), *Housing and Identity: Cross-cultural Perspectives*, London: Croom Helm 1981, 12.

¹⁹ See J. A. Armstrong, *Nations Before Nationalism*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press 1982. Mentioned in N. Yuval-Davis and M. Stoetzler, 'Imagined Boundaries and Borders: A Gendered Gaze' in *European Journal of Women's Studies* 9:3 (2002), 329-344.

²⁰ See Yuval-Davis, 'Gender and Nation', 627.

²¹ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 111.

²² *Ibid.*, 74.

²³ I conducted in-depth interviews with ten Algerian women who explicitly stated their *Salafi*-oriented understanding of Islam and with eight Algerian women who are either members or sympathizers of the Muslim Brotherhood. It must be highlighted that this

Tweed's understanding of the role religions play in spatial movement and home building among the two sample groups of Algerian Muslim women, and illustrate the two groups' essentialized understanding of their ideologies that are expressed through Tweed's four chronotopes and their interrelation. I will begin with the cosmos and the homeland in order to place the research group within a framework from which to understand their religious, political and socio-economic background. After this discussion I will go on to gender specific spaces introducing the different understandings of home and body among the women.

The Salafi Dwelling: Constructed Cosmos and Imagined Homeland

One of the main characteristics of the first group of Algerian women I introduce in this section is that of 'boundary-building': defining oneself in a particular space stating who does and who does not belong to that space. It is a universal and global space that goes beyond territorial borders and determines the afterlife.

The Algerian women I interviewed essentialize religion by polarizing the cosmos into either believers (Muslims) or infidels (*kuffar*) and stating exactly what they mean by believers. A true Muslim is a 'Muslim who believes in Allah and His Prophet Muhammad and follows only the Quran and the *Sunna*.' To my question what interpretations of the Quran and the *Sunna* should a Muslim follow they answered: 'Either Shaykh bin Baz or Shaykh al-'Uthaymeen.'²⁴ This group of Algerian women define themselves explicitly as *Salafi* Muslims and believe that only Muslims following a *Salafi* interpretation of the Quran are true Muslims.²⁵ Any other interpretations or cultural influences are *bid'a* (innovations), constitute a heresy in Islam and are therefore forbidden. This group of Algerian women construct a clearly defined religious and political identity in order to create a space for themselves in their new diasporic environment in which they feel secured

division is not my own but rather an identification voiced explicitly by the Algerian women I interviewed, who see themselves belonging to either of these contemporary streams of Islam.

²⁴ Two important *Salafi* scholars from Saudi Arabia. See B. Lia, 'Destructive Doctrinarians. Abu Mus'ab al-Suri's Critique of the Salafis in the Jihadi Current' in R. Meijer (ed.), *Global Salafism. Islam's New Religious Movements*, London: Hurst and Company 2009.

²⁵ See the study of Roald on Muslim migrants in Europe, in A. S. Roald, *Women in Islam. The Western Experience*, Routledge: London and New York 2001, 36-37 and 50-54.

and protected.²⁶ This protection is expressed through their belonging to a global imagined Islamic community, *al-ummah al-islamiyya*.

Religious, National and Historical Narratives

The Algerian women's understanding of Western societies in general and their relation to the Irish majority society in particular, is very much linked to the long colonial experience of their home country Algeria. Although Algeria was colonized by the French, these Algerian Muslim women regard Ireland as part of the same general European imperialism. Irish society, being largely Christian, is considered to pose a threat to Algerian Muslim identity in the same way that French colonialism did in the past. The Algerian reactionary identity construction²⁷ in the face of French colonialism, seen as oppressive of Algerian national, ethnic, religious and linguistic identity, was manifest in the Islamic Salvation Front (*Front Islamique du Salut*, FIS) established in the late 1980s. The FIS-party attracted low-class members of society who were disaffected by the government's political and ideological orientations. The party fought for the recognition of Islam as the official religion and 'Arabness' and 'Berberness' as essential aspects of Algerian identity. After several electoral successes of the party in the early 1990s, the situation escalated between FIS-members and sympathizers and the government, which led to a civil war in the early and mid 1990s.²⁸ In 1997 a ceasefire was declared and the FIS-party was dissolved. FIS-activists were jailed or took refuge in European countries such as Ireland.²⁹ Although not explicitly mentioned by the

²⁶ The face cover is one of the main signifiers by which a space can be constructed. It creates a literal and symbolic boundary between the Algerian *Salafi* women and the other Muslim groups. Several *Salafi* women in the mosque said that they do not take their face cover completely off but only fold it to the back in order to show the other Muslim women in the mosque who do not cover their faces that they are different: '[In] that way they can see that I am a better Muslim since I cover my face as Allah has commanded us to do.'

²⁷ On reactionary identity constructions among European Muslims see O. Roy, *Globalised Islam: The Search for a New Ummah*, London: C. Hurst 2002, 117-147.

²⁸ For a historical overview of Algeria, see M. Evans and J. Phillips, *Algeria: Anger of the Dispossessed*, New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2007.

²⁹ It is not possible to state the exact number of FIS-activists who sought asylum in Ireland. However, a total of 1,907 Algerians applied for asylum in the years 1992-2010. For detailed information on figures of asylum seekers and migrants, see O. Scharbrodt, 'Muslim Migration to Ireland: past perspectives and future prospects', *Éire-Ireland: Journal of Irish Studies – Special Edition New Perspectives on Irish Migration* 47 (2012, forthcoming).

Algerian Muslim women I interviewed in Dublin, their ideological beliefs, the terminology used in reference to non-Muslims, Irish society and European societies in general, as well as the confirmation of some other anti-FIS Algerian women living in Ireland, verify the women's affiliation to the FIS-party either as former activists or sympathizers or as wives of former active members.

This group of women engage in a process of self-ghettoization which is facilitated by the women's ideological belief in the classical division of the world in *dar al-Islam* (the land of Islam) and *dar al-harb* (the land of war or disbelief). The women maintain agency and autonomy by intentionally deciding to isolate themselves from the Irish society. The way they instil fear onto their children of entering friendships or even socializing with non-Muslim children is one illustrative example. My own observations of the women's attempt to isolate themselves from the Irish society is supported by the women's descriptions of their effort to maintain this segregation in order to preserve their *Salafi* identity – a reason they highlighted themselves. Different from other Algerian and Muslim groups in Ireland, this group insists on 'othering' itself, highlighting its religious, cultural and ethnic differences.³⁰ The loss of a culture, country and Arab Islamic history through French colonialism and Western imperialism is compensated by a global *Salafi*-oriented Muslim lifestyle and approach.

Regarding Irish society as *kuffar* (infidels), *Salafi*-oriented Algerian women feel a 'threat', as they call it, to their national, ethnic, cultural and religious identity – an identity their children need to maintain during their stay in Ireland. This group locates itself in a religious, national and historical narrative that supports very well their construction of the cosmos as a separation between *us* and *them*. Situating themselves as victims of Western imperialism, they then adopt a position of religious and moral superiority justifying it with eschatological connotations of reward and punishment in the afterlife. Their division of the cosmos into *dar al-harb* and *dar al-Islam* and their transnational identity expressed in their belonging to a global Islamic *ummah* is maintained through specific practices mentioned in this article.

³⁰ On ethnicization of Muslims in Europe, see B. Tibi, 'Ethnicity of Fear? Islamic Migration and the Ethnicization of Islam in Europe' in *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, 10:1 (2010), 126-157.

Maintaining a *Salafi* Cosmic Identity

There are two Muslim schools in Dublin: the North Dublin Muslim School and the Muslim National School in Clonskeagh. Both schools have a visible Islamic ethos but operate at the same time according to the Irish educational system and are state-funded.³¹ The curriculum is the same as in other Irish national schools, with the addition of Arabic language and Islamic education, which are taught by Muslim teachers. The principal and the other teachers are all non-Muslim and Irish because until now there are no Muslim teachers available who fulfil the requirements of the Department of Education to teach in Ireland. Both schools are administered by the Imam of the Islamic Foundation of Ireland, Yahya al-Hussain, who acts as their patron.³²

The majority of the Algerian *Salafi* women I interviewed do not send their children to either of these two schools. The reason lies mainly in the presence of non-Muslim teachers and principals: 'How can we send our children to a so called Muslim school when the principal is a *kafir* (infidel).' By sending their children to a Catholic school they hope to avoid any misunderstandings and confusion among their children: 'We just tell our children that *we* are Muslims and *they* are *kuffar*. We will go to Paradise and they will go to Hell.' Binary oppositions are much easier to construct when it is possible to draw clear lines of distinction between who is who. In a school like the one in Clonskeagh, boundaries are very hard to detect since Muslims and non-Muslims are located in the same Muslim space. To avoid any misunderstanding, the Algerian Muslim women I interviewed believe a Catholic school to be a better environment for their children in order to construct the world they want their children to grow up in – a world of us and them.

The majority of *Salafi*-oriented Algerian women I interviewed were aged between 30 and 55 years, originally coming from rural areas, without any formal education. However, they are very knowledgeable of the Quran and *Sunna* as well as of specific Islamic streams which are mainly based on *Salafi* interpreters such as the above mentioned Shaykh bin Baz and al-'Uthaymeen. This group, which for the most part consists of refugees, regard their stay in Ireland as their personal sacrifice, 'it is part of our *jihad* to live here', since they were forced to leave their country of origin and live

³¹ T. Sakaranaho, "For God and Eternal Values': Muslim national schools in Ireland' in E. Aslan (ed.), *Islamische Erziehung in Europa*, Vienna: Böhlau 2009, 203-218.

³² See <http://www.islaminireland.com>, accessed 4 October 2011.

in the *dar al-harb*.³³ As the following example shows, these Algerian women try to avoid any unnecessary contact with the Irish majority. Their children are brought each day after school for a couple of hours to a mosque in Dublin in order to learn Quranic verses by heart and to ‘know who their people are’. Their children do not socialize with non-Muslims during school time or after school. Their friends are the other Muslim pupils at school or other Muslims they meet in their afternoon school at the mosque: ‘My children need to know that they are Arabs and Muslims. We are different. We are not Irish or Catholic. We are going to Paradise. Allah loves my children because they are Muslims and they fear Allah not like the *kuffar* out there.’ Language is an important marker of difference. One can notice the usage of Arabic as a language of communication enforced by the mothers. Whenever an English word is used the mothers cry out ‘*Araby* ‘*Araby*’ – Arabic, Arabic. From time to time the children are frightened of using the *kuffar*’s language as the language of ‘the *shaytan* (Satan) that will bring the user to Hell.’

Isolating the children from their non-Muslim environment, demonizing the non-Muslim society and highlighting the status of devout Muslims is a way of life observed in other *Salafi*-oriented groups in other European countries too.³⁴ The situation in Ireland is, however, different from other Western European countries because of the public role of the Catholic Church. A Catholic ethos is pervasive in the public sphere in, for example, education and the health sector. Social transformations have begun to take place in Ireland but the Catholic Church still plays a fairly dominant role in society in comparison to other more secular societies in Western Europe.³⁵ *Salafi*-oriented Algerian women feel an indirect interference in their Islamic religiosity in Ireland because of the Catholic presence in public life that affects them and their children on a daily basis: ‘Wherever we go we see their Jesus, in schools, in hospitals just everywhere.’ *Salafi* women consider themselves and their children in particular to be under constant pressure and feel the influence of the Catholic ethos all around them. Children praying several times a day at school, going to mass on a regular basis, people on the bus crossing themselves whenever they pass by a church – all these practises are noticed by Muslim migrant children and require their parents to constantly

³³ On *dar al-harb* see S. Akbarzadeh and F. Mansouri (eds.), *Islam and Political Violence. Muslim Diaspora and Radicalization in the West*, London: Tauris 2007.

³⁴ See Roald, *Women in Islam*.

³⁵ T. Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Rise and Fall of the Catholic Church in Modern Ireland*, Dublin: University College Dublin Press 1998.

remind their children of being different. Therefore, *Salafi*-oriented Muslims in the diaspora in Ireland are not so much challenged by secularism,³⁶ as in most other European countries, but by a much larger ‘threat’: in their view Islam in Ireland is challenged by Catholicism and its ubiquitous public manifestation. For the *Salafi*-oriented Algerian women, self-marginalization and self-ghettoization become a mechanism for self-protection.

The Illusion of a Stable *Salafi* Dwelling

The first group of Algerian women introduced above identify themselves clearly and consciously as supporters of the *Salafi* interpretation of Islam. They construct a transnational and global religious identity refusing any national, regional or cultural connection or influences. The purification of Islam from any cultural elements as essential to their *Salafi* identity was constantly highlighted throughout our interview sessions. The Algerian *Salafi*-oriented women use a religious framework in order to construct a space they feel comfortable and secure in. This religious homemaking sets boundaries and classifies who is and is not part of this religious home: ‘[I]t constructs collective identity and, concomitantly, imagines degrees of social distance.’³⁷ The Algerian *Salafi*-oriented women use religion to map religious space and to distinguish it from the social space ‘by employing tropes – symbol, metaphor, simile, and myth – and anchoring those in artifacts and transmitting them in rituals.’³⁸

The Algerian women I interviewed use religious narratives to maintain these boundaries and ensure that their children become aware of them as well, for example, by telling what will happen to them when they do not listen to their parents and make friendships with *kuffar* at school: ‘It is as if you are making friendship with the devil and you don’t want to be the devil’s friend, do you, my dear?’, as one of the older Algerian women was telling a girl at the mosque. Gender roles are highlighted in relation to bringing up children. It is the mother’s responsibility to teach the children how to maintain one’s Muslim identity particularly in the West. The mothers have to safeguard these boundaries between who is a *kafir* and who is not in the family and among their children: ‘Allah will judge me on the Day of Judgement after all. ... Allah gave me as a mother the responsibility to raise good Muslim children who fear Allah, glory be onto him (*subhano*).’ Another woman added: ‘Everything must be under my

³⁶ See Roy, *Secularism Confronts Islam*.

³⁷ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 111.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 111.

control because I will be the one who will stand in front of Allah on the Day of Judgement. I will be punished. I am the mother.’ Another woman highlighted the challenge of raising ‘good Muslim children’ in the West: ‘Our task is even harder than any other one. Back in Algeria they don’t face the same problems as we do here in the West. It is harder for us here because our children are surrounded by evil and forbidden things (*munkarat* and *muharramat*).’

However, at the same time, the Algerian women are not eager to go back to Algeria because the situation there is ‘not Islamic enough’, as they claim. One of the problems is the language: in the ‘country of *kuffar*’ the Algerian children are able to learn *fusha* (classical Arabic), that is to say the language of the Quran, whereas in Algeria, as one of the women explained, ‘there is no real Arabic language any more. Our language got torn into pieces and became a mixture of Berber, French and Arabic.’ This language, ruptured through colonialism, is not present in Ireland since the different religious classes in the Dublin mosques are mixed with children coming from various Arab as well as other Muslim countries. The language that is used and taught is *fusha*. In their opinion, such quality of language cannot be achieved in Algeria: ‘When going back to Algeria I am proud of my children and their ability to speak *fusha* better than the other children there who are lost between different languages.’ It is paradoxical that in the country they regard as a country of *kufr* (disbelief) they find a better place for their children to be taught the language of the Quran, a language ‘purer than that spoken in Algeria’.

Homemaking for *Salafi*-oriented women is to construct a space that goes beyond territorial spaces and extends national boundaries. The *Salafi*-oriented women do not see themselves as Algerians but define themselves in religious terms as Muslims and *Salafi* primarily. They believe in *al-ummah al-islamiyya* and do not necessarily look at identities in terms of nations but more in terms of believers and non-believers. However, one can notice an ambivalent relationship with their natal homeland and a resulting sense of a fragmented selfhood: ‘We don’t know what we are any more. They [Europeans] have taken everything from us.’ Every now and then one can also perceive a yearning for a secure and stable Algeria where harmony and understanding reigns between the different ethnic, religious and social groups: ‘They [Europeans] destroyed our country, language, culture and unity. They destroyed everything even our respect of ourselves ... our dignity’. Assuming a religious identity, whether consciously or unconsciously, is part of a process of acquiring a safe label and idea of selfhood. This identification has to be the opposite of the identity of the

forces which caused the instability and rupture of their country, in other words, the West. An Islamic identity which is regarded as the opposite pole to a Western Christian or secular orientation serves as a compensation for the lost country, language, culture and religion.

However, the Algerians' national-geographic and historical understanding plays a significant role in their own identity construction and in their relation to the West and Western societies in particular. The Algerian women are still affected by the colonial time and blame the West for Algerians' long lasting suppression through French colonialism. '[N]ationalism – and diasporic nationalism – creates an imagined community that has affective bonds with the natal land.'³⁹ These affective bonds with the homeland are suppressed in order to maintain their transnational and global *Salafi* identity.⁴⁰ Colonialism, nationalism and Salafism inform the Algerians' construction of cosmos and homeland and thereby define their relationship to Irish society.

The Muslim Brotherhood Dwelling

The second group of Algerian women differs from the first group in their ideological understanding and their orientation towards the cosmos, the homeland, the home and the body. Unlike the Salafis, this group does not build boundaries and polarizations but supports limited engagement with European societies: 'We don't want to isolate ourselves from Irish society. We came here to study and educate ourselves further.' Because of this difference there are a lot of tensions between Algerian women identifying themselves with Salafism and those supporting the Muslim Brotherhood. Both groups are Muslim Algerians, either Arab or Berber, but they differ in terms of generation, class and educational level. The majority of *Salafi*-oriented Algerian women I interviewed came to Ireland mainly as asylum seekers in the 1990s (only two of the ten women I interviewed arrived in the 1980s). All of their claims for refugee status were accepted, resulting in their right to reside and work in Ireland. All of the women come from a low and lower middle-class background with no third-level education. The majority went to private religious classes to learn the Quran and the *Sunna*. None of the women are in paid work positions. Only one teaches *tajweed* (Qur'anic recitation) and conducts private religious classes in the mosque.

³⁹ Ibid., 110f.

⁴⁰ On Salafism as an essentialized and deculturalized understanding of Islam in its European and global context see Meijer, *Global Salafism* and Roy, *Globalised Islam*.

Except for one woman who is in her mid-twenties all other women were, as mentioned before, between 30 and 55 years of age.

In comparison to the women of the *Salafi* group the Muslim Brotherhood sympathizers come from a middle-class Algerian society, with a good education also among women. They are in their twenties and thirties. All of the eight women gained their first university or college degree in nursing or in midwifery back in Algeria.⁴¹ These professions, as one of my interviewees explained, belong to the so-called 'female professions' and so they are fulfilling, in their view, their Islamic role as understood by some of the leaders of the Muslim Brotherhood:

I want to become a midwife to help my husband financially. But also to get independence. There is nothing wrong in me working. I am a decent woman, wearing the *hijab* and fearing Allah. I am a good Muslim because I will educate myself to become stronger in mind and soul. My children will be happier as well.

This understanding focuses on the importance of education in particular among women who are the future mothers of a new generation of children who will be able to influence global societies through their education: 'That way we fulfil our duties towards Allah and towards society. The world will see a new generation of highly educated and influential Muslims.' The level of education and the socio-cultural and economic background of the women are important factors that distinguish them from the *Salafi*-orientated group.

The *Akhawat*, as the female members of the Muslim Brotherhood are named, make a clear distinction between themselves and the *Salafi*-oriented women in their degree of education and social class. The *Akhawat* understanding of Islam and their lives in a European context reflects to a large extent the views of the prominent Egyptian televangelist Amr Khaled:⁴²

Amr Khaled is a good person to listen to. He is not a *shaykh* but he is a very good speaker. He brings Islam to the heart of the people. In particular the younger generation like us are fascinated by him. We feel that he understands our needs and our struggle especially in the modern world.

⁴¹ Some of the women are either students taking extra courses that are required for the recognition of their degrees in Ireland or they already work in paid positions.

⁴² On Amr Khalid see A. Rock, 'Amr Khaled: From Da'wa to Political and Religious Leadership', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 37:1 (2010), 15-37.

In several religious gatherings (*halaqat*) which I attended he was taken as a reference on different religious topics through his various satellite programmes and internet sites. The *Akhawat* search for different interpretations of Islam that can be adopted in today's time whilst still following 'Prophet Mohammad as a timeless role model for mankind.'⁴³ Amr Khaled offers such an understanding of religion that is popular among young Arab Muslims in particular.

The Algerian as well as the Egyptian *Akhawat* group in Ireland has a different attitude towards Catholicism and secularism. Unlike the *Salafi*-oriented group, the *Akhawat* feel their religiosity secured and understood through Catholicism in Ireland. The Catholic ethos in public life reminds them of the Islamic ethos in their home countries – Algeria or Egypt – where religion still plays an important role in society. They associate this ethos with certain moral and ethical values that are very similar to those back home. They see a lot of similarities between the Irish and the Arab culture in terms of family values and solidarity. They compare the weekly attendance of mass on Sunday that is still performed by a lot of Irish people to the Muslim attendance of Friday midday prayer in the mosque and see in it a familiar reflection of their own religiosity. Muslim Brotherhood supporters feel much more comfortable living in a Catholic society than living in a secular society where 'people don't fear God'. A saying was constantly repeated by different Muslim Brotherhood supporters: 'Don't fear those who fear God.' This perception plays a central role in the inter-personal relationships between Muslim Brotherhood supporters and the Irish majority society. Moreover, it delivers a different foundation on which relationships can be built – not on the basis of believers versus infidels but on the notion of the *ahl al-kitab* (people of the book) who share a common belief in one God and a religiously grounded sense of morality.

The *Akhawat* cosmos is porous and cannot be defined categorically. It is rather a combination of religious, national and educational identity markers. It is important for the *Akhawat* to highlight their religiosity mainly expressed through the veil and performing prayers during working or study hours. At the same time they emphasize the importance of education highlighting in addition their national, ethnic and cultural roots. Unlike the *Salafi* women they do not believe in *al-ummah al-islamiyya* but acknowledge the existing diversity of Islamic streams and interpretations.

⁴³ Rock, 'Amr Khaled', 31.

The Gendered Body as Site of Contestation

Religion regulates and forms the body in the private and domestic space but it also alters it and gives it a meaning in the public space. In the case of my interviewees, the body is defined in a way that represents cosmic space in public, becoming a powerful tool from which the ideological and religious orientation is articulated in the public sphere. The body becomes a source of political stance in which visible boundaries are expressed. The division between *Salafi*- and Brotherhood-oriented women in Ireland is also explicitly articulated; women's inclusion and exclusion from particular circles is decided within gendered spaces and related mainly to the way women dress.

The majority of fully covered women in Ireland are *Salafi*-oriented.⁴⁴ Women who belong or want to belong to the *Salafi*-oriented circle need to wear the full face-veil. 'A true Muslim woman should cover from head to toe avoiding any exposure of her body to the public', as one of the Algerian *Salafi* women explained. The face cover along with a headscarf reaching in most cases down to the breast should be worn over a long wide dress (*abaya* or *jilbab*). This symbol of difference for the *Salafi* women functions as a political and ideological message not only to the Irish public but also to the different Muslim communities. Bodies have 'become pathways to the wider universe'⁴⁵ to symbolize and to represent the cosmos.⁴⁶ The bodies of the women have become a symbol of authority and territory to include or to exclude other women. *Salafi*-oriented women in Ireland are not only coming from Algeria but are also represented by Libyans, Egyptians and in particular Irish converts to Islam.⁴⁷ Not all *Salafi*-oriented women dress in such a way but those who do not face tensions with women who are fully covered.

In the same way as the body becomes a means for authority among *Salafi*-oriented women in Ireland, it becomes for the *Akhawat* members a tool to define social space. This space is on the one hand widely accepted within the Irish society but on the other hand it distinguishes and separates the *Akhawat* from the publicly perceived *Salafi*-oriented women. When migrants arrive in Ireland and join one of the mosques, they enter an already established community structure in which they either fit or where they are rejected. One of the *Akhawat* women I interviewed wore the face cover in her home country Egypt but as soon as she saw the public

⁴⁴ As far as my ethnographic study supported by interview data can tell.

⁴⁵ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 101.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

⁴⁷ See Shanneik, 'Conversion and Religious *Habitus*'.

connection between face covering and extremism, she put away her face cover in order to avoid any accusation of being part of an extremist group: 'I don't belong to the Salafis and my face cover is not a symbol of Salafism. But when I saw that I will be perceived as one here, I took it off.' The gendered discourse of Muslim women in the West – connecting the full face veil with extremism – influences the *Akhawat* women's negotiation of their gender identity and their feeling of home within their bodies. Their expression of their gender identity through the veil is restricted and in some cases not fully lived out as a consequence.

The Hybridity of Home

The body is a private gendered space but at the same time it is a social space in which religious, political and ideological understandings can be articulated. Home is another private/public space that is hybrid and interwoven with religious, cultural, habitual and historical elements and cannot be reduced to a homogenous definition. In Tweed's understanding home refers to 'places of varying scale: a clearing, a hut, a nation, the earth, or the universe' and it also means 'finding a place or making a space'⁴⁸ that one is in control of. This imagined space that one calls home and that is regarded as one's own territory is too complex to be reduced to a single definition: '[T]he imagined boundaries of the home contract and expand across cultures and in different semantic contexts.'⁴⁹

The Salafi Home

Salafi Algerian women see their home, understood as their *Salafi* community, mainly represented by the mosque. Gendered gatherings at home rarely take place, as *Salafi* women feel discomfort in their houses and prefer to spend as much time as possible in the mosques among other Salafis: 'I don't feel comfortable in my house. It is cold and dark as Ireland itself. ... When I enter the mosque I feel the light of Allah shining in my body.' The association between 'the soulless houses' with 'the soulless *kuffar*' occurred several times in our interview sessions. The women try as much as possible not to stay in their houses: 'When I stay in the house and don't go to the mosque for one day, I feel as if I'm sick ... everything starts aching ... I feel my head exploding behind these walls.' Another woman expressed her discomfort as if the coldness of the walls would freeze her soul: 'My life force gets sucked in these houses.' In the mosque, however,

⁴⁸ Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling*, 105.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 105.

their souls are revitalized through Quran recitations and the *iman* (religious atmosphere) surrounding the mosque. In addition, the women feel that their stay in the mosque assures their purity. They are far away from any *fitna* (temptation) that could be caused at home, for example, by television or radio. The mosque acts as a protective shield from any temptation outside the mosque but it also guards the women from gossiping: 'If we would gather at home instead of the mosques, the *shaytan* could get hold of our tongues and we could gossip too much. ... Here in the mosque our tongues are safe. We wouldn't dare to say bad things about others inside here.' Unlike in their houses where they are more liable to do *sayyi'a* (sins), in the mosque they perceive themselves protected and safe. The home, expressed through their *Salafi* religious community in the mosque, controls the women's lives and assures their *Salafi* understanding of the world. The presence in the mosques and the gendered social control within the mosque assures the strict separation between culture and religion, essential to *Salafi* identity.

The Akhawat Home

The case is different with the majority of *Akhawat* women I interviewed who do not feel comfortable performing most gendered social activities in the mosque – activities that are in most cases traditional and habitual practices and above all have a non-religious character: 'The mosque is only for praying and superficial social networking.' One of the woman mentioned the controlling role of the *Salafi*-oriented women in the mosques: 'We don't have freedom in the mosque. Whatever we do or even when we laugh in a loud voice we are accused of doing *bid'a* (innovations) or of acting in an un-Islamic manner, ... that is suffocating.' The *Akhawat* feel restricted in their freedom of speech and expression in the mosque and more homely in their houses. In addition, *Akhawat* women do not go to the mosque on a regular basis since they believe the house to be a better place for a woman to perform gender-specific rituals such as the example mentioned below.

Female spaces could be territories in which practices take place that do not reflect their public ideological and religious beliefs, but are cultural or habitual. In the diaspora specific ethnic and national habits are taken over beyond national boundaries. One of these habitual practices performed by Egyptian women in particular is the celebration that marks the birth of a child. Usually this celebration takes place a week after the baby's birth. That is the reason why this tradition is called *sebou'*, meaning the seventh day after the birth of the child. The ceremonies might differ

according to the family and the region but those I attended were in general as follows; the ceremony starts with the mother or any related person such as a friend spreading some salt on the front door to keep the Evil Eye out of the house. Then, female family and friends gather together in the living room and wait for the dressed up baby to be carried into the room and put in one of the decorated baskets or blankets. Once the baby is in the room it is put on the floor for the procession to begin. Women mill around the baby singing different cultural and religious songs. They then shake it a little in order to shake the evil spirits out of its body. After that, the mother steps over the baby seven times while others sing and drum on, for example, a saucepan. The noise should be as loud as possible because it is believed that only in this way will the evil spirit be cleared away. Gold such as necklaces, bracelets and amulets usually with pendants in the form of an eye or a hand (*khamsa*), decorated with turquoise stones in the middle are worn by the baby or are pinned to its clothes to protect it from Evil Eye or spirits.

This Egyptian way of celebrating newborns is adapted by Algerian women and celebrated in their homes. This praxis is interwoven with cultural and historical elements going back to the Pharaonic period but is also underlined with religious prayers and Quranic recitations. This praxis is highly condemned by the *Salafi*-oriented women who regard it as a non-Islamic praxis and as *bid'a* to the extent that some call this praxis *shirq*.⁵⁰ Although it is widely known amongst the Muslim female community members that celebrating this praxis is not Islamic, they argue that it is only a gendered social activity and does not carry any religious meaning: 'We don't believe in it. We do it because it is fun and it reminds us of our families. ... It gives us a feeling of being at home.'

As the *Salafi* women illustrate, home can be a specific religious gendered community which exists in the mosque. Within this religious gendered space strict divisions can be made and the essentialized understanding of the cosmos, the homeland and the body maintained. As the example of the *Akhawat* women shows, home can be also a hybrid space in which different cultures and different practices in diaspora meet and are performed regardless of their national, ethnic, historical or political origin.

⁵⁰ *Shirq* means literally worshiping something else as God. The word *shirq* refers to the *Salafi* women's strong condemnation of this praxis. It expresses a stronger meaning than *bid'a*. Literally, though, the women do not worship something else as God but celebrate a pre-Islamic praxis underpinned with Islamic prayers.

Conclusion

In this article, I have discussed Algerian Muslim women migrants and refugees who have passed through a process of deterritorialization in coming to Ireland. This has led them to search for new territories in order to create a new 'home' for themselves. I used Tweed's argumentation that religion forms and is formed by different cultural practices and organic processes in conceptualizing identities expressed through the body, the home, the homeland and the cosmos. The socio-cultural, economic and educational background of the women plays an additional role in the way these different spaces are defined and in which identities are expressed.

The Algerian women migrants in Ireland tend to revert to an essentialized understanding of identity, constructing a univocal and monolithic perception of different gendered, domestic, geographical and transnational spaces. All four spaces, the body, the home, the homeland and the cosmos, correlate with each other and locate the Algerian women, even in their own terms, in a clearly defined and set understanding of identity. However, these homogenous perspectives clash, sometimes unconsciously, with complex social, political, historical, national and ideological as well as habitual practices and processes. The Algerian women community in Ireland is diverse and the pre- and post-migratory social, political and religious experiences influence their feeling of home expressed in Tweed's four chronotopes in different ways.

The constructed cosmos and the imagined homeland as well as the gendered body and the hybrid home are all spaces that are defined by the religious orientation of Algerian women migrants in Ireland as well as by their socio-cultural, economic and educational background. Within these spaces the migrants are able to construct identities that provide them social and religious positionalities within Irish society in which they feel secure and protected. In this article, I have deconstructed monolithic and homogenous spaces by giving examples of some challenges that Algerian Muslim women face, directly as well as indirectly, in their diasporic spaces.