

The Mevlana Mosque in Berlin-Kreuzberg: An Unsolved Conflict

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This paper describes a public conflict over the building of a mosque in Berlin. The conflict covered the best part of three years. It started in 1999 with a misunderstanding, steadily culminated over a period of two years and was finally cemented into stalemate after 11 September 2001. It has not been solved yet. A description of the historical background and the local setting in which the conflict emerged sets the scene. The main narrative describes the phases of the conflict. In conclusion, the question is raised as to why it took such a disastrous course.

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A History of Mosque-Building in Germany

Germany has no colonial memory. During the age of colonialism it made an effort to secure power and possession in other continents just like most European countries did. However, colonialism's phases hardly had an impact on German everyday life. Neither people nor goods were transferred in such numbers as to influence population statistics or popular culture. Moreover, a writing of history that deals with German colonialism in detail is still in its infancy (Böer *et al.* 2002; Eckert 2002). This may account for the fact that, when Muslims started to build mosques, these were considered totally foreign to the German eye and, therefore, undesirable.

Any Muslim presence in Germany prior to the twentieth century is scant and has left almost no traces (Heller 1986). The first public memory of a Muslim presence is intertwined with Germany's history of two World Wars, during which Muslim combatants were transferred to the country. The big economic boom in the 1960s, when Germany rose to wealth utilising cheap migrant labour from the Balkans and

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Turkey, finally imported a noticeable Muslim population. Germany's history of mosque-building mirrors this state of affairs.

During World War I Muslim prisoners-of-war held in captivity near Berlin were given permission to build the first mosque on German soil. It consisted of a wooden structure that fell into disrepair after the war camp was given up, and was demolished in 1923 (Höpp 1992). Once it had disappeared, Muslim diplomats, together with the missionary sect of Pakistani *Ahmadiyya*, promoted the building of a new mosque in Berlin proper; in 1927 a miniature copy of the Taj Mahal was erected in the borough of Wilmersdorf. During the Second World War its Imams sympathised with the National-Socialists; this, together with the mosque's geographical position on the outskirts of the city, may account for the fact that after the war was lost this building still stood intact. The Pakistani community sent a new mosque leader who, in the after-war years, took a leading position both in tracing and helping Muslim displaced persons and in dialoguing with the German churches.¹ Today this mosque still functions as the main prayer hall for one of the Pakistani *Ahmadiyya* branches. However, being branded as an *Ahmadiyya* mosque also accounts for the fact that, within the very animated fabric of Muslim religious life in Berlin, this is the one and only mosque which is widely avoided by all other Muslims.

The end of World War II brought other changes as well. A considerable number of Tartar and other Muslim combatants who had sided with the German armies were now left stranded in Germany. Some were repatriated but most decided to stay, and built Muslim communities in several urban centres—Munich and Aachen among them. These founders, earmarked as war criminals, tried very hard to keep a low profile and as a consequence they did not undertake the construction of recognisable places for the performance of the Friday prayer. And so it happened that, in the 1970s, only some Persian businessmen in Hamburg managed to erect the second noteworthy Islamic (Shi'ite) place of prayer in Germany. As late as the early 1990s, a third representative building—the so-called 'glass mosque—was erected in the city of Mannheim on the initiative of the directorate for Turkish religious affairs.

Between 1965 and 2000 the Muslim population in Germany rose from an almost negligible number to 3.5 million people. The newcomers satisfied their religious needs with makeshift places. They possessed neither the money nor the networks to take building measures. But above all, the founding generation did not feel the necessity to erect buildings of lasting presence, as returning home still dominated their view of the future. Therefore, they preferred to hire cheap places situated more often than not on the edge of the city and they did their best to keep Muslim community life as invisible as possible. It took 30 years until this mentality of temporariness became a thing of the past. As long as it lasted, approximately 2,400 improvised and largely invisible prayer places were installed in cellars, shops, factories or private apartments (Jonker and Kapphan 1998).

A first change in attitude is observable around 1995 when the two main Turkish Muslim organisations in Germany, the *Islam Kültür Merkezi* and the *Islamic Community of Milli Görüş*, start to buy building plots.² By now, the dream of

returning slowly gives way to the realisation that the next generation might stay in Germany. Community members increasingly adopt the opinion that their religious taxes (*Zakat*) should be spent on real estate for the benefit of their offspring. Everywhere in Germany, local mosque communities suddenly apply for building permissions. At this stage, they still do not make claims for publicly recognisable mosques but express the need for multifunctional cultural centres to which a place for prayer might be attached (Jonker 2002). Five years later, in January 2000, the German law on citizenship changes and as a result half a million Muslims apply for German citizenship. For mosque builders and politicians alike, this date represents a major watershed. The systematically neglected matter of visible religious worship for Muslims has finally become a public issue.

Ever since, conflict is in the air. The German institutional frame for the integration of migrants traditionally has been linked to the labour market only. Consequently, attempts to instal structural dialogue between Muslim communities and the institutions of the majority society were hardly undertaken (Soysal 1994: 61–4). Locally, the churches offered inter-religious dialogue but this did not teach mosque administrators how to apply for government money or to deal with the building authorities. Thirty years of structural isolation left an imprint. It created a deep distrust of the motives and morals of the ‘Other’. As a consequence, wherever plans for mosque construction are made public, either the municipality, the local residents, the churches or the media are likely to block them.

At the University of Giessen, near Frankfurt, a handbook has now been written to steer through the many mosque conflicts that are popping up almost everywhere (Leggewie *et al.* 2002). The authors diagnose, on the part of the majority society, a deep fear of change in the minority–majority balance. Thus, independent of the political preferences of the mosque builders, and indifferent also as to whether they are Sufi, heterodox Alevi or Islamist Milli Görüs, building projects are currently being rejected, Leggewie *et al.* claim. In these conflicts usually only one Muslim party emerges. The other parties in the contest consist of municipalities, local politicians, construction authorities, residents, local churches and media. Conflict seems to crystallise in four different forms, which Leggewie *et al.* (2002) have captured in the following manner:

- *The undesired mosque.* Mosque builders express their wish to acquire a certain plot as a construction site to the building authorities. Either the media or the neighbourhood gets wind of this and starts a vigorous protest. The mosque builders drop their plan and try their luck somewhere else.
- *The invisible mosque.* A makeshift prayer place has gradually been enlarged and finally acquired as a property. Due to this change, the authorities inspect the premises and notice serious defaults such as a missing fire escape or insufficient toilet facilities. But for reasons of their own, they decide to condone the situation and keep quiet about it.

- *The protected mosque.* Local politicians have decided to stimulate and protect the construction of a mosque for reasons of their own.
- *The discursive mosque.* Mosque builders already acquired a plot and now are in the process of defending their plan in public. In this case, all actors will be on stage for a prolonged stretch of time: local residents, politicians, the authorities, churches and the local media may argue against, or take sides with, the mosque builders. The mosque community itself may feel misunderstood and may suddenly break off communications. Then again, co-operation with the outside world may get underway and the mosque management goes through a phase of internal differentiation, allowing for the younger generation to play a responsible part.

The case discussed in this paper is of the discursive kind. It concerns a Milli Görüs community and already has a history of five years. The conflict is located in Berlin in the district of Kreuzberg, a dilapidated inner-city area that also constitutes the largest Turkish town outside Turkey. At this moment, the Muslim actor—the local Milli Görüs community—feels thoroughly misunderstood and reacts with a series of lawsuits against the authorities, the media and several individuals. But before this conflict can be properly unfolded, some background remarks need to be made on Muslim settlement in the borough of Berlin-Kreuzberg.

One Event—Two Memories

Turks dominate Muslim life in Berlin. Back in the 1960s, along with Bosnians and Kosovans, the city brought in Turks from Anatolia to do the menial work. Most workers originated from secular countries—Turks were raised in the lay republic of Atatürk, and Bosnians and Kosovans grew up under Tito's communism. Upon migrating to Germany these migrants were not, as a rule, interested in making a religious turn. The minority who embraced religious life typically came from rural backgrounds and possessed very little education (Seufert 2002).

Turkish workers also brought with them the typical Turkish agony over the role of religion. Turkish laicists denied traditional Muslim believers the right of self-organisation and accused them of undermining the Turkish state and plotting to introduce *Shari'a* as the ruling force. As a consequence, Turkish workers who congregated in Muslim communities acted defensively, trying not to attract any attention. During the first wave of migration from Turkey, Berlin especially became the home of many illiterate peasants from rural Anatolia for whom mosque community life functioned as a compass to reorganise their lives. But secular Turks, fearing that these community-building activities would dominate the Berlin view of 'Turkish guestworkers', tried to close off the religious activities of their co-nationals by accusing them of *Shari'a* indoctrination and fascist sentiments (Jonker 2002: 81–145). After the military putsch of 1979, many Turkish leftists—teachers and trade-union people among them—likewise migrated to Berlin and added considerably to the already heated atmosphere.

Most of these newcomers went to live in Kreuzberg, a dilapidated borough in which the first wave of migrants had already taken over the homes of the German working class. Mosques and communist action centres now opened side-by-side and soon functioned as a red flag for the opposing factions. Then, in March 1980, a demonstration took place in front of the Mevlana mosque, a Milli Görüs place of prayer that was opposed by other Turks for its Islamist political involvement. It was—although invisible—situated on Kreuzberg's main square, the Kottbusser Tor, hidden from the street by a large apartment building. The mosque elders decided to take advantage of their favourable position and express solidarity with the Afghani Muslims (just besieged by the Soviets) in the public square. It did not take long before an anti-demonstration consisting of Turkish left-wingers appeared on the scene. The moment the two parties met, a fight exploded; eyewitnesses claim that all present engaged in a short but furious man-to-man battle. When the police arrived 20 minutes later, the Mevlana combatants quickly retired to their mosque whereas the leftists dispersed into Kreuzberg's back-streets. However, one young man was left bleeding in the square and died on his way to hospital. As he happened to be one of the left-wing combatants, the Mevlana mosque community was accused of covering for the murderer.

Memory of the fighting still lingers on today. It sets the tone for the way this mosque, but also its organisation, the Islamic Federation of Berlin (IFB), plus its co-opted partner Milli Görüs, are still being perceived. In the streets of Kreuzberg, in the offices of its municipality and in local committees which decide on youth initiatives, religious visibility and many more subjects that touch upon living together, both organisations are treated like the devil. Even more, 25 years have moulded the event into a collective memory that acts as a warning against all Muslim activity. The majority of non-Muslim Kreuzberg inhabitants generally views visible Muslim activity with suspicion and is unwilling to discern between first, second and third generations. As a rule, young Muslim social-workers asking for public recognition, Muslim women seeking co-operation for their kindergarten, or mosque communities which apply for public support are denied help. Turkish lay people who now occupy political, administrative and trade-union positions in Kreuzberg do their best to keep the status quo in place.

On the Muslim side, the fighting led to a significant counter-memory, expressed in the way in which religious Muslims have chosen to be represented. In October 2001, when I first retraced this piece of city history and interviewed its main protagonists, it occurred to me that these men, who back in 1980 had been instrumental in the organisation of the Mevlana mosque demonstration, are still today occupying all the leading religious functions. Both the Imam of the Mevlana mosque, the Head Imam of the Islamic Federation and the leader of the local Milli Görüs network, to name just the main protagonists, have been in authoritative religious positions ever since.

Thus, several elements add to the present isolated position of the Islamic Federation in Berlin and its local partner Milli Görüs. A general suspicion, fed by

the memory of a disastrous fighting and kept alive by the lay Turks, seems to be still dominant. The Muslim leadership, drawing its authority from that same event, answers it with a suspicion of its own, one that is built on non-communication. To complicate matters, these Muslim religious officials mainly consist of self-made men with little formal education who never properly got hold of the German language. Their acute awareness of not being wanted is wedded to a scanty knowledge of their immediate surroundings. The lack of information resulting from this forces them to mould every confrontation with the 'outside world' into an inimical frame of overwhelming generalisation. According to this frame, the world of the unbelievers (*Kuffir*) invariably despises the Muslim *Umma* and oppresses the true believer. Actual instances of discrimination against members of the community are invariably taken as proof and utilised as a motor for further mobilisation. What keeps this local community together is its acute awareness of being discriminated. Its alleged victim status heightens the solidarity inside the community as it calls for a high degree of social closure towards the outside world. In this manner, Milli Görüs has added to the creation of its own social isolation. A severe language barrier helps to strengthen it. In all matters that concern the non-Muslim 'outside world', the mosque officials depend on the information from, and translation by, the younger generation. As these latter control all information that passes from the outside into the heart of the Berlin Muslim community, these young men function as gatekeepers, with all the restrictions involved. Those responsible still have no experience with, and no practical knowledge of, the functioning of the local borough. And whenever something goes wrong they do not have the capacity to judge why this is so. Every miscommunication only adds to their conviction that 'the West' despises 'Islam'. Occasionally this gives rise to over-reactions. The conflict over the building of a new Mevlana mosque will help to analyse in detail how these come about.

The Phases of the Conflict

In 1999, the Mosque Foundation—an executive body acting on behalf of both the Islamic Federation of Berlin (representing 12 mosque communities) and the Islamic Community of Milli Görüs (responsible for education, youth and women in these same mosque communities)—bought a plot of land adjacent to the apartment building in which the old Mevlana mosque was housed.³ The plot was purchased on behalf of the Mevlana mosque community from a private owner for 1.5 million euros. For more than 14 years, the Mevlana mosque community had tried in vain to purchase this particular piece of land. Fearful of losing its community members to other mosques, it badly wanted to erect the new Mevlana mosque as close as possible to the old one. So, when the occasion finally presented itself, it was willing to pay whatever was being asked. However, after the purchase had been concluded and the first joy expressed, the Mosque Foundation and, some time after that, the members of the mosque community, discovered they had been cheated.

It transpired that the plot purchased was situated in a city development area and that its actual value was officially fixed at only half the sum paid. Upon discovering this, the Mosque Foundation started a lawsuit—not against the former owner who had raised the price on his own initiative, but against the municipality. It accused this authority of deliberately changing the designation of the area so as to enable an increase in land prices and thus hinder the Mosque Foundation from building mosques at all. The municipality, however, claimed the opposite:

The building group did not come to seek information beforehand. We offer free advice to everybody; we keep a vacant lots archive, which records prices and categories of all plots in this neighbourhood. It is in the interest of all buyers to seek available information before they buy. It is a mystery to me why these people never came to us (Burgomaster of Kreuzberg, interview, 20 November 2001).

The Mosque Foundation held a different view. Although it claimed to have ordered an official expert's opinion beforehand, it appeared to have acted under considerable pressure:

They (the Mevlana community) have been waiting to buy this plot for fourteen long years. They badly wanted it because of its position adjacent to the present Mevlana mosque. Other plots were never considered, so for us executors there was no need to seek advice or to consider other plots. This is what they wanted! When we bought the plot, it still belonged to the development area in which prices cannot be raised (*Sanierungsgebiet*). But after the purchase the municipality started to change area designations. We think they did that on purpose to keep us from building (Chairman, local Milli Görüs branch, 15 November 2001).

While the legal case was still pending, a conflict over the preliminary notice (*Baubescheid*) arose, putting more strain on the relationship between the Kreuzberg planning authority and the Mosque Foundation. In June 2000, a year after the purchase, the Mosque Foundation delivered a first preliminary notice to the planning authority. The notice suggested keeping and renovating the old building and adding an extension. It also promised to keep within the building limits of 2,000m². The notice was received positively and a meeting was quickly arranged to settle the details. Once this had been done to everybody's satisfaction, the building authority urged the Mosque Foundation to finalise the construction plan before unification with the neighbouring borough of Friedrichshain would be realised. Friedrichshain is one of the former socialist East-Berlin boroughs and in Kreuzberg it was expected that the fusion would bring some marked political changes (and indeed, three months later, the incumbent Green Party had to make space for the 'Eastern Socialists').

After the green light had been given, the mosque construction could actually be carried out. But the Mosque Foundation did not make a start because it dawned upon the executors that the mosque community was not happy. According to most of its members, there seemed no sound relation between the total sum of money paid (1.5 million euros) and the actual size of the building project (only 2,000m²). But

because the head of their community also acted on the supervisory board for the Mosque Foundation, the community did not openly express its discontent. Nevertheless, the Mosque Foundation felt the pressure. In October 2000, in order to diminish the build-up of negative emotions, it drafted a new preliminary notice. In this second notice— more in line with the conceptions of the mosque community—the Mosque Foundation proposed the demolition of the old building and the erection of a new structure of no less than 3,500m².

Although applauded by the community, the new plan did not meet the expected agreement with the authorities. On the contrary, the planning authority accused the Mosque Foundation of deliberately neglecting all building prescriptions. According to the new notice, the fire escape could not be installed without access to the neighbouring yard, the new building was too high and its mass index was excessive in relation to the ground available. Besides, the new facade was criticised as being too elaborate and the minarets of excessive height. But the Mosque Foundation, now under steady pressure from the mosque community, refused to take back any of its proposed changes. The building authority in return refused its consent and, as a result, communication was once again stuck.

Nevertheless, over the winter, the Mosque Foundation presented a third preliminary notice. This time, it proposed to build a big shopping mall under the mosque structure. The sheer thought of this managed to bristle the authorities for good! Berlin building regulations clearly state that religious and commercial undertakings belong in different sections and should never be combined. The mere suggestion of mixing is considered an insult. In this case, it re-kindled the old suspicions against the Islamists. In the end, the Kreuzberg municipality made the accusation that, in reality, the Mosque Foundation only harboured plans for creating a parallel community. After this third preliminary notice, constructive contacts between the Mosque Foundation and the building authorities now definitely belong to the past.

In the months following this event, two opposing positions crystallised that both generalised and simplified what had actually happened. This was what the Mosque Foundation claimed:

The proposed combination of religion, culture and business is genuinely Islamic! A shopping mall could also guarantee us a stable income and help to pay off debts. It was a good plan, because it guaranteed durability for the mosque (Preacher at the Mevlana mosque, 5 November 2001).

But the building authority saw the whole affair in a different light:

A religious space in combination with cultural and social services can be easily envisaged. We are not against that. But a shopping mall belongs in a different department all together. It is against all existing regulations (Burgomaster of Kreuzberg, 20 November 2001).

The Muslim party was also aware of the fact that the city authorities had just given permission to a medical centre to construct 100 per cent of the mass index on a site situated directly opposite the old Mevlana mosque:

The same regulations are on this side of the street as on that side. If they got the permission, we can also have the permission. Those builders could prove they are needed. We can also prove we are needed. Our argument is that there are 40,000 Muslims around Kreuzberg—a group of inhabitants for whom no real mosque centre is available (the Muslim architect, 3 November 2001).

Upon being asked, the municipality refused to comment on the difference in treatment, thus feeding Muslim suspicion that those *Kuffir* were dishonest and discriminated against 'Islam'.

In February 2001, the conflict finally culminated in a local press scandal. The lawyer of the Mosque Foundation publicly claimed that Muslims in Kreuzberg were being discriminated against and accused the city authorities of trying to prevent the mosque from being built. The burgomaster took it personally. In the past he had defended the construction of the Mevlana mosque against all sorts of opposition, including that of his own political party, and as a result had been strongly attacked. However, he had stuck to his position—which, in Kreuzberg, he did not even share with his political friends—that a main mosque was badly needed and should therefore be realised:

We supported this plan exactly because a mosque is needed. We never cared to look into the Islamic organisation behind the Mosque Foundation, although they do have a bad reputation round here. 'As long as regulations are respected, we support the construction', I said. We also agreed that a new preliminary notice could be the solution—one which was able to keep the balance between the first and the second notice. But I have not heard anything from these people any more (Burgomaster of Kreuzberg, 20 November 2001).

Meanwhile, the Mosque Foundation tried to solve the problem of space and the square-metre limits through the purchase of a second plot, adjacent to the first one. Once this plot was obtained, it argued, the Mosque Foundation would surely be allowed to build the proposed 3,500 m². Luck seemed to be on its side, as the owner of the plot showed an interest in selling. But, once again, the Mosque Foundation refused to seek information from the municipality on its use-destination plan. It therefore came as a total surprise when it learned that the lot could not be used as a construction site.

Other problems remained unsolved as well. The shopping mall, badly needed by the mosque community to finance the construction, was not likely to pass regulations. On the other hand, the community changed its mind on a whole range of aspects that came under criticism from the building authority. In due course it withdrew the too-elaborate facade as not essential. It renounced the minarets, claiming that the call for prayer could very well take place indoors. It criticised the

Muslim architect for being too fancy. It even tried several times to contact non-Muslim architects. But the three conflict areas discussed so far—the purchase and its aftermath, the immoderate proportions of the second and third preliminary notices, and the recent media squabble—managed to scare most candidates off.

Money Problems

There still remains the problem of finance to be discussed. During the 1990s, the Mevlana mosque community had not been able to meet the rent payments any more. Finally, the owner of the apartment building in which the present prayer hall is still located, started a lawsuit to get rid of his indebted renter. This development added considerable pressure to the realisation of the new construction plans. When the purchase finally took place in 1999, the community was ready to collect fresh capital on a considerable scale. Many members were willing to invest their savings in a representative project that, after all, was likely to outlast them. After the clash between the Mosque Foundation and the Kreuzberg municipality, donations dwindled. As the Imam of the Mevlana mosque pointed out, members now wanted to see some affirmative action first, before they would decide to invest more capital. The Mosque Foundation thus found itself under a double strain. In order to attract more private capital, it had to create evidence through visible building activities. But negotiations to obtain the necessary building permission got stuck without a solution in sight. Meanwhile, bank interest payments were also mounting.

In this situation, an application for public money seemed to be the only way out. The Mosque Foundation therefore turned to a governmental sponsoring agency created to support small-scale local initiatives (*Quartiersmanagement*) and applied for 500,000 euros. The argument ran that the whole neighbourhood could benefit from a mosque centre with social services attached. But the sum it claimed appeared to be far too high for the *Quartiersmanagement* budget, which yearly receives exactly 500,000 euros—a sum that needs to be divided among a host of small local projects. Members of the *Quartiersmanagement* board even felt insulted by the excessive nature of the application.

Upon hearing that their application had been rejected, the Mosque Foundation, the community members, the Imam and the Milli Görüs officials could not understand why it had been turned down at all:

What we do is badly needed round here. We take care of our youth. We imbue people with morals and ethics. We teach them to live together. What more do they want? The government should be thankful for our work. (Head Imam of the Islamic Federation, 24 October 2001).

Here, then, another basic difference came into view. On the Muslim side, people felt that their efforts were belittled, and the importance of their work neglected. The impression once again fed the suspicion that, when all was said and done, the *Kuffir* only despised Muslims. On the governmental side, however, there was the acute

impression that the Muslim party acted with unacceptable brazenness on the grounds that it did not in the least consider that it might have a duty to integrate into the majority society.

And indeed, a new affair arose just in time to strengthen this scepticism. In May 2001, the Mosque Foundation managed to contract a non-Muslim architect for the development of an application in the sector of 'Ecological Building and Urban Integration' for one of the other Milli Görüs mosques in the Kreuzberg district. However when, in December 2001, the very first pre-application was refused on the grounds that the mosque in question did not show enough signs of integrating into the majority society, the Mosque Foundation rudely dropped this architect without payment. The incident strengthened the general suspicion that, in the eyes of Milli Görüs, living together meant 'Muslims only'.

In the course of 2001, while the conflict was still raging, the Mosque Foundation suddenly started to buy five more plots in the Kreuzberg area and beyond, announcing the construction of five more mosques. Surprise in the neighbourhood! What had happened? Five more mosque communities—all of them monitored by the Islamic Federation of Berlin and sympathising with Milli Görüs—finally decided to invest in something more permanent. To them, the Mevlana mosque was a trend-setter and the impressive drawings of the projected mosque had fuelled many fantasies. In each single community, a board had gone through its own motions of developing plans for the future and in the end the members had agreed to dedicate their share of religious taxes (*Zakat*) to the building of their own permanent prayer-hall. Wherever enough members had been found willing to donate their savings, the community turned to the Mosque Foundation with a request for help. In short, two years after the Mevlana community had started its fight against the windmills of German bureaucracy, five more communities were ready to take up the same cause.

Upon hearing about the Mosque Foundations' recent purchases, both the *Quartiersmanagement* and the municipality saw their suspicions acknowledged. This time, they misinterpreted the fact that the Mosque Foundation seemed fluid enough to purchase other plots, turning a blind eye to the reality that behind this body stood a host of individual communities with their own decision patterns. In fact, nobody seemed to possess any knowledge of the internal mechanisms of Muslim community decision-making in general. Instead, the press blandly suggested that the Mosque Foundation retained other, illicit, sources of income. The word 'oil money' crystallised and was accepted as an explanation without much scrutiny.

In sum, the three conflict areas discussed earlier in this paper appeared to be flanked by several more conflicts over money. In every one of these conflicts, the Mosque Foundation and, through this body, the IFB and its partner Milli Görüs, came out as the losing party. It is therefore worthwhile to take note of the fact that, over recent years, the Mosque Foundation has experienced a steady loss of face, both in front of society at large and, more serious still, in the eyes of its own mosque

communities. The general misinterpretation of the Muslim communities' willingness to spend large sums of money on a noteworthy religious edifice may serve as an example. All this has manoeuvred the Mosque Foundation into an attitude of furious defence. Its main reaction, apart from rousing the media against the burgomaster, exhausted itself in a string of law cases against all institutions and individuals frustrating its aims. Needless to say, these tactics nullified the Islamic Federations' chances for communication and eventual co-operation.

Continuation of the Conflict after 9/11

In the aftermath of 11 September, the German government heightened its already considerable pressure on Milli Görüs. The organisation came under heavy surveillance, members were barred from political party membership and denied German citizenship because they were said to be incapable of possessing any loyalty to the German constitution. In response, both within the Milli Görüs organisation at large and within the mosque communities of its local partners like the Islamic Federation of Berlin, internal pressure rose to an unbearable degree.

One is tempted to think that, in the ensuing confusion, the IFB lost its head. After 30 years of close co-operation, it suddenly decided to claim independence from its partner Milli Görüs. Both partners denied any relationship whatsoever. In order to push this view through, the lawyer of the Mosque Foundation imposed a ban on anybody daring to say the contrary. People of the press, civil servants and also we, as researchers, were threatened with legal action the moment anyone uttered a different view in public. And by the middle of 2002, at least 150 private individuals and institutions had been challenged to defend their opinions in court. This initially puzzling behaviour had a very good reason indeed. As soon as the liaison between the two organisations could be officially established, or so the Islamic Federation feared, this organisation could lose its right to give religious instruction in state schools (Jonker 2001a; 2001b).

By Way of Conclusion

The conflict over the building of a mosque in Berlin-Kreuzberg, of which only the main phases have been described here, left little room for contentment. At first, the purchase of the plot after a waiting period of almost 15 years must have caused satisfaction on the part of the mosque community. Once it discovered that it had been cheated, the initial sentiment was quickly spoilt. The reaction following this discovery was based on the much older sentiment of enmity towards the majority society. A second moment of contentment must have been felt when the first preliminary notice was well received and both parties agreed to start proceedings as quickly as possible. This time, good feelings were spoilt by the inability of the Mosque Foundation to mediate between legal conditions and the needs of the community.

Again, the reaction of the Muslim side became wrapped up in the much older suspicion of being discriminated against.

Despite the goodwill of some of the actors, general suspicion and collective stereotypes about 'the Other', views that have not been verified, kept dominating the conflict. Both parties definitely lacked accurate knowledge on the internal structures, the inner necessities and the resulting outlook of their conflict partner. This culminated in a series of misunderstandings followed by actions that managed to infuriate the other party even further. Finally, the curve of anger and distrust was topped by the events of 11 September. After this date, as happened in other countries of the EU as well, the German government heightened its surveillance of, and pressure on, Muslim organisations, especially those with an Islamist tinge.

Several reasons help to explain this development. I started out this paper with the remark that Germany was not structurally prepared for, nor publicly aware of, a Muslim population within its borders. Until 2000, the German parliament was not aware of the religious dimension of the new citizens and even German scholarship has hardly found proper ways yet to map and analyse the presence of this new religious minority. Over the past 30–40 years, the Muslim migrant population has gone largely unacknowledged as a part of German society, while suspicion of its culture and motives grew.

On the side of the Muslim partner in the conflict and debate, historical conditions also set the scene for its seemingly puzzling behaviour. In the 1970s, Milli Görüs made a name for itself as a religious protest movement with political aspirations, attracting the poorest and lowest social strata of Turkish society and Turkish migrants. Migration transported the intra-Turkish conflict over religious self-determination to Germany. In the district of Kreuzberg, also called 'Little Istanbul', Muslim communities backed up by Milli Görüs were soon publicly stamped as 'the devil', socially ostracised and politically avoided. The ranks of local Milli Görüs authority, on the other hand, were composed of self-made men with very little education or knowledge of the German language. Still today, their knowledge of German society depends on gatekeepers—younger men who select the information they themselves deem necessary. As a result of these two factors, any encounter with the outside world that remained incomprehensible or was judged unfriendly was dubbed as discrimination. The organisation soon wrapped itself in a simple worldview, one in which 'the unbelievers' invariably despise and discriminate against the Muslim *umma*.

It remains to be seen whether the conflict described on these pages is exceptional compared to the way other Muslim communities will mediate building conflicts. The Islamic Federation of Berlin monitors a total of 12 mosques only. The city, however, hosts a total of 82 Muslim prayer-halls, as yet hidden from sight. Taking this into account, it can reasonably be expected that other building initiatives will also raise claims in the near future. The contributions of my fellow-authors in this special issue meanwhile indicate that the Kreuzberg conflict is part of a larger European struggle

with the new Muslim presence. The institutionalisation of Islam in Western Europe, in which the visibility of this religion plays a major part, is going through a difficult phase.

Notes

- [1] According to unpublished documents in the *Ahmadiyya Jamaat* archive in Berlin.
- [2] Both organisations originally were Nakshibendi reactions to the Turkish forced modernisation in the 1920s. The Islam Kültür Merkezi, also called Süleymanci, opted for passive—non-political—resistance through the pious observance of *Shari'a* law. In the 1950s it became known for the refusal of its male members to wear Western hats. The organisation was repeatedly forbidden in Turkey. Migration to Europe, Germany especially, offered it a chance to institutionalise. The hierarchical order-like community specialises in teaching *Quran* and rules of ethics (*Ahlak*) to the young generation (Jonker 2002: 179–203). Contrary to the Süleymanci, the Islamic Community of Milli Görüs ('The Right View') from the very start pursued political aims. Obeisance to *Shari'a* law for this organisation meant the realisation of a *Shari'a*-ruled state on Turkish soil. Efforts to build a political party during the 1970s and 1980s were invariably thwarted by the Turkish military. In 1996, the first 'democratic turn' allowed for a short government participation. After a dramatic split in which the 'progressive democrats' left the 'conservative forces' behind, the new AKP party managed to win the elections in 2001 (Seufert 1997, 2002). For Milli Görüs, too, the 1960s migration to Europe offered a possibility to stabilise and grow. But once in Europe, its members quickly realised that they should build explicit religious communities with no political involvement if they wanted to become acknowledged. This institutional expectation has proved a main difficulty. Milli Görüs considers political involvement as belonging to Islam. In Germany, especially, this causes distrust and friction.
- [3] Between October 2001 and January 2002, interviews were made in Berlin with Milli Görüs officials, the Head Imam of the Islamic Federation, the preacher of the Mevlana mosque, both the architect and the lawyer of the Mosque Foundation, and the burgomaster of Kreuzberg. In addition, several interested architects and politicians working in the Kreuzberg borough were asked their opinion on the mosque conflict.

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