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Islamic burials in the Netherlands and Belgium. Legal, religious and social aspects

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Citation

Kadrouch-Outmany, K. (2014, September 16). *Islamic burials in the Netherlands and Belgium. Legal, religious and social aspects*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/28740>

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Cover Page



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Issue Date: 2014-09-16

Chapter 2

On death and eschatology. Islamic developments and socio-cosmologic ideas

Chapter 2. On death and eschatology. Islamic developments and socio-cosmologic ideas

Eschatology is a central element in primary Islamic sources.¹⁸ Belief in the Last Day (or Day of Judgment) is considered to be one of the articles of faith.¹⁹ It is seen as a Muslim's ultimate end and goal, and is considered to be their guiding factor in life (Q 4:136; Shaltut 1980, 41). The Quranic emphasis on a *post-mortem* existence connects one's actions in this life to the final judgment in the Hereafter, and this teaching inevitably entails responsibility and accountability. Besides Quranic verses and *hadiths*, eschatological manuals describe and interpret the various episodes that are considered to occur from death to resurrection in exquisite detail. In this regard it is possible to distinguish between the 'classical' and 'contemporary' eschatological views held by Islamic scholars and shared by Muslims. Classical scholars seem to use particular references to God and the Afterlife to illustrate the nature of God rather didactically. In contrast, contemporary scholars are less concerned about teaching the particulars and more with preaching the message about the meaning of death and resurrection.

Before discussing the practice of death rituals for Muslims in the Netherlands and Belgium in the following, this chapter provides a meta-discussion on eschatology as an organizing principle in the practice of separate death rituals. Bearing this discussion in mind, it is possible to describe and interpret the various death rituals in the course of this study. I shall argue that the different ideas that are held by Muslims about death, dying and the Afterlife correspond with contemporary and classical scholarly views on Islamic eschatology. Importantly, these ideas correspond to an idea of a socio-cosmology in which one's community after death corresponds with the community one belonged to while still alive. This continuity of belonging is expressed, among other ways, in the physical location of the grave. Although the Islamic eschatological narrative has been thoroughly studied, little attention has been paid to

¹⁸ Eschatology refers to the study of the last things. Epistemologically the term stems from the Greek word *eschatos*, which means last.

¹⁹ The Prophet is believed to have answered the following to the question on the meaning of *imân* and *islâm*: Articles of faith or *arkân al imân*: Belief in God, His Angels, His Messengers, His Book and the Last Day (Bukhari Vol. 1, Book 2, 47). Some scholars also add belief in fate (*qadar*) as the sixth article, other add the *jihād*. The pillars of Islam or *arkân al Islâm*: *shahâda* (witnessing the oneness of God and the Prophet-hood of Mohammed), *ṣalât* (daily prayers), *zakât* (almsgiving), fasting during the month of Ramadan (*Siyâm*) and the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hadj*) (Esposito 2003, 136, 247)

the way the eschatological views are expressed and ritualized by Muslims in a context of migration (cf. Venhorst 2013).

This chapter commences with Section 2.1 that contains a brief elaboration on the relevance and meaning of Islamic and national legal definitions of death. As a consequence of medical developments in the last century, different definitions of death have emerged. In Section 2.2, the process of dying and the occurrence of death are dealt with. These situations are accompanied by several rituals performed by those surrounding the dying person. Section 2.3 will deal with the eschatological narrative in Islamic theology (*kalâm*). An overview will be given on the steps that are believed to occur from the moment one dies until the soul's final sojourn in Paradise or Hell, as explained by respondents and elaborated on by classical and contemporary Islamic scholars. My concern is not so much to provide an interpretative discussion of the development of *kalâm* or of ideas about eschatology, but to look at the influence classical and contemporary scholarly views are having on the ideas currently held by Muslims that they express when referring to dying and eschatology. In Section 2.4 the significance of the grave in relation to the Afterlife will be discussed. One of the most debated subjects in eschatological narratives concerns the period between death (or burial) and resurrection that has become known as the *barzakh*. This matter also came up during the interviews in which the grave and its physical location seems to play an important role for people's identities. These identities were related to the socio-cosmological ideas people held about life and the Afterlife.

2.1 Determining death. Legal and Islamic views

In a study of burial practices among Muslims, it is important to determine the exact moment of death. Both legal and social relations are involved with the moment at which death occurs. Legally death raises questions about filing a last will and designating the heirs. This subject is left outside the scope of this study. From a social point of view, the determination of death marks the beginning of death rituals that have to be performed by members of the Muslim community within an eschatological framework and form the focus of this study.

At first sight determining death might seem to be a simple diagnosis. However, for centuries diagnosing death remained controversial and there was no universally accepted idea of when a person was considered dead. Both in Western history and among Islamic scholars, the criteria determining death were traditionally defined by the

expiring of the bodily functioning, especially respiration and heartbeat (Russel 2000, 1-3; Krawietz, 2003, 199; Hedayat 2001, 969). In his historical overview of the idea of death, Russel indicates that the eighteenth century brought the first changes in determining the criteria for death (Russel 2000, 3-7).²⁰ It was during this period that the first attempts were made to intervene in the dying process medically by the use of artificial respiration techniques and electroshocks. Nevertheless, it was the twentieth century that really challenged the thus far prevailing criteria for death, with the introduction of electro-encephalogram (EEG) and the first successful human heart transplantation (Russel 2003, 18).²¹ A new definition of death became essential.

During the last few decades, this new definition of death has become centered on the concept of brain (stem) death.²² Brain death is the legal definition of a situation in which there is a complete and irreversible cessation of all brain functions.²³ As a result of this new definition of death, countries worldwide have established legal protocols to determine the procedure for diagnosing brain(stem) death. The Netherlands and Belgium are no exception. The question of organ donation above all others made it legally, medically and ethically imperative to have a clear protocol on brain(stem) death.²⁴

Death in Islam can be explained as both a physical and a metaphysical process. Both are inevitably intertwined. Metaphysically the criteria for death in Islam were determined by the Quran in relation to the departure of the soul (*rûh*) (Q 39: 42). The *rûh* is considered to be the principle of life that leaves the body at the moment of death,

²⁰ Some scholars seem to suggest otherwise: 'Prior to the middle of the twentieth century, there was no major dispute over the criteria for death.' (Cranford 1995, 529)

²¹ The first successful heart transplantation was performed by Christiaan Bernard on December 3rd 1967 in Cape Town, South Africa.

²² The idea of brain death was first introduced by two French neurologists, Mollaret and Goulson, in 1959 as a *coma dépassé*. (Cranford 1995, 529). In 1968, the Ad Hoc Committee of the Harvard Medical School formulated this situation as brain death or irreversible coma. For more on the development of this definition see Belkin 2003.

²³ Universal Determination of Death Act, 1980, Article 1. I shall not dwell on the legal, medical and ethical discussions that led to this definition. These are discussed, for example, in Cranford 1995 and Capron 1978.

²⁴ Both the Netherlands and Belgium have legal protocols on brain(stem) death. For the Netherlands see 'Hersendoodprotocol, 30 June 1997, Stb 1997, 306'. Since the realization of this first protocol however, discussions on brain death in relation to organ transplantation have still been the subject of medical, ethical and legal commissions. See, for example, 'advies Hersendoodprotocol, Health Council of the Netherlands, 11 April 2006'. Furthermore, in the jurisprudence on euthanasia, several examples of cases in which the court rules on the meticulous and careful research and norms that doctors should follow with regard to the diagnosis of brain stem death are to be found. See, for example, the case of a doctor who was found guilty of the negligent treatment of one of his patients: HR 9 November 2004, NJ 2005, 217.

and was traditionally considered to occur when the heartbeat and respiration ended and the body grew cold. This was not a divine or prophetic tradition, but an empirical observation of the physical process (Kamal 2008, 100; Hedayat 2001, 969; Karawietz 2003, 39). During the 1980s Islamic scholars gradually showed a tendency to be influenced by medical developments in determining the criteria for death and the discussion on brain death. This resulted in various declarations and *fatwas* by Islamic *fiqh* councils and scholars accepting brain(stem) death as a form of death in relation to organ donation and the cessation of medical life support (IFA MWL 1987; ECFR, 37). Brain death is accepted as an indication for the de-escalation of intensive medical support because of the irreversible cessation of all brain functions. Importantly, brain death is considered a physical form of death when the matter of organ transplantation arises. However, in terms of death rituals, brain death is not to the equivalent of death since there is still cardiac activity and the body has not grown cold. Death rituals are not performed until both respiration and cardiac activity have ended. Consequently, it should be emphasized that, while many Shiite and Sunni scholars have accepted brain(stem) death as a form of death, it has certainly not yet attained general consensus among Islamic scholars nor is it generally accepted by Muslims (Sistani, Q&A Medical Issues, 2).

The majority of the respondents (85%) referred to death only as the cessation of cardiac activity and respiration. Only 15 per cent indicated brain death as a form of death. All of them associated brain death with the withdrawal of medical life support. Among these respondents, there seemed to be an agreement that medical life support would not be beneficial if there was no brain activity. Therefore, the body was to be considered dead, as was explained by a respondent:

I knew a man whose wife was in the intensive care. She was on medical life support because her husband refused to give permission to stop the life support. He explained to me that her heart was still beating and her body was still warm. I told him “No, your wife is dead. The *rūḥ* has left her body!”. It was only the machine that kept her heart beating and her blood circulating. (Amira, personal interview, October 10, 2012)

The respondent went on to explain that it was only after the medical life support had been stopped the body did indeed die, that is, the heart and respiration stopped. At this moment Muslims consider the person to be dead and several ritual obligations must be

observed. These will be discussed in Chapters 3 and 4. In the following section, the importance of guiding the person through his dying process will be considered. This process entails both collective and individual obligations from those surrounding the dying.

2.2 The process of dying. Collective and individual rituals

In Islamic *fiqh* literature, the book of *janâzah* (consisting of burial prescriptions) often begins with recommendations about what to do for the dying person and how the people present should act. The process of dying is considered to take place on God's order, that is instrumental in removing the soul from the body. A process that is often described as accompanied by feelings of desolations and loneliness. Therefore, it is heavily emphasized that a dying person should not be left alone and the people present should do their very best to accompany the dying person every step of the way in his process. This includes the act of encouraging the dying person to look forward, full of confidence, to meeting God (Sayyid Sabiq 1991, 15; Al Jaziri 2009, 669). Family, friends and acquaintances are recommended to visit the dying person and to make supplications on his or her behalf (Al Jaziri 2009, 669; Sayyid Sabiq 1991, 15-16; Al Baghdadi 2005, 190-191). Various scholars also recommend the reading of the *Sûrat Yâsîn* (Al Jaziri 2009, 669). This is disputed by others who claim that there is no basis for reading the *Sûrat Yâsîn* specifically (Philips 2005, 4; Albaanie 2011, 198).

Visitors are prompted to remind the dying person to pronounce the *shahâda* (the Islamic creed *Lâ ilâha illa lâh-* 'There is no God but God'- known as *talqîn*). One should make sure these words are the last the dying person will pronounce or hear, as one can also whisper the *shahâda* to the dying person (Al Jaziri 2009, 668; Sayyid Sabiq 1991, 16; Ibn Rushd 1994, 259; Al Ghazali 1989, 48; Bukhari 23, 80; Al Kafi 13/276). Shiite Muslims emphasize furthermore that the dying person is encouraged not only to pronounce the *shahâda* but also the names of the Twelve Imams (Sistani 1999, 135). Any person present can perform these rituals. Therefore they are referred to as collective rituals.

The way one dies (alone or in company of others), and also the place where one dies can be considered to be a sign of a 'good' or a 'bad' death (Tan 1996, 110; Gardner 1998, 511-513; Lemmen 1999, 9). As examples of good deaths, in the literature we come across departing one's life at such sacred places as Mecca, Medina, Kerbela or Najaf, or dying at home (or in home countries) surrounded by close relatives and

acquaintances. A death that occurs on a Friday is also considered to be a sign of a good death (Tabatabai 2001, 178; Lemmen 1999, 12-13; Heine 1996, 12; Chaib 1988, 339-340; Gardner 1998, 511).

Similar qualifications were also given by respondents during the interviews in which they recounted their stories of deceased relatives or acquaintances. Among those who did not die in accidents, most of the stories were about death occurring in a hospital or at home. Respondents emphasized that the relevance of people being with the dying person lay in the contribution they could make by reading from the Quran, for example the *Sûrat Yâsîn*. Apart from this, they could make supplications on behalf of the dying in order to ease the process and to assure him or her that he or she has not been left alone. Prompting the *shahâda*, giving the dying person water to drink and turning him or her in the direction of the *Qibla* (*ihtidâr*) were mentioned by respondents as collective rituals that can be performed by anyone who happens to be with the dying person. Turning the dying person in the direction of the *Qibla* (*ihtidâr*) is an act that is considered by some scholars to be part of the *sunna* of the Prophet (Al Jaziri 2009, 668; Al Sistani 1999, 135). While others state that *ihtidâr* is a practice only to be performed when the deceased is placed in the grave (Philips 2005, 4). Of all respondents, a third had actually turned the dying to the direction of the *Qibla*, either at home or in the hospital. Those who had not performed this act reported that it had not been possible on account of the layout of the room, or because they had not wanted to disturb the dying person in his process of dying.

It is believed that a dying person suffers from intense thirst. Offering water to the dying person was mentioned by respondents in relation to the visit by the Devil, who tries to seduce the dying into denying the articles of faith in exchange for water. This is a popular subject in classical eschatological manuals, in which the feeling of desolation and loneliness experienced by the dying person is considered to make him a prime target for temptation (Al Ghazali 1979, 24). One of my Turkish respondents emphasized her comfort in knowing that her father drank water on his deathbed and hence had not given in to the Devils temptation. He managed to swallow some, even though in the previous months he had not be able to eat or drink anything at all because of a tumor in his esophagus.

Another issue frequently reported by respondents was the facial expression of the dying person that reveals, so almost half of the respondents believed, that the dying person was being shown a preview of where his or her final abode will be. This subject

also recurs in eschatological manuals. For example, Al Ghazali states: ‘Watch for three signs in the dying man. If his forehead sweats, his eyes shed tears and his lips become dry, then the mercy of God (Exalted is He!) has alighted upon him. But if he should choke like a man being strangled, and if his colour should turn red, and if he should foam at the mouth, then this is from the chastisement of God which has befallen him.’ (Al Ghazali 1989, 47).

Both classical and contemporary eschatological manuals go into the vocal and facial expression of a dying person in some detail: ‘The soul sees other souls but thinks they are living because it is actually still seeing living people... the clarity of both worlds depends on the degree of the soul’s exit from his body. If the soul has slipped away to more than half of its strength, it sees other souls more clearly than the living people. If the opposite is true, it sees the living more clearly. Therefore, a dying person often talks to the dead, calls them, or smiles at them. Talking, calling and smiling are nothing more than an expression of the degree of communication between the soul and the body or their separation. In the case of smiling, the vision of the souls is not fully clear; in the case of calling it is clearer though from a distance, and in talking it is clear and close and therefore the moment of transition is at hand.’ (Abd al Razzaq Nawfal in Smith and Haddad 2002, 120).

When these two positions are linked to the results of the interviews rather lively reports about the moment of death emerge. These particularly involved narratives about the extra-ordinary way death occurred and the facial and vocal expressions of the dying person. Sunni and Ahmadiyya respondents tended to report the individual facial and vocal expression of the dying person. For example, in the story of one of the Sunni respondents reporting the death of his father:

My father had already been unconscious for three days. We would always make sure someone was there with him at his bedside to read the Quran, we read the *Yâsîn* but we also did a *khâtîm* (reading the entire Quran). While we were there, all of a sudden he sat up straight in his bed and smiled. He sat like that for several seconds and then fell down on his back again. We began prompting the *shahâda* but he had already died. He died with a smile on his face. I am sure he saw his next abode and that it made him smile reassures me. (Serdar, personal interview, October 19, 2012)

Other respondents referred to the dying persons as being in ‘another world’ and able to see things that people present could not see. Sharing the story of her father’s death a Sunni respondent reported that her father screamed out ‘I see *al haqiqa* (the truth)’ before he passed away. She mentions how she was shocked by her father screaming, but at the same time it reassured her knowing that he really saw what his next abode would be.

Shiite and Alevi respondents emphasized the role of Imams and *dedes* in the dying process. They are believed to guide the dying person through this process. In sharing the story of his wife’s death, the following report was given by a Shiite respondent:

A week before she actually died, I knew she was already in another world. She would sit down on her bed and put on her headscarf, when no one was there but me. I knew then that she saw others whom I could not see. While seated on her bed she would say “Number 7”. I never understood that until after she had died. We believe in the Twelve Imams, she called out to Number 7 because she died on a Monday as did our seventh Imam, Jafar al-Sadiq.²⁵ I believe that she saw him and that makes me glad, because the Imams will be guiding us to Paradise. (Mansour, personal interview, January 8, 2013)

Both the facial expressions and vocal utterances of the dying seemed to be able to reassure the people present of the next abode of the dying person. None of the respondents reported the dying person experiencing any hardship during the death process. All of the stories involved positive situations.

Besides the collective rituals, respondents also mentioned individual rituals that are a matter between a specific individual and the dying person. The individual rituals were considered by respondents to exert a direct influence on how the dying person would enter his or her final abode. Asking for forgiveness and settling debts came up in this regard.

Respondents found it of the utmost importance, if still able, to have the dying person grant and ask forgiveness from those present. The idea behind it is that if a person has not forgiven his fellow humans for any injustice that he or she might have done or had done to them, God would also not forgive. One of the Turkish respondents explained this issue while sharing the story of her father’s death:

²⁵ Gregorian calendar 4 or 5 December 765

Before he died my father asked us all in, one by one. When I was called in he began telling me about his possessions in Turkey; what parts of it were to be mine and what was to be for my siblings. He asked me to forgive him for anything he might have done to harm me. I said of course I forgive you and he said that he forgave me. He didn't want us to have quarrels about his possessions or other things after his death. One day our neighbor, a good friend of my father's, dropped by and my father summoned him to his room. He told him about an illegal water pipe that he had constructed in our garden and asked the neighbor to remove it after he had died. The neighbor did so, just a couple of days after my father's death. Nothing should stand in his way in the Hereafter. Debts and people not forgiving you might stand between you and a better abode in the Hereafter. (Yusra, personal interview, June 12, 2012)

Referring to this asking and giving forgiveness, Turkish respondents especially also pointed out a ritual after the funeral prayers, *helal etmek*, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Another subject mentioned concerned paying off one's debts which were explained by almost 25 per cent of the respondents being both financial and religious debts, such as the fasting days omitted in Ramadan, performing the pilgrimage to Mecca and even giving alms on behalf of the deceased. As a respondent explained:

Debts are to be paid by the family of the deceased. Otherwise the deceased will have to pay them off on Judgment Day by giving away some of his good deeds. Omitted fasting days should also be recovered and even the *ḥadj* if the deceased was *wājib* (obliged) to go. My aunt had written down all these issues in her will and she had appointed specific people to take these tasks upon themselves. (Zaineb, personal interview, September 14, 2012)

These individual obligations seem to reveal a form of responsibility that specific people had to undertake on behalf of the deceased.

Along the same line of thought, familial responsibilities are believed to have an impact on the deceased long after his or her death. The significance of relatives praying for their deceased is stressed in various *ḥadīths*, for example, the following: 'It is related from Abu Qalaba that he saw in a dream a cemetery, and it was as if the graves were split open and the dead came out of them. They sat on the edges of the graves and each one had before him a light. He saw among them one of his neighbors with no light in front of him and he asked him about it, saying, "Why do I not see any light in front of you?" The dead person said, "These others have children and friends to pray for them

and give alms for them and their light is produced by that. I have only one son and he is no good. He does not pray for me and does not give alms on my behalf, therefore I have no light. And I am ashamed of my neighbors”. When Abu Qalaba woke up he called the man’s son and told him what he had seen. So the son said, “I will mend my ways and will not more do what I have been doing.”(...) When Abu Qalaba saw the graveyard in his dream [again] he saw the same man with a light brighter than the sun and greater than the light of his companions. And the man said, “O Abu Qalaba, may God reward you well for me. Because of what you said to my son I am saved from shame in front of my neighbors”.’ (*Kitâb ahwâl al qiyâma*, 28; Smith and Haddad 2002, 61). The deceased can be burdened by shame and pride as a result of actions performed by the living. In this example, the continuing feeling of belonging to a family and community is extended into the Afterlife. It is this socio-cosmological idea that was emphasized by respondents in relation both to the Afterlife and the grave. Before turning to the latter, I shall first look at the meaning Muslims attach to death in relation to the Afterlife.

2.3 Death and the Afterlife. Classical and contemporary Islamic views

Many Quranic verses portray the close relationship between the concepts of death and life (Q 80:17-22), death and creation (Q 56:57-62) and death and resurrection (Q 23:12-16), making them one of the major Quranic themes.²⁶ Although the Quran describes the Final Judgment and the final abodes in exquisite detail, it makes little mention of the intermediate state between death and resurrection; the *barzakh*.²⁷ The *barzakh* came to be known both as the time every individual must wait between death and resurrection and the abode of this waiting (Ibn Qayyim 2010, 14; Sayyid Sabiq 1991; 95).

The idea of the *barzakh* became the subject of the eschatological narrative that developed among Muslim Sunni and Shiite scholars involved in studying and defining Islamic theology (*kalâm*) in the early centuries after the death of the Prophet

²⁶ For more on the study of the meaning of death in Islam and in the Quran see Brandon on Judgment or Predestination in Islam (1967), O’Shaughnessy on the Quranic data on death (1969), Bowker on The meaning of death within in Islam (1991), Welch on Death and Dying in the Quran (1977) and the in-depth analysis on the Islamic Understanding of Death and Resurrection by Smith and Haddad (2002)

²⁷ This meaning of *barzakh* is taken from Quranic Verse 23:100, that expresses the inability of deceased to return to Earth ‘behind them is a barrier (*barzakh*) until the day when they are resurrected.’ The term *barzakh* is also mentioned in Quranic Verses 25: 53 and 55: 20.

Muhammad.²⁸ In their descriptions, the nature of death, the process of dying, the events in the intermediate period between death and resurrection, the Day of Judgment and the final abodes, the eschatological manuals provide detailed elaborations. Some of the most popular of these classical manuals are by Ibn Qayyim al Jawziya (*Kitâb al-rûh*) and Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (*al-Durra al-fâkhira fi kashf 'ulûm al-âkhira* and *Kitâb dhikr al mawt wa ma ba'dahu*), both of which have been translated into various languages and also circulate among Muslims in the Netherlands and Belgium.²⁹ Among Shiites there is, for example, the authoritative *hadîth* collection of the *Kitâb al Kafî* (Kulayni d. 941), that includes many traditions about the events that follow death. Later Ahmadiyya scholars also became involved in this study, for example, the well-known scholar Mohammed Ali (Mohammed Ali 1950). Although the descriptions given in these manuals might seem to be in the nature of actual predictions, one should not overlook the point that, 'they seem most clearly to be set forth as warnings and reminders to the living of the necessity of seeing their daily acts in an eternal framework.' (Smith and Haddad 2002, 45).

Earlier in this chapter I mentioned that a number of classical and contemporary scholars have written on eschatology. The classical Islamic scholars seem to use particular references to the Afterlife to illustrate the nature of God and His justice rather didactically. Unlike the classical scholars, contemporary Islamic scholars have tried to revitalize Islamic theology by addressing modern philosophical and scientific issues and by tackling the Western emphasis on rationalism, human accountability and responsibility. They are less concerned with teaching the particulars and more with preaching the message of the meaning of death and resurrection. In fact, the majority of contemporary Islamic scholars have chosen not to discuss issues about the Afterlife at all and simply affirm the reality of the Day of Judgment and the human accountability, without providing details or interpretative discussions (Smith and Haddad 2002, 100; Ryad 2-3).

Though it is a thorny issue to position the various contemporary scholars in matters of eschatology, academics have succeeded in distinguishing various categories of scholars. On the one hand, there are Smith and Haddad who distinguished between

²⁸ There are various branches within Islamic theology, for example, the *mu'tazilah* and the *ashari*. See Esposito 2003, 26, 222

²⁹ Ibn Qayyim, *The soul's journey after death* (1998). Ibn Qayyim, *De reis van de ziel na de dood* (2010). Al Ghazali, *The Precious Pearl* (1979), Al Ghazali, *La perle précieuse* (2002), Al Ghazali, *The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife* (1989).

‘three fluid and certainly not always mutually exclusive’ categories of modern thinkers; traditionists, modernist and spiritualists (Smith and Haddad 2002, 100-101). Traditionists are contemporary writers who contribute to the genre of eschatological narrative by addressing the classical Islamic view on Afterlife as perpetually valid that cannot be added to or subtracted from (for example Ahmad Fa’iz and Al Bayjuri). Modernists, on the other hand, prefer a more interpretative analysis of life after death in which they are concerned with such issues as ‘science and the immediate life after death, the possibility of continuing human development, and the reaffirmation of the Quranic stress on ethical responsibility.’ (for example Al Mawdudi d.1973 and Mawlana Muhammad Ali d.1951). Under British colonial rule representatives of the spiritualist trend flourished and were exposed to many of the European and American spiritualist writings. In their works, they spent a great deal of time responding to the accusations leveled by Orientalists and missionaries that Muslims have a sensual and material conception of life after death (for example Tantawi Jawhari and Ahmad Fahmi Abul Khayr).

In contrast, the work of Ryad provides much greater elaboration on the various streams within and in addition to the categories of Smith and Haddad. The author presents multifaceted views about eschatological issues by examining key texts that are not considered by Smith and Haddad. Ryad begins by discussing the modern Indo-Pakistani scholars who are considered to have been influenced by mystical and philosophical ideas. Their common emphasis is that the physical body does not play a role in the immediate life of an individual after death. Ryad illustrates this position by quoting the works of, for example, Shah Wali Allah (d.1762) and Muhammad Iqbal (d. 1938). An important part of Ryad’s work is taken up by a discussion of death and resurrection in the ideas of Islamic Reformism. This approach seems to stress the ethical values of eschatological ideas for Muslims in this life. In this approach it is also possible to detect that the author has consulted the ideas of classical scholars, for example, Ibn Qayyim. Mohammad Abduh (d. 1905), Rashid Rida (d.1935) and the well-known contemporary scholar Yusuf al Qaradawi (1926-) are furthermore discussed as illustrative in this approach. The last part of the discussion on modern Islamic theology is ‘bolder’ and has tended to gain recognition among elite intellectuals who have taken its ideas on board. These neo-modernists do not seem to have been concerned with attempting a reconciliation between the validity of Islamic traditional eschatological ideas and modern ideas. Examples that illustrate this position are the works of Fazlur

Rahman (d. 1988) and Hasan Hanafi. The latter has explained eschatology as a projection that does occur not inside Islam itself, but has been introduced from outside. 'Outside' being something Hanafi invariably seems to categorize as 'folklore fantasy' (Ryad, 36).

Although these categorizations do give us an idea of the development of Islamic theology, any elaboration on them falls outside the scope of this study. I shall refer to these various approaches and opinions when I discuss the views of Muslims on the meaning of death and resurrection. I have structured this discussion according to the topics that happened to come up during the interviews about death and resurrection. These topics were principally concerned with the meaning of death and the departure of the soul.

2.3.1 The meaning of death

Among Muslims in the Netherlands and Belgium, it has been possible to establish that there is a broad spectrum of ideas about the events that occur from the moment one dies to the sojourn in the final abode of the soul, Paradise or Hell. With regard to the nature or the meaning of death for individuals, three categories of answers can be distinguished: death as a terrifying occurrence; death as the next phase in the logical order of existence; and death as a stimulus for living a 'good' life on Earth. A minority of the respondents (14%) thought of death as something frightening, something of which they had no idea when, where or how it would approach them. The idea of being judged as individuals with no help from relatives and friends was the most dominant part of this fear. These respondents also believe that death itself is a very painful process:

When you die you feel as if your skin is being ripped off your body, that is the kind of pain you feel when your soul is leaving the body. You can no longer do anything about it; when the process begins you are on your own. It is a lonely state. (Mansour, personal interview, January 8, 2013)

This view of death as a terrifying occurrence represents only a minority in the results of the interviews, but was nonetheless an answer given by a variety of Muslims: 'secular', Sunni and Shiite. The idea of death as an agony and a fearsome ordeal seems

to correspond with both classical and some contemporary scholarly views (cf. Ibn Qayyim 2010; Rashid Reda in Ryad 19-24).

The majority of the respondents consider death either as being the next phase in the logical order of existence, that is everything that is born will die (49%), or death as a stimulus in being aware of the fact that everything one does in this world will have a direct effect in the Hereafter (37%). The latter clearly indicates an idea of continuity in one's actions and a sense of human responsibility and accountability. This is also the idea behind many of the eschatological manuals, especially as these are interpreted by contemporary scholars.

That death was not the end, but the beginning of a new phase was the scarlet thread that runs through the reports of the interviews. How this new phase would occur and in what form elicited a variety of ideas and opinions. The idea that all life, from the present to the final eternal abode, is seen as a continuous process was widely represented among respondents. A view which is also found in modern contemporary works on Islamic eschatology (al Mawdudi in Smith and Haddad 2002, 106). *This* view of continuity, however, does not mean a continuity of life as we know it on Earth namely, the idea of continuation held by classical scholars. The latter implied that life after death (at least in the grave) was to be considered to be a continuation of the kinds of activities in which the deceased had also engaged while still alive; the souls can carry on general forms of social intercourse with other souls and life continues much as it does for those still on Earth (Ibn Qayyim 2010, 18; Smith and Haddad 2002, 107).

The nub of the question is that the continuum to which most respondents referred, and is likewise explained by some contemporary scholars, entails a continuity of life whose character will be different from life on Earth (Mawlana Muhammad Ali 1950, 271). A respondent reported:

It is a different world. How can God explain something to us that we have not seen, except in our own human terminology? We tend to confuse the literal meaning with the metaphorical. I do not think we shall live the same way as we did on Earth, but I do believe we shall be able to experience joy and happiness, or sadness and grief. (Mamduh, personal interview, September 13, 2012)

The different character of life after death also intimates limitations in describing and understanding the Afterlife in human terminology. In whatever way death was

perceived and explained, all the respondents connected the meaning of death with the presence of angels.

2.3.2 Occurrence of death and the departure of the soul

In describing the event of death, Islamic eschatological manuals often describe how the dying person is visited by angels. At the moment of the cessation of individual life, it is Izrail (the Angel of Death – *malak al mawt*) who is considered to appear, as God’s instrument, to the one whose soul is to be taken (Ibn Qayyim 2010, 3; Al Kafi 13/298; Q 32: 11). Besides Izrail, scholars also mention four other angels descending to the dying person to take away his soul, each one of them pulling the soul by each of its arms and legs (Al Ghazali 1979, 21).

The view on death coinciding with the arrival of an angel or angels was an important subject in the way respondents shared the story of the death of their relatives, referring to this angel either as Izrail or *malak al mawt*. Some respondents distinguished between the Angel of Death as the one who brings about death and other angels accompanying him to carry away the soul. They connected the appearance of the angel(s) to the way a person had lived on earth. If they appeared black this portended a negative message, whereas white was a positive sign. Again respondents emphasized the continuing consequences of one’s actions on earth.

The angel(s) who come(s) to take away the soul are reported by respondents to be already aware of what the dying person’s final abode will be. An illuminating answer was given by a respondent when sharing the story of his wife’s death:

When the Angel of Death comes, you will die. He will take your soul as it leaves your body with your last breath from here (pointing to his Adam’s apple). He will take the soul through the Seven Heavens and on their way the other angels will ask “to whom does this delightful fragrant soul belong” and the Angel of Death will answer them and refer to you as a good soul. Conversely, angels can also ask “to whom does this stinking, putrid soul belong” and the Angel of Death will answer and refer to you as a bad soul. During this journey, the Angel of Death will show you either Paradise as your future, final abode or Hell. (Mansour, personal interview, January 8, 2013)

Another respondent told a similar story and added that:

When God is pleased with the soul He will say, *Yâ ayyatuhâ al-nafsu al-mutma'inna, irji 'î ilâ rabbikî râđiyatan marđiyâh. Fadkhulî fi' ibâdî wadkhulî jannâtî* (But ah! Thou soul at peace! Return unto thy Lord, content in His good pleasure! Enter thou among My servant! Enter thou My Garden. Q 89:27-30). The soul then quickly returns to the world to see how the body will be prepared for burial. (Amira, personal interview, October 10, 2012)

Both respondents have clearly been influenced by a classical view of the moment of death and the role of angels (Ibn Qayyim 2010, 6). The afore-mentioned journey through the different heavens seems to be based on or related to the *mi'raj* journey of the Prophet Mohammed. The Prophet is believed to have traveled (in what has been described as both a physical and a spiritual journey) from Mecca to Jerusalem and from Jerusalem through the Seven Heavens in the course of one night, known as *isrâ'* and *mi'raj*, after which he returned to Mecca (Smith and Haddad 2002, 39). The immediate trip that the soul of the deceased undertakes shows him or her the fruits of his or her religious duties. Afterwards the soul returns to the body to experience how burial preparations and the actual burial are being performed. Alevi respondents reported similar stories, but (again) emphasized the relevance of the *dede* and the Imams. As one Alevi respondent reported:

When Izrail comes to take one's soul, one should not fear, because those who guided you in life, will also guide you to God in the Hereafter. When Izrael takes you to God, you will be accompanied by the *dedes*, by Imam Ali, and Imam Hussein. If you have followed their path in life, they will guide you on your path in the Hereafter. (Zeki, personal interview, December 11, 2012)

Although respondents could speak very vividly about how the Angel of Death will take the soul away and how death will occur, the idea of the soul departing the body and the abode of the soul was a subject to which they had various answers. They often shared the stories they had learned, heard or read about. However, their own ideas did not always tally with these stories. Although the stories were deemed real in their beliefs about the occurrence of death, they tried to connect them to their own personal ideas. An illustration of this process was given by a respondent who emphasized that he knew that the idea of reincarnation is rejected in Islam:

After my wife was buried, we went back to the house. The children were crying because it was so hot [burial took place during the summer in Iraq]. All of a sudden a beautiful white pigeon appeared at the window. The children began to laugh and wave to the pigeon. I knew then that it was her, it was my wife, her soul came to us in that pigeon to make the children smile. (Mansour, personal interview, November 16, 2012)

When sharing the story of her husband's death, another respondent explained that souls of those who die at a young age remain in this world. They wander around in this world and might take the shapes of other people, even animals:

He was only 32 years old when he died and our son was 3 months. My grandmother passed away several years ago and her soul has gone away, to the waiting period. There is a difference in the abode of the soul of a young person and that of an older person. I see my husband's soul in other people and sometimes in animals, like a cat or a bird. (Nassira, personal interview, May 23, 2012)

These remarks seem to suggest the development of Muslims' personal ideas about the abode or the journey they believe the soul makes after death, without rejecting classical or contemporary views about the occurrence of death and the role of the angels. The process through which these ideas develop among Muslims seems to be a rather personal one. Respondents indicated that they were loath to share their ideas too quickly with others for fear they might be declared to have 'non-Islamic' ideas on death and dying by friends and family. An important factor in this trend seems to be the ready availability of Salafi-Wahhâbi pamphlets and books on death and eschatology that have often been translated for laymen both in print and online. These books often include a part about innovations in ideas about death and dying. Examples of these innovations are the idea that the soul of the deceased might wander around in this life or reincarnate (al-Albaanie 2001, 198).³⁰ It seems that because the Islamic primary sources provide hardly any information on the period between an individual's death and resurrection, this gap became filled in with later eschatological narratives developed by generations of scholars and teachers. It is also this part in which Muslims shape and express their own ideas and perceptions about the abode of the soul. Sometimes these ideas clearly

³⁰ On the whole, Islam rejects the suggestion that human souls will or could be reincarnated in different bodies for the purpose of improving their record of actions (Smith and Haddad 2002, 8)

correspond to either classical or contemporary scholarly views. Nevertheless, all too often however respondents included and expressed their own ideas that did not necessarily connect with the previously discussed classical and contemporary views.

Although these views might be presented as individual trends among Muslims, I have found similar stories in Islamic *hadiths*. The idea of souls returning as birds or cats is not unknown in traditional Islam. Various *hadiths* speak of souls returning as an animal and there are even some theologians ‘who admit the transmigration of souls into the bodies of animals.’ (Pellat 2013, 2). Respondents who have these ‘traditional Islamic’ ideas did not refer to them as being Islamic but as being their own private thoughts, and some even feared they might be harboring non-Islamic ideas. The influence of Salafi views and dogmas about death and eschatology seem to have played a great role in this fear of respondents. There is a ready availability of Salafi pamphlets and books about death and the Afterlife that present a clear-cut eschatological view, one that disregards the rich Islamic tradition on this topic, dismissing them as either ‘folklore’ and ‘pagan’ traditions or simply innovations (*bid‘a*) (see for example the list of innovations of Albaanie 2011, 198-200).

2.4 The grave: waiting, resurrection and re-union

After death, Islamic scholars distinguish three major stages; the ‘Inter-world’ (*barzakh*), the Day of Resurrection and the final abodes (Hell and Paradise) (Chittick 1992, 136). These three stages will be discussed in this section that investigates how Muslims perceive these stages and in what way the grave and its physical location play a role.

The general view presented in various classical Islamic eschatological manuals is as follows:³¹ During the first night in the grave the deceased is visited by two angels who became known as Munkar and Nakîr. These angels interrogate the deceased on matters of his faith. They ask him about his God, his religion, his books and his *Qibla*. Shiite and Alevi also include a question about the Imams (Al Sistani Q&A Death Related Issues, 132). After this interrogation, the situation in which the deceased finds himself will be pleasant or unpleasant, depending on his answers. It is believed that the deceased will remain in his grave until the Day of Judgment and will experience the

³¹ This general narrative on eschatology is presented in various works related to this subject (cf. Al Ghazali 1979; Muhammed Ali 1950; Ibn Qayyim 2010; Chittick 1992; Welch 1977; Bowker 1991; Smith and Haddad 2002) and by the different imams who were interviewed.

grave as either a paradisiacal garden or a hell pit. This juncture is a much-debated topic among contemporary theologians, since many reject the idea of the soul remaining in one place and being capable of experiencing any kind of pleasure or pain (Sayyid Ahmad Khan and Muhammad Iqbal in Ryad 8-14).

The entire period between death and the Day of Resurrection is the Inter-world, or *barzakh*. Although the *barzakh* has been thoroughly discussed in eschatological manuals, it is still an issue often raised among contemporary scholars. The *barzakh* (or life in the grave) will come to an end with what are called the Signs of the Hour that will entail various frightening events signaling the complete destruction of the Earth and all that lives on it. At the Day of Resurrection (*Yawm al Qiyâma*), that is vividly described in many Quranic verses, the souls are resurrected from their graves and gathered in front of God (*hashr*- Q 99: 1-8). The Books (*kutub* or *suhuf*- Q 69: 18-26) containing all the acts of that person will be given to every individual. In the enactment of the Final Judgment, these acts are balanced in a pair of scales (*mîzân*- Q 21: 47). Every individual is judged according to his own deeds. To reach one's final abode, one is expected to walk across a bridge (*shirât*- Q 37: 23-24) over the fires of Hell, described as being as thin as a hair and as sharp as a sword. The faithful will cross the bridge easily, whereas the unfaithful will fall into the fires of Hell. After the Judgment, everyone will be assigned an everlasting abode in either Hell or Paradise, although the eternality of Hell is still a much debated topic among theologians (Smith and Haddad 2002).

This narrative clearly underlines that God has the sole authority over the beginning, duration and ending of all things. A person's lifespan is set for a fixed term (*ajal*- Q 10:49; 15:4-5) and takes place within the context of collective time that will come to an end on the Last Day. Although this narrative seems to be presented more or less coherently, in practice it is much more fragmented. Furthermore, individual Muslims tend to focus on certain elements within the narrative. In the interviews respondents concentrated on the idea of life in the grave, the *barzakh*.

2.4.1 The waiting-period of the *barzakh*

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, *barzakh* is known as both the time every individual must wait between death and resurrection and the abode in which this waiting takes place. Little is mentioned about the *barzakh* in the Quran, in which the term appears only three times (Q 25: 53, Q 55:20 and Q 23:100). The concept of the *barzakh* is

especially explained in eschatological manuals and in the *ḥadīths*. Several stages are perceived to occur during the putative life in the grave that begins with the burial of the body.

Turning to the practice of Muslims in Belgium and the Netherlands, almost 75 per cent of the respondents attached great value to the grave and its physical location as the first station in the Hereafter, a classical Islamic idea (*Kitāb Aḥwāl al Qiyāma*, 24). Some of them pointed out the grave and its physical location as the precise spot from where resurrection will take place. These accounted for 46 per cent of the respondents and included a majority of Alevi, Shiite and a minority of the Sunni and Ahmadiyya Muslims. Others said that it does not matter how, where and when you are buried, your resurrection will not be a literal waking up from the grave. These were mainly Sunni respondents and accounted for approximately half of the respondents.

Classical Islamic scholars especially state that two occurrences take place in the *barzakh*: the questioning by Munkar and Nakîr and the punishment meted out in the grave (*‘adhâb al-qabr*). On both subjects respondents had opposing opinions. There were those who clearly made connections to the classical conceptions of life in the grave and those who had adopted a more contemporary eschatological view.

A more classical view on the questioning and the punishment in the grave was that given by Shiite respondents. Illustrative in this regard is the story shared by one of the Shiite respondents:

When you are buried in the grave, you try to get up three times. Then Munkar and Nakîr come to you ask you questions about your God, your religion, your *Qibla* and your Imams. At burial the imam who leads the prayer whispers the answers to you at the head of your grave (*talqîn*). So when Munkar and Nakîr come you will not feel afraid, you know the answers. After you have given the right answers, your grave will become enlarged and you feel the air coming in from Paradise. If you give the wrong answers, however, the grave will crush you and the mother’s milk you drank as a baby will come out of your body and the other deceased will be frightened by the screams that come out of your grave. You will remain in this situation until the Day of Resurrection. (Mehmet, personal interview, December 19, 2012)

As a rule, Ahmadiyya respondents referred to a more contemporary view in which the story of Munkar and Nakîr is taken to be a mental state, a situation resembling a dream. As one of them shared his view:

I have never understood the story of Munkar and Nakîr, I mean God already knows whether you are a good person or not? I think your soul or your consciousness talks to you. As in life, when you do something during the day, you have a nightmare about it at night or you have a very nice dream. I think that is what life in the grave is. It is not a physical state, only mental one. (Rashid, personal interview, November 27, 2012)

This view corresponds very much with the views held by for example by the modern Indo-Pakistani scholars Shah Wali Allah and Muhammad Iqbal (Ryad, 3-14).

Talking about the questioning of Munkar and Nakîr, an Indonesian Sunni respondent recalled the quarrel that occurred at her father's funeral about the *talqîn* and the idea of Munkar and Nakîr. This quarrel clearly shows the several views on eschatology within one family:

When my father was buried, the imam wanted to sit down at the head of the grave to perform the *talqîn*. As far as I was concerned it didn't matter that he did this, but my uncles opposed it. They are always very strict about observing Islamic rules. They said there was no such thing as the *talqîn* and the questioning by Munkar and Nakîr. It was rather awkward but the imam performed the *talqîn* anyway. (Ena, personal interview, November 20, 2012)

However, the most surprising answers were found in the category of respondents who had integrated several views into their own, resulting in an individual view on life in the grave. These respondents were mainly Sunni. When relating to me his own ideas on life in the grave one of the Sunni respondents reported:

I do not say that there are no such things as Munkar and Nakîr, but I just can't imagine them as [they are] in the stories. I do not believe the grave is the abode of the soul, it is not a hotel! The grave is merely an important place for the bereaved and a resting place for the deceased body. We respect the grave as part of whom the deceased was: it expresses his identity as a Muslim and his name and those of his parents are mentioned on the tombstone. The grave is most important to those who are alive; they can see it and imagine the person who is buried in that grave. It is like your *carte visite*, the grave resembles who you were and where [to which community] you belong. When we visit a grave, we pray for the person we knew. The grave is the place where we caught the last sight of the body. (Mamduh, personal interview, September 13, 2012)

It is surprising to see that although this respondent does not reject the idea of Munkar and Nakîr, he does give the grave a completely different meaning; not as an abode of the soul, but as being a *carte visite* of the deceased. Two other Sunni respondents were also expressing their own personal beliefs when they stated a clear rejection of Munkar and Nakîr. This rejection was tied in with the grave and their own personal identity. One of them said:

I do not believe in Munkar and Nakîr or in anything taking place in the grave. There is nothing going on in the grave. When I die I want to be cremated. I did not belong to one city or to one country, I belong to the whole world! I want my ashes to be dispersed over the ocean. But as long as my parents are alive, I shall never tell them that I want to be cremated. They would simply not understand that I would want that as a Muslim. I do believe in resurrection and that everyone will have to bear responsibility for their deeds no matter how the body was disposed of. (Gulsah, personal interview, June 21, 2012)

Respondents elaborated in great detail about the *barzakh*. This was the part of the eschatological narrative in which many respondents felt free to incorporate their own ideas and wishes. Nevertheless, those who did so did not openly say what they thought to relatives and acquaintances. It seemed to be a rather individual and private process. Whatever people's ideas, classical, contemporary or a 'fusion', the grave and its physical location is valuable to Muslims in many ways, quite apart from being a resting place for the deceased body. In some cases the connection that respondents made between the grave and their identity and their belonging to a community was also continued when they talked about resurrection. This socio-cosmological idea held by Muslims in life seems to be extended to what happens after death (see also Platenkamp 2009, 12). Thinking along the same lines, respondents expressed their idea that resurrection occurs as the process that re-unites the deceased with those they belonged to in life.

2.4.2 Resurrection and re-union

When expressing their ideas about the Day of Resurrection, all respondents reported thoughts that tallied with the general narrative presented earlier in this chapter. Specific details were not brought up, since the majority reported that this was a fact, a reality, described vividly and in detail in Quranic verses. Respondents spoke about the Day of Resurrection as both the moment at which people will know their final abode, and as the moment of re-union with loved ones. The emphasis was invariably on the moment people would gather in the Face of God to be judged as individuals. Part of the reward for believing in Islam is considered to be the fact that one will be united with one's loved ones and relatives. In this context, several respondents referred to the grave as the starting point for resurrection and this union. Stories verging on the mythical or idealistic were shared by several respondents, and in these great emphasis was placed on belonging to their own community.

Just as mentioned earlier, both Alevi and Shiite respondents stressed the role of the Imams, also when they spoke about resurrection. As one Shiite respondent reported:

When the end of time comes and Imam Mahdi appears, we shall be resurrected from our graves and gathered in front of God as an Islamic community. I imagine that resurrection will take place from the abode in which you were buried and with the people who were buried next to you. (Mehmet, personal interview, December 19, 2012)

For this reason, many Shiites wish to be buried in Najaf or Karbala. These are considered to be holy cities because Imam Ali and Imam Hussain are buried there. Alevi respondents stress the role of the *dede* alongside that of the Imams on the Day of Resurrection:

If you have believed in the Imams and followed the *dedes*, they will guide you on the Day of Judgment. The Prophet, Ali, the Imams and also the *dedes* will be with us. That is why my brother wanted to be buried next to our *dede*. He wanted to be resurrected with him on the Day of Judgment. (Mevlut, personal interview, December 7, 2012)

Ahmadiyya respondents very much emphasized the Day of Resurrection as a day of justice. In her story one of them stressed the lack of understanding and the injustice done to his community:

When I die, I want to be buried in the cemetery of my Ahmadiyya community. We belonged together in life, and we belong together in death. On the Day of Resurrection, the Sunnis will see that we believed in the same religion! We shall stand together, my Ahmadiyya community and me in front of God. (Sarah, personal interview, November 27, 2012).

Generally speaking, Sunni respondents talked about the classical narrative as mentioned earlier in this chapter. When they spoke of belonging, they referred to their Islamic community, not specifying their Sunni denominational adherence:

On the Day of Judgment everyone will be self-involved and say *nafsi nafsi* (myself myself), except for the Prophet Mohammed. He will say *ummati ummati* (my community my community). He will perform *shafa'a* (intermediation) for us because we believed in him and followed his *sunnah*, died with his *sunnah* and were buried according to his *sunnah*. (Amira, personal interview, October 10, 2012)

Although in various academic studies, the Islamic eschatological narrative tends to be presented as a complete, unified and coherent story, this rounded whole is not how respondents perceive it. Respondents seemed to be familiar with the general narrative but tended to single out certain aspects and elaborate on them extensively. From the results of the interviews, it turned out that they chose to concentrate principally on the *barzakh* and the Day of Resurrection in relation to the grave and their identity. However, these personal views and ideas were not readily shared with others. Being aware that their own contribution to the popular narrative might be perceived as contradictory to the general narrative, respondents frequently emphasized that they kept their ideas to themselves.

Conclusion

The views and ideas of respondents in response to questions about death and the Afterlife seem to have developed in the direction of an allegorical interpretation and tend to emphasize the continuity of one's earthly actions in the Hereafter. Individual views about death did include the possibility of reincarnation and cremation. Examining the ideas on reincarnation, I would argue that these are not as individual as the respondents tended to emphasize. A rich tradition exists in Islam in which the idea of souls returning in the shape of animals is not unknown. Although Salafi views about

death and eschatology tend to emphasize a uniform, clear-cut image on this topic, nothing could be farther from the truth. Both in theory and in practice, we find a rich tradition of different Muslim ideas about death and eschatology that are not in any way uniform.

By and large, respondents perceived the Day of Resurrection to be the completion of all phases, since on it man will be allotted his final abode (birth-life-death-burial-*barzakh*-resurrection-final abode). In this phase of completion, their emphasis is on the re-union with not only their relatives but also with their religious community. Although generally speaking respondents spoke about the re-union of the Islamic community (*ummah*), they also elaborated on this unity in the form of a specific religious community, namely Sunni, Shiite, Alevi and Ahmadiyya. It appears to be a way of identifying themselves strongly with a specific community and distinguishing themselves from others, who might be both Muslims and non-Muslims. Especially in the context of migration, this chapter has shown that Muslims tend to identify themselves, albeit for different reasons, strongly with members of their specific religious community. This identification is extended to ideas about dying and resurrection. A situation which also emerges in the practice of burial preparation to be discussed in the next chapter.