Muslims in Austria, in their homelands, and living together in the new Europe.

Photographs by Lukas Maximilian Hüller
The cultural diversity of Europe is one of the strengths of our continent. However, at the same time it is a challenge for politics to safeguard a European life model of cultural diversity based on such indispensable values as democracy and the rule of law in a pro-active and integrative manner. In order to present the diversity, the traditions and the integration of the Muslim population in Austria, the Lighthouse Centre for Culture and Education in cooperation with the Austrian Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs has prepared an exhibition illustrating the life of Muslims in Austria today.

A dialogue among cultures is indispensable for Europe and starts “in our own home”. This dialogue has to be based on a broad approach and should comprise the whole social spectrum. The aim is to see also differences as an enrichment, which makes knowledge of the religion and culture of the dialogue partner a necessary precondition. This dialogue among cultures and religions will be one of the most important educational tasks of the next decades. Austria therefore supports the idea that the year 2008 should be declared European Year of Intercultural Dialogue by the European Union.

In Austria, the dialogue with Islam has a long tradition, which was why Islam was awarded the status of a recognised religious community as early as 1912. In June 2003 a Conference of European Imams was organised, which was the framework for the “Graz Declaration” on the safeguarding of Islamic identity in Europe and the recognition of pluralism and democracy. The international conference “Islam in a Pluralistic World” (Vienna, November 2005) and a follow-up conference of European Imams at the initiative of the Islamic Religious Community and the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs (Vienna, April 2006) are examples of the continuous and concrete efforts to which my country feels committed. Austria also supports the Alexandria-based Anna-Lindh Foundation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, which, in a spirit of dialogue between cultures, promotes sustainable intercultural projects throughout the Mediterranean region.

The exhibition “180 Degrees East and West – Muslims in Austria” shows the participation of Austrian Muslims in society and public life and will be presented from spring 2006 onwards in Jerusalem, Cairo, Istanbul, London, Paris and other cities. It is another important building block in the dialogue with Muslims in Austria and in Europe, as well as between Europe and the Islamic world.

Ursula Plassnik
Dejan Petrovic came up with the concept for this project quite some time ago. But it was not until he accidentally came across Lukas Maximilian Hüller’s rotation photographs that he felt confident that he had the right person to carry it out. After explaining his idea to Lukas a partnership was born.

For Dejan, the idea for the project started with a simple question: Why do we only read and hear negative comments about the co-existence of Austrians and people of other cultural backgrounds? Having left his native Novi Sad for Austria shortly before the NATO bombardment, he himself had a lot of positive experiences as a foreigner in Austria. He was challenged to capture positive experiences, such as his, and make them accessible to the public.

The political events of the past years led, and still lead, to an increasingly more intense clash of cultures. Despite Austria’s vast geographical distance from the centers of the current clashes, even here, in Austria, co-existence of different cultures has become more difficult. Despite the fact that prejudices and racism have permeated every aspect of our lives, in Austria the sense of community still exists. Attention needs to be shifted from the negative aspects of our society to the positive ones. Dejan’s desire to contribute to this shift led him to make this photo collection and book.

To Dejan, Lukas’ photographs conveyed strong sensitivity and expressiveness, the will and also the talent, to show more than just the obvious and the visible. His images display an intellectual world, without which this project wouldn’t have been possible.

The use of rotation photography, which allows an angle of up to 360 degrees, and thus the possibility of a view in all directions, plays an important part. Things that the human eye usually cannot perceive at one glance can be captured in a single picture. This inclusion of the surrounding, the room in which a person is present, makes it possible to convey atmosphere. It gives you the feeling of not just looking at a short moment – captured in the second the shutter release of the camera was pressed – but to gain deeper insight – the anonymity seems to be shed this way. This is exactly what Dejan was looking for in order to realize his idea.

Dejan and Lukas found great interest for the project from the Cultural Department of the Foreign Ministry. To avoid superficiality and to focus on the important problematic nature of topicality, the decision was made to limit the project to the Muslim community in Austria.

How and where do Muslims live in Austria? What does their daily life look like? How do they practice their religion? In order to get answers to these questions as well as to gain insight into the life of the more than 300,000 Muslims living in Austria today, a great deal of support was necessary. The Islamic Center, the Islamic Community, ATIB, and the Egyptian and Turkish Embassies were all very open-minded about the project. It is only through their support that contacts in both Austria and other countries could be established and the project could be carried out. Lukas and Dejan would soon find out, however,
that the openness shown towards them in Austria was not a matter of course.

Shortly after the beginning of the project it became clear to Dejan and Lukas that they also wanted to visit some of the countries where most Muslims living in Austria today come from. How do their lives here in Austria compare to their homelands? Through the support of Muslims living in Austria and Austrian foreign agencies they were given contacts in Cairo and Istanbul. In order to get a full feeling for life in these countries meetings were arranged with people from all levels of society – from manual laborers to intellectuals and religious thinkers. The results of these meetings were not only photographs, but also interviews and a film.

In the many conversations Lukas had with his subjects a sentiment that was frequently repeated was the high regard within the Muslim community for Austria. It is viewed as a country where one can practice one’s religion freely, a country where a Muslim can lead a good life – a sentiment not always invoked for other European countries.

Lukas and Dejan also embarked on trips to Paris and London; however, these trips are only a first glance within the framework of the present project. It was only in the course of their travels that Lukas and Dejan really began to grasp the explosive nature of the subject. Their trip to London took place shortly after the underground attacks. Because of overstraining by the media [or in other words: the media barrage] and fear of fabricated press coverage within the Muslim community, it was almost impossible to meet people. In vain did they look in London for the wide-open doors they had found in Austria, Cairo and Istanbul. The fear was simply too much.

Pictures alone can’t say everything

Of course, this project conveys a European view, which is certainly different from the Muslim one. Lukas and Dejan aim to counter this by the confrontation of text and image. The pictures shouldn’t stand on their own – texts from literary and historical works, excerpts from interviews and everyday stories are juxtaposed with the photos; they emphasize or contradict, complement or combine what is shown, creating a lively dialogue.

I had the opportunity to follow the development of this project from its genesis in all-night conversations, Dejan and Lukas told me about their impressions and experiences, the personalities they have met while working on this project, and also about prejudices they have encountered over and over again. It was clear to them that it was impossible to give a comprehensive general account of the problem. Instead this project should be understood as a platform, as a stimulus, to concern oneself with the actual life of Muslims (not only) in Austria, to get to know and understand or simply accept their culture and religion. This is a notion which conveys deep hope and should be supported by every means.

Anna Stuhlpfarrer, Curator
Today, some 335,000 Muslims from different parts of the world live in Austria. The great majority of the Muslim population is of Turkish origin (134,210); the second largest group comes from Bosnia and Herzegovina (96,210). Muslims from other countries (Iran, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, India, etc.) constitute a group of approximately 20,000 to 30,000 people. The largest group of Muslims in Austria, comprising 85 to 90%, is Sunni; ca. 10 to 15% are Shiites, including the Iranian, Alevite and part of the Kurdish minority. Of course, the total number of Muslims also includes Austrian citizens: those who received an Austrian passport after their immigration as well as Austrian citizens who have converted to Islam.

If we speak of Muslims in Austria, we do not necessarily mean the “Islamic community.” The great variety of Muslims with regard to their national and ethnic origins, and their different political and social standing in their home country or in Austria, show that people of the most diverse identities live here: their belonging to Islam or their “Muslim identity” is not a priority to everyone who (statistically) belongs to the Muslim population. The degree of “religious belonging” or “religious organization” cannot be documented statistically either. As a rough estimate, only about 10% of the Muslims are “organized,” i.e., members of an Islamic organization in one way or another. Information gathered by the mosque organizations does not refer to “members” in the strict sense (registration, membership fees), but often to the potential of people who come to Friday prayers or on high Islamic holidays. From that, however, it is impossible to draw conclusions about how deeply the visitors are connected with the respective mosque organization, be that through ideological approval or religious and social involvement.

It is thus possible to “document” to some extent the relatively low potential of “organized Muslims,” but not the great majority of people who do not take advantage of the services rendered by mosque organizations: either because they are not religious and do not identify themselves with the services of Muslim organizations and mosques, or because they are involved in the large number of cultural and political organizations that do not place special emphasis on Muslim identity. A relatively large but statistically unrecorded group are the Alevites, for example, who – although Muslim – do not consider themselves to be a religious community but rather a cultural one. Consequently, if we speak of the Muslim or Islamic Community in Austria, this includes all statistically recorded Muslims, for whom the Islamic Community of Austria formally acts as a public organization. It does not mean, however, that all Muslims have a feeling of belonging to the Islamic Community or are members or involved in its activities. In the following passage the structures of the Islamic Community of Austria are introduced:

The Status of Islam in Austria
An Autochthonous Religion for Immigrant Muslims

The legal status of Muslims in Austria is unique within the European Union. The present organizational structures and ethnic-religious composition of Muslim communities are the result of the immigration of Muslim workers in the 1960s and 1970s, the majority of whom came from former Yugoslavia and Turkey. However, the status of Islam in Austria as a legally established denomination is not the result of immigration but rather the product of Austria’s historical relations with the Balkans. Following the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908, Islam was legally acknowledged as a denomination, along with its rights and privileges. The appropriate Islam law of July 15, 1912, in turn, was the prerequisite for the establishment of the Islamic Religious Community of Austria (IGGiÖ). The first significant step toward the establishment of the Islamic Religious Community was taken in 1964 with the creation of the Muslim Social Service (MSD) by Muslims from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Muslim Social Service, or rather its founders, saw themselves embedded in a Muslim tradition with a long history in Austria and in the Balkans, to which they felt an obligation, historically, politically and “theologically” as well. The publication that was in circulation at the time, “Der gerade Weg” (“The Straight Way”), was published in three languages (German, Bosnian and Turkish) and argued for the attainment of the status of
Islam as a body incorporated under public law. Thus Austria is the only country within the European Union with a legally established, autochthonous Islam.

Pluralism in the Muslim Community and Central Representation

With the establishment of the Islamic Religious Community of Austria (IGGiÖ) as a body incorporated under public law in 1979, a legal representation to the Austrian state was created for the Muslims living in Austria, who today number 335,000. While in 1912 only the Hanafit school of thought (to which Muslims from Bosnia and Herzegovina essentially belong) was acknowledged, in 1979 all Sunnite schools of thought and Shiite groupings (Twelver Shi’a, Zaidites, Ibadites) were recognized. In addition, the Turkish-Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Cooperation in Austria (Avusturya Türk İslam Kültür ve Sosyal Yardımlasma Birliği, short: ATIB) has formally represented the largest group of Muslims, those of Turkish origin, since 1990. Founded on the basis of the organizational statute, it is a semi-state-representation of the Turkish Committee for Religious Affairs (Diyanet), which has been dealing with religious issues of Muslims from Turkey since the 1970s. Parallel to this, Muslims who immigrated to Austria organized themselves in principle on the basis of the organizational statute (mosque organizations), just like in other states. These organizations and associations reflect the different ethno-religious and ideological trends of Islam. Neither ATIB nor the numerous mosque organizations or their umbrella organizations can – according to the statute of the IGGiÖ – be “members” of the Islamic Religious Community. Although all Muslims in Austria are “members of the Islamic Religious Community” in the eyes of the law and can take advantage of its services and facilities, only “registered members,” who pay a membership fee, have the right to vote and stand for election to the committees of the IGGiÖ. Even if the comprehensive representation claims of the IGGiÖ in all religious issues have not always been unchallenged – not least because of the plurality of the Islamic community (with regard to countries of origin, languages, cultural and religious traditions, etc.) – the majority of the organizations nonetheless actively participate in the IGGiÖ or have come to terms with the situation.

Since the beginning of labor migration the numerous mosque organizations assumed important social functions: the provision of religious infrastructure (prayer rooms, materials), a social environment for leisure activities (teahouses, TV rooms, canteens, specialist grocery shops, etc.) and the support of the unity and further religious education of the Muslim community (imams as praying men and
spiritual leaders and in the role of “mediators” in conflict situations, Koran courses, German courses, women’s circles, etc.). In recent years, organizations have made greater efforts, not only to “support” their clientele socially and religiously, but also to place special emphasis on social and socio-political affairs in their work. With enhanced outer and inner “target-group policies” (concentration on the demands of special groups such as women, youth, students, etc.) and professionalism, the mosque organizations are trying to increase their significance to Muslims far beyond the sphere of leisure activities.

Because of its legal appointment, however, the IGGiÖ reserves the right to deal with central aspects in the Muslim community. These include the examination and recognition of the qualifications of Islamic religion teachers at public schools as well as of imams in mosque organizations. About 200 Muslim religion teachers currently teach Islamic religious classes (introduced in the school year 1982/83) to some 40,000 children. The teachers’ salaries are paid by the Austrian state. The Islamic Pedagogical Academy (IRPA), founded by the IGGiÖ, opened its doors in 1998. Under public law, the IRPA is a private school and educational institution for religion teachers. It was basically founded out of the practical necessity of training qualified and pedagogically well-versed Islamic religion teachers, who, above all, have a command of the German language. The public relations work and services of the IGGiÖ were increasingly expanded and professionalized in the 1990s; thus the central position of the IGGiÖ seems to have been brought to the greater notice of Muslims in Austria as well as the general public.

Concrete Legal Issues and Problems for Muslims in Austria

In principle Islam enjoys “inner autonomy” due to its legal status, i.e., as long as there is no infringement of Austrian laws, the state has no right to “interfere” in the religious affairs of the Islamic community. In daily life, however, there are spheres that require regulation from the view of one or the other party, because they may develop into “conflict zones.” This is because not only legal regulations, but also the “(religious) rhythm of life” of both non-Muslims and Muslims can diverge.

The most important issues in the routine daily life of Muslims in Austria include ritual slaughter (slaughter according to Islamic rites), the wearing of headscarves and swimming lessons for Muslim girls, family-law issues, regulations for holidays and the performance of religious duties as well as Islamic funeral rules. There are no explicit legal regulations for any of these issues, but it appears that the solutions have been satisfying for both sides so far.
has been regulated Austria-wide by the new animal rights law that took effect on January 1, 2005. Previously it was regulated only in certain provinces. According to law, “Animals have to be effectively anesthetized after the opening of the blood vessels.” The Hanafit school of thought also allows the consumption of meat that has been slaughtered by followers of the “book religions” (“Ehlü’l-kitap”), in other words Jews and Christians.

With regard to the question of wearing headscarves at school, the basic constitutional right of religious freedom (and thus also “freedom of clothing”) juxtaposes the recognition of Islam as a religious community with individual school regulations prohibiting the wearing of headgear in class. Muslim women who insist on obeying religious clothing rules must nevertheless be granted unlimited access to classes. Although regulations regarding polygamy have raised numerous questions in the history of the Islamic Religious Community, investigation by the authority for educational and cultural affairs has shown conformity with Austrian regulations. Regarding the granting of exemptions for the performance of Islamic religious duties (for example, an exemption for Friday prayers) and for Islamic holidays, Austrian legislation does not provide any special regulations. The performance of religious duties can thus take place only in agreement between employer and employee. With regard to schools, however, an initiative of the IGGiÖ resulted in an agreement that school inspectors are to be informed annually of Islamic holidays and that pupils are allowed to stay away from lessons on these days. There are legal regulations with regard to the religious education of children (including instruction in Islam) and for Muslims conscripted into military service (provision for the observance of food regulations, Islamic religious workers).

Islamic cemeteries are a further issue. The preparations for funerals (ritual ablution by an imam or close relative) have to follow certain rules, and the graves have to be oriented in the direction of Mecca. The requirements of the Muslim community are met with the combined capacity of the Islamic graveyard at Vienna’s central cemetery, Zentralfriedhof, which does not fully meet the (capacity) needs of the Muslim community, and the new cemetery site in Vienna’s Liesing district.

Conclusion
Islam is legally established in Austria, and the Muslim community has a legal representation to the state. Anchored in the historical context at the beginning of the last century, the statutory basis and thus the equality of Islam to other legally acknowledged religious communities have clearly been successful in meeting the demands of modern labor migration and immigration of Muslims. Not all of the problems accompanying migration, integration and inter-religious communication can be solved in this way, but nonetheless the situation in Austria clearly provides advantages and opportunities for both sides: the state and the religious community have a clear basis for dialogue, and a number of issues can be turned into “political issues” or subjected to populist abuse only with difficulty because they are clearly defined under the constitution. Future challenges include improving the integration of Muslims into the existing structures of the Islamic community as well as into the political, economic, cultural and social life of Austria in general. Another matter of major significance is to examine Islam with regards to its content and how it is establishing and redefining itself in Europe as “European Islam.” Finally greater attention must be paid to the wide variety of identities of religious and non-religious people from Muslim countries. All this goes far beyond the question of “dialogue”: post-industrial, multi-cultural and secular societies must confront the issue of solving problems together.

Notes
(1) Statistics Austria: Census 2001
(2) Statistics Austria: Census 2001
(3) According to the Vienna-based Cultural Organization of Alevites in Vienna (“Vienna Alevi Kültür Birlği”) up to 17,000 Alevites live in the Austrian capital between 2,000 and 3,000 of them are in contact with the organization.
On Being Afraid of Strangers and Strangeness

That religions still, or once again, most clearly indicate the borderlines between the own and the other, is a scandal that one has not yet grown tired of staging. As though it would help people if we took their holy books at their word instead of having their poetic power intoxicate us. Because what does it mean to take them at their word? What does it mean to strip them of their salutary ambiguity, which they share with poetry, and send them to the people naked? The truth, as the Gnostics say, has always come into the world fully clad. If that had not been the case, theology would have never existed. Isn’t it rather that part of the responsibilities and involvements rests in all periods, and in all religious communities? That each epoch has decided on the literal accuracy of the religious text anew? And that there has also always been the possibility to spiritually interpret the universal demand, and not claim it with fire and sword? In a word, to reach for the ceiling for the sake of peace without throwing it over everyone like a net? It seems to be a characteristic of human behavior not to be particularly consistent in dealing with the holy books. For example: Neo-Muslims (young female Muslims who wear the headscarf with awareness and of their own accord) on the one hand take the duty to cover head and body literally (though this precept of Islam theology can have a variety of different interpretations). On the other hand, they allow themselves rather extensive room to move when it comes to such hairy passages of the Qur’an as the one saying that a man occupies a level a step above a woman, and that he is allowed to marry up to four women, provided he is capable of treating them all equally. They state that the step above can only refer to the responsibility a man has for his family, and as for polygamy they claim that only the Prophet would have been capable of treating all his wives equally. In real life, however, such cases would not exist, and thus one need not worry about it. And as far as we are concerned, one can quite reasonably refer to the fact of how little concretely and extremely symbolically the Christian commandment to love one’s neighbor, not to mention to love one’s enemy, has been handled in different times.
In this light, I consider the dialogue between the great religions as meaningful only if it does not take place on the level of mutual off-setting of commandments and bans, i.e. on taking the holy books literally, which despite the best of intentions mostly presents itself as a self-opinionated interpretation, but on a level one step higher: the level of mysticism. As difficult as it is to express and convey mystic experiences, what is conveyed forms the most important common denominator of all great religions, including their smaller branches. Everything else quickly leads to politics and should also be declared and treated as such.

Since I am neither a Neo-Muslim nor a practicing Christian, and thus have no interest in the problems of the position of certain religious communities within a social context, I owe you an explanation of why I have been bothering you for quite some time now with the state of headscarf-wearing Muslims. It is quite simply: because they exist. They do not only exist in the Islamic world, but next door, in Austria, in Germany, in Europe. And most of them have become naturalized. Thus they are also an Austrian, an European problem, if one really wants to regard them as a problem rather than a foreign but by now native element of the population.

And I think that the composition of the population of a country should be reflected in public life, the social sciences and in literature as well. Integration is possible only if a society is open enough to allow those who are being integrated – provided they have the appropriate qualification, of course – access to all positions offered by society. If such an offer seems at least somewhat realistic, the incentive to integrate, and thus the will to obey the prevailing rules, increases. A precondition for integration being an effort worth striving for is also that one be perceived in accordance with one’s character, and that means, not in general terms or stereotyped, but at a somewhat higher resolution.
Karim, son of an Austrian mother and an Egyptian father, Mosque in Floridsdorf, Vienna, May 2005
COMPLETE DEVOTION

I wander through life without knowing if I walk the right path.

If I rail at fate, second after second, and write it down, I feel the pain rising inside me, when I’m thinking of secularizing myself.

It feels as though I am sitting an exam, while God’s watching eyes are reflected in the worldly temptations.

Day after day, He burdens me with questions, whose weight is almost impossible to carry. The answers seem so close, but I feel too drawn to the worldly life to be able to find them.

In deep belief I find the necessary strength to resist the worldly. But I have to be honest: the last step and complete devotion remain denied to me.

In prayer, I try to resist earthly life, but fail.

I am supposed to imagine that I am standing before my Creator. But show me how! No matter how I try with all my strength, I cannot reach this stage of complete meditation.

May God forgive me!

Karim Saad
Tarek in his favourite Vienna Coffeehouse Sperl, Vienna, October 2005
They said
“all men are created equal,”
and we fell in the trap
through no fault but our own:
We should have asked them
just who they meant by “men.”

Tarek Eltayeb, Vienna, April 19th, 2004
“Allah has condemned khamr (alcohol) and the one who produces it, the one who drinks it, the one who brings it, the one who carries it, the one for whom it is carried, the one who sells it, the one who profits from the sale, the one who buys it and the one for whom it is bought” (authentic tradition).
The centuries-old hamam tradition emerged in the time of the Ottoman Empire and has its origins in central Anatolia and Istanbul.

The Arabic word “hamam” means “to warm, bathe” and suggests relaxation, well-being and cleanliness. This method of physical and mental cleaning enjoyed great popularity among the Ottomans. The central elements of this bathing ceremony are water and warmth. “For water to clean it must flow”, says a Turkish tradition. Thus water is poured over the body over and over again from a water bowl (tas). The warmth is absorbed from the heated floor, walls, steam and the marble table (göbektasi), which forms the heart of the hamam.
“Ninety percent of the Senegalese population is Muslim, but Senegal is a country where Muslims and Christians have been living together from time immemorial. The Islam we know in Senegal is an extremely open Islam, a tolerant Islam. Since I have been living in Europe, I have noticed that our Islam, the Islam typical of Africa, differs from the Islam generally described by the occidental press and media: a violent, terrorizing Islam. In other words, we do not know this kind of Islam, and that is also the reason why I have always felt and described myself as a modern Muslim: a Muslim capable of harmony between my Islamic belief – which is a conviction, a state of mind – and the values of modernity. And if you really want to fulfill yourself in Europe, it is necessary to have an absolutely open “spirit” (French: esprit). You can’t be a rigidly orthodox Muslim, but have to be someone who says: I want to live my religious Islamic belief in Europe, but without slamming the door in the face of other European influences. Consequently, I consider my Islam to be an absolutely tolerant Islam, which is entirely capable of existing alongside other religions without any problems.”

“Being Muslim is something completely personal, inner thoughts and feelings, an exclusively intimate belief, and in this respect the fact of drinking alcohol raises no questions and creates no problems.”

Part of an interview with Bussoo Abdourahmane, July 2005
AFRICAN WAY ...
AFRIKANISCHER WEG...
VOIE AFRICAINE...

Busso Abdourahmane – philosopher and social worker, Kulturlokal Treibhaus, Innsbruck, July 2005
ATIB - Turkish Islamic Union for Cultural and Social Cooperation in Austria
ATIB - Türkisch Islamische Union für kulturelle und soziale Zusammenarbeit in Österreich
ATIB - Union Islamique Turque pour la coopération culturelle et sociale en Autriche
“Islam is an entirety, but the belief of humans differs – even in Christianity.”

“Of course we must not forget Turkey’s conception of Islam and have to take into account that this conception is much more highly developed than that of other Islamic countries.”

“The biggest problem our community in Austria faces is the lack of communication and mutual understanding – we have failed to get to know one another and that leads to problems.”

Part of an interview with Harun Özdemirici, August 2005
THE SUNRISE MAN
MANN DES SONNENAUFGANGS
L’HOMME DE L’AUBE
Austro-Turkish Students, Ahmet Genc, Birkan Simsek and Akin Pascali, members of the Islamic Youth Organization in Austria, University of Innsbruck, May 2005

Mehmet Genc (right), father of Ahmet (above) with a Turkish colleague in front of textile factory in Feldkirch, May 2005
“Each generation in a foreign country, be that Turks, Austrians, Muslims or Christians, becomes more open-minded about culture, and thus more progressive.”
Michael Häupl, Mayor of Vienna, with leaders of the Islamic Religious Community,
Ceremony, "25 Years of the Islamic Religious Community in Austria," Vienna City Hall, December 2005
All speakers agreed that a ceremony like this with the participation of all the forces of society would not be possible in any other European city. In his welcoming speech, Anas Schakfeh, president of the Islamic Religious Community, emphasized the special Austrian way of dealing with almost 340,000 Islamic inhabitants. On the one hand, equal rights have largely been established in the 25 years since the official recognition of the Islamic religious community in Austria. On the other hand, there have been “unparalleled acts of solidarity with the Muslims in Austria,” especially following the events of September 11, 2001.

“They are not guests in this country, they are not just merely tolerated, they are a part of Austrian society.”

Vienna’s Mayor Michael Häupl on the Islamic Religious Community.
Brunnenmarkt, Vienna’s 16th district, May 2004

Fish market, Alexandria, September 2005
DR. YÜKSEL YÜCEL
Born in Istanbul
Specialist at the University of Vienna, Department of Gynecology (Obstetrics and Gynecology) for the past nine years

DR. ÖMER SENBAKLAVIOĞLU
Born in Istanbul
In Austria for 17 years, assistant medical director of the Department of Cardiothoracic Surgery, Klagenfurt for the past twelve years
In the Austrian military, soldiers who are strict Muslims are deployed within the Vienna Military Headquarters. This makes it easier to take organizational measures such as pork-free food and the observance of prayer times. Thus we can respond better to the daily work routine and the religious duties of comrades of Muslim belief. By completely integrating them into all areas of responsibility within the Austrian military, we practice not only proverbial military comradeship, but promote also the understanding for other denominations.

Vienna Military Headquarters / Infoteam
I AM FROM AUSTRIA

Turkish student and snowboarder Yavuz Kurtulus, Stubaier Gletscher, Tyrol, June 2005

... THEN WE ARE ALL THE SAME...
... DANN SIND WIR ALLE GLEICH...
... PUIS NOUS SOMMES TOUS ÉGXAUX...

Bosnian Muslim cemetery, Amras in Tyrol, July 2005
TYROLEAN VOICES
TIROLER STIMMEN
VOIX TYROLIENNES

From right to left: Cömert (Turkish), Mamadou (Ivory Coast, imam), Efendi (Austrian of Kurdish descent), Bussoo (Senegalese), Integration house’s backyard with the only minaret in Tyrol to date, Innsbruck, July 2005

WORDS OF GOD
GOTTES WORTE
PAROLES DE DIEU

Samir Redzepovic – imam teaching at a koran school for children, Bosnian Mosque, Innsbruck, May 2005
“Things should come from the bottom of one’s heart; one has to be convinced and understand them – it is pointless to do things one doesn’t stand by and believe in…

…I educate my children in this way, but it is up to them where they finally end up…

…Each religion has its orders and rules, but what you do or observe is finally up to you – there is me and my relationship to God, things that I do or don’t do – in Islam I found inner peace.”

Part of an interview with Maria El Ghoubashy, September 2005
According to the Christian doctrine, the woman is responsible for the suffering of mankind because she tempted Adam to eat the apple. In Islamic view, the very opposite is true. Adam alone bears responsibility because he let himself be deceived. And it was he who could not withstand the temptation to eat from the tree of knowledge.

Muhammad Al-Ghasali, Egyptian scholar, on the role of women and tolerance in the Islamic world.
“We have to define the borders, the lines, so to speak, between what our tolerance still allows on the one hand, and what can be legitimately demanded by people of another religion who live here, on the other hand. The canon of what needs to be done is broader: It extends from the knowledge, and the enlightenment on both sides about each other, to the training of Islamic theologians. Why does a theologian, who wants to head an organization in a European community, have to study in Turkey or Damascus or Saudi Arabia or Egypt or Morocco? After all, it is here that he has to cope with believers. He is not supposed to create a Moroccan Islam here. In addition, the following question arises: to what extent can this Islam actually be reformed in order to be practiced in a secular society, which is increasingly being rejected by the Islamic world?”

Prof. Steinbach, Orient Institute Hamburg
The Image of God

When I was young and green they used to frighten me with talk of how God would punish those who slipped from His service. God's compassion, however, was hardly ever mentioned. They said that God lives in the sky. They told me that He sees all things yet cannot Himself be seen. That didn't stop me from trying, though.

At first, I thought my father must be God, for he was called “lord” of the family. Moreover, he was a giant to one as small as I was, and had a rough and booming voice. Yet since he was good to us and always treated us with kindness, I stopped associating him with God.

Then there was the Imam from our Koran school, who terrorized us and ruthlessly beat us with his cane in the house of God. It was said that he was God's servant in that house, and so I imagined Him to be a rather harsh lord.

The Imam was succeeded by a cruel primary teacher who muddled my image of God by making Him a woman. For a while, she had me seeing a female God. The image continued to vary from one person to another depending on their power until it finally arrived at Gamal Abdel Nasser, who I suspected at the time was the man closest to God. But his defeat led me to believe that God must be on the side of the enemy, and only served to confirm the picture of cruelty in my mind.

Since all physical illustrations of God and the Prophets are expressly forbidden in our religion and are considered the failed imitations of man, my childhood images of God stayed with me for quite some time. Over there, God cannot be seen, and that causes some confusion.

When I moved to Europe, the childhood images came back to me, though in a somewhat different light.
I saw how the supervisors – those “lords” of the office – desired to be gods to us meek ones. I realized that a few of the lofty professors at the universities were seeking that very same divinity. And I knew that some of the “original” inhabitants here – who saw us as strangers and outsiders – wanted to look down on us like gods.

I saw many depictions of God in Europe’s museums and churches, but no two were ever alike. God can be seen here, yet He’s greater than any single image, and that causes some confusion.

Some people over there would have me enrich their image of God – which is unknown to me – with my image, with the image familiar to me, here in the “land of unbelievers.”

Some people here would have me endorse their multifarious images of God, which they assume I know; they want me to hone my image (and my conduct) and then set it up as an ideal for the ones living in the “land of terror.”

To some, I’ve abandoned the divine cause. To others, I’m a potential recruit for that cause. No one wants to see the truth of my image. So many different spectacles rest on the nose of each spectator: they magnify the image or reduce it, they obscure or clarify, they polish and exaggerate, or sully and exacerbate, or alter and distort… and so on and so forth.

Now then, who told you that this image you see is mine?

(Vienna, October 26th, 2005)
Having grown up in Germany, she returned to Turkey and today works in the Research Center for Islamic Studies.

“For a woman, veiling herself is a torment. And that is why I believe that veiling is important, because I am suppressing myself, I cannot see myself, my desires, my vanity, my egoism. I just obey Allah; I do it only for Him, to be able to show Him: I believe in You.”

(On veiling and clothing rules)

“I adhere to it; but I think it is a great unfairness that men, Muslim men, brand a woman as bad if she is not a virgin. Personally, I think that if I were a man, it would not matter to me if my wife wasn’t a virgin, because what I see is the person; for me the human being is important. Apart from my religion I am a human being, and I want to be seen, accepted and respected as such.”

(On virginity and marriage)
“I cannot speak for other religions, but in mine, Islam, I consider the laws and rules to be universal and timeless. I believe — and that, at least in my opinion, is the special thing about the Qur’an — that the Qur’an is timeless, and today still as topical as it was centuries ago. And because we believe in the miracle of the Qur’an, we believe that it still has its validity. Thus I do not think that laws should be adjusted to today’s living standards, no, I do not think they should!”
(On a reform of Islam)

Part of an interview with Zuhal, September 2005
TO APPEAR AND TO BE
ERSCHEINEN UND SEIN
PARAÎTRE ET ÊTRE

Tulay, 28, in her favourite Istanbul bar, Bar & Restaurant 360, Istanbul, September 2005
“My family, my mother learned one week beforehand about my marriage with a Frenchman — my mother was shocked and sad too, she was shocked that I am going to marry and she was more shocked that I am going to marry a foreigner, a French — not a Muslim. This was a problem for her and she asked me why I could not find a Turkish man. But only two months after my marriage she got used to the situation.

Today I can say it is difficult to be with a Frenchman — if I would have fallen in love with a Turkish man, maybe things would be easier — but in my case now I have to admit that we sometimes have troubles because of our different cultures and our different understanding.”
“Because of progress, modernity developed more quickly in the West. However, in the course of this development a just distribution of human values could not be reached because moral values, the basic religious values, were not established.”

“If you visit the Asian side of Istanbul, you will find a place called KUSKUNTSHUK, and there you will find a church and a mosque located in the same garden. And that, for me, is an image of how I would like to see the world, because I believe in common human values in this world.”

(On values)

“One must not sacrifice diversity in favour of globalization.”

“As a people we do not have a problem with the West as such, or with Western values. The population would like to cooperate and live in harmony with the Western world. The only problem is that our people apparently do not believe in the sincerity of the West.”

(On Europe)

“If you look at today’s wars, you only see what is on the surface, but you should also include the historical background in your assessment. That way, I believe, we can find solutions for the problems more easily. And if you look at it this way you will realize that these secular problems are not problems of Islam, of Iraq, Afghanistan … but problems of the world. If you look at today’s world, you will see that on the one hand 2.5 trillion US dollars are being spent on weapons, while on the other hand people are dying of starvation. If you look at it this way, then you will see that it is not just one side that is to blame for these problems: we all are – the West, the East, Islam … we all have our share in these problems. And if we want to be just, we should not point our fingers only at Islam, but also at ourselves, in order to find a solution to the problems.”

(On war and religion)
“My main advice for the parents is, because they know how to educate, how to teach their children – to teach the right path, how to follow the right way of the creedal of Islam. The children may not know actually what is right and wrong, the problem is in the hands of the families to make it clear to the children. Before the adult age of the children the personality is in the hand of the parents. The parents are responsible to educate their children, to prevent them to look at evil behaviour and evil things.”

Part of an interview with Sheik Muhammad Sayyid Tantawi, June 2005
“Opinions are formed quickly in this country about the subject of ‘Women in Islam’: either, great concern is expressed about their oppression by the extremely male-dominated Islamic society. Or, blissful women idealize the harem as a centuries-old forerunner of feminist sensitivity groups.

Scholars of the Islamic world draw attention to the fact that, at any rate, the Qur’an, as compared to the Bible, supports the equality of gender ad verbum. And the Egyptian writer and doctor Nawal El-Saadawi relativizes her own criticism of the Islamic world with reference to the still acute patriarchy in the so-called free Western world.

Necessity in the East and West makes women question their self-image from a foreign point of view from time to time.”

“I am very rich with my family. All the time I look for people, I don’t look for money for what I do, I love the people – this is my religion.

When you are Muslim you have to be close to the heart of the people, when you look to the face of people you know them very well – if he is good, if he is a liar – you can know that, you can touch it with your heart. Allah, my God, he helps me and he helps us all the Muslim people.”

Part of an interview with Yamil, June 2005
Below us the desert, the naked earth, as if we were flying over an immeasurable map, fantastic formations, river beds, valleys and mountain ridges, reminiscent of the Mars images sent to Earth by the American probe. A land that sometime in ages past was wooded, rich in water, rivers, ponds and herds of animals, gradually grazing clean the inexhaustible soil that was not inexhaustible. It became steppe, dried out, was covered with sand. Staring down at this dead world, I realize that this God, born by the desert, this invisible God, the God of Abraham, who became the God of Jews, Christians and Muslims, is an experience of the desert, and not a product of philosophy or a conception, and that without this experience we lack the language to speak of Him, and can only remain silent about Him. Jacob, who wrestled with Him at the Jabbok River, Moses, threatened by Him with death at the inn, Moses, cast by him onto Mount Sinai, and the mountain was shaking so much that it roared with thunder. Moses left alone, half covered with debris, shrouded in a black cloud, from which God’s commandments thundered towards him. Jesus, cowering in the boundless desert, tempted by the one opposite him, the one of whom we know not who he was, for it ought to be prayed: “Lead us not into temptation.” Muhammad, surrounded by piercing revelations that made him and the camel he was sitting on tremble. The God of the desert can neither be conceived, nor demythologized — were that possible, He would need to be something else: fiction as conception, myth as projection — He can only be experienced in shock, faith thus not meaning a perception of truth but of shock, that cannot be proved and does not have to be proved either.

I believe it is very easy for Muslims to integrate in different societies. Islam is a religion of serenity, of peace, of love to the people, of love to earth, to nature. It is a relationship between the individual and his God. So, I believe it is a very easy religion to move around any society and which is able to be lived in any society. Islam is not a religion that segregates, it is a religion of tolerance. I believe that is the reason why there are a lot of Muslims that have succeeded all over the world and mainly in Europe.

Islam is a very serene culture, a culture of peace. The way of certain people to interpret Islam into a wave of hatred and violence is not really coinciding with our mentality. We as artists are very realistic and at the same time romantic – therefore we look at religion in a very romantic way and manner; that's why we use our art to integrate in different societies. Film is an instrument of integration, it is an exchange of cultures.

We all feel the same, terrorism is not favourable to Islam, on the contrary, we have been labelled as being terrorists because of 9/11 and I think this is unfair – those who do such acts are responsible for what they do, but you can not label the whole religion for such acts.”

Part of an interview with Husein Fahmi, June 2005
I cannot put in words the grief inside me when I leave my second home, Egypt. At the same time I look forward to arriving in Austria, my place of birth. Raised in two worlds, I spend my time in Europe. Each time I visit my Egyptian family my heart is glowing. They are people with whom I share my moral values and who strengthen my religiousness.

Nonetheless Austria is and remains my home: the country where I was born, where I went to school and where I live my life. Looking at things from a distance, you observe them more closely. You come to realize what is important to you and how much your home means to you. At home you often complain about your life and lifestyle; if you leave home behind, it hurts all the more. Home is the inexhaustible source of my strength.

Karim Saad
PLACES OF GOD

Interior of the Blue Mosque, Istanbul, September 2005
New Military and Police Mosque in Cairo, June 2005
...and living together in the new Europe.

The photograph you will not see here
Etienne Tombeux

A sensitive and serious portrait, the old way, as artificial as a painting.

In Paris there was this face, this body, a caught and exhibited look, the tarbouk and beautiful teeth of the old and healthy nigger saying: « No. We are no animals.» Which is why you will not see this photograph here. But you will see others, if you care to; stories where the body, the face, or one given look, are the topic of the photograph; they are here with more or less 180 degrees west and 180 degrees east of space around them. A line, a body, a face, one given look… caught by the painter, the photographer or the time stopper, attempting the making of a portrait. And going round in circles with it.

And by wanting to look at those shouting “We are no animals”, it is ourselves we are looking at, ourselves we are attempting to see in our universality, such a diverse one, though…
IN THE GALLERY

Mehmet Suraoglu, at 'The Photographers' Gallery'. After living in London for 17 years he decides to go back to Istanbul, London, September 2005

FIGARO SI... FIGARO LA

Adnane Hachemi from Algeria / Kabyle, Bvd. De la Chapelle, Paris, October 2005
PARIS - DAKAR

Restaurant Ile de Gorée, Momo and Aziz from Ivory Coast with friends, Gerald from France and Diadie from Mali, Paris 11th district, October 2005

Abdula, student from Oman, smoking the water pipe in the teehouse Palms Palace, Edgware road, London, October 2005

NOT YET FROM HERE AND ALREADY NOT FROM ELSEWHERE
NOCH NICHT VON HIER UND SCHON NICHT MEHR VON ANDESWO
PAS ENCORE D'ICI ET DÉJA PLUS D'AILLEURS
Adnane Hachemi from Algeria / Kabyle, on the corner of Bvd. de la Chapelle and Rue Islettes, Paris, October 2005
WELCOME TO SARKOLAND
WILLKOMMEN IM SARKOLAND
BIENVENUE À SARKOLAND
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For all additional information regarding this project, exhibitions and photographs please contact us at:
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The story of the rue Bervic
(a Parisian story)

It is “the” street of textile, in the 18th arrondissement. The month is September. Beautiful light, ever so exotic, yet most real. Still, the times being what they are, making portraits is as difficult in London as in Sarkoland. Never mind: we start shooting (I say “we” because I was there).

- Would you like to stand in front of your shop for a picture?
- No!

… Just like I told you: those are difficult times for making portraits, whether it be Barbès or London. But higher up in the street, here is a last someone who accepts being photographed in front of his shop: a fabrics salesman. Also fond of espressos, which he orders from the bar next door. So he accepts. We put the camera on its tripod (forget playing paparazzi with this kind of material) and then everybody starts working: Lukas does the portrait, the salesman tries and convince him to buy his silk fabrics, and I look at the scene. As I said, everybody is working.

Then Lukas must go to Boulevard Barbès to fetch money. So I stay there; and we talk. The salesman asks me… I answer:

- Yes, we are making portraits of Muslim citizens here and there (Vienna, Istanbul, Cairo, London, Paris).

The guy bursts out laughing and announces:

- I’m Jewish, you know. But it does not matter: I was born in Tunis and grew up with everyone.

Lukas Maximilian Hüller

The multidisciplinary work of Lukas Maximilian Hüller questions time in photography and leads towards story-telling photography, installation and video. Acting, painting, sculpture, landart, theatre, architecture and music have a strong influence on Hüller and his work.

Lukas Maximilian Hüller was born in Vienna (Austria) in 1969, graduated from the atelier of photography at the „Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Arts Visuels de la Cambre“, Brussels, Belgium and lives and works mainly in Europe.

Lukas Maximilian Hüller has exhibited his work internationally in Belgium, Holland, France, Austria, Germany, Switzerland, Portugal, Cuba and the United States. Current projects deal with photography and its social-cultural-political impacts as well as with story-telling photography, acting, installations and video questioning coeval culture and religion against the background of historic painting.

Etienne Tombeux
God – the variety – it is a beautiful concept, this idea of bringing together; this explanation of the inexplicable that man created – in a social way – to gradually change and regionalize it, in order for it to help them to live and die.

Etienne Tombeux, Belgian writer

Monika and Dursun in their midnight stroll through Dornbirn, Austria, August 2005