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**‘Public Islam’ and  
the Nordic Welfare State:  
Changing Realities?**

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## **Preface**

Ulrika Mårtensson & Mark Sedgwick

This special issue is the outcome of a generous invitation by the Center for Islamic Studies of Youngstown State University, Youngstown, Ohio, to arrange a seminar on Nordic Islam at Youngstown State and to publish the proceedings in the Center's journal, *Studies in Contemporary Islam*. To make the proceedings available to Nordic audiences, the proceedings are also being published in the *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning*. The seminar was held on 25–26 October 2010, and was highly rewarding. The contributors are grateful for the hospitality they received during their stay in Youngstown. They are also grateful to Professor Rhys Williams, Director of the McNamara Center for the Social Study of Religion at Loyola University Chicago, for contributing to the seminar and the special issue. Rhys Williams' perspective is that of an experienced researcher of religion in the USA, and represents the logical opposite of the Nordic state model and its way of organizing welfare, civil society, and religion. Dr. Williams' perspective helps to highlight the specifics of the Nordic context. Last but not least, the contributors wish to thank the editors of the *Tidsskrift for Islamforskning*.

The fact that this special issue about Islamic institutions and values in the context of the Nordic welfare state is intended for both American and Nordic readers has inspired the framework that introduces the issue. The first three contributions constitute one group, as they each deal with the significance that the two different welfare and civil society models represented by the Nordic countries and the USA may have for the institutionalization of Islam and Muslims' public presence and values. First, Ulrika Mårtensson provides a historical survey of the Nordic welfare state and its developments, including debates about the impact of neoliberal models and (de)secularization. This survey is followed by Rhys Williams' contribution on US civil society and its implications for American Muslims, identifying the significant

differences between the US and the Nordic welfare and civil society models. The third contribution, by Tuomas Martikainen, is a critical response to two US researchers who unfavorably contrast European 'religion-hostile' management of religion and Islam with US 'religion-friendly' approaches. Martikainen, with reference to Finland, that globalized neoliberal 'new public management' and 'governance' models have transformed Finland into a 'postsecular society' that is much more accommodating of religion and Islam than the US researchers claim.

The last seven contributions are all concerned with the 'public' dimensions of Nordic Islam and with relations between public and Islamic institutions and values. In the Danish context, Mustafa Hussain presents a quantitative study of relations between Muslim and non-Muslim residents in Nørrebro, a part of Copenhagen, the capital, which is often portrayed in the media as segregated and inhabited by 'not well integrated' Muslims. Hussain demonstrates that, contrary to media images, Nørrebro's Muslim inhabitants feel that strong ties bind them to their neighborhood and to non-Muslims, and they trust the municipality and the public institutions, with one important exception, that of the public schools.

From the horizon of the Norwegian capital, Oslo, Oddbjørn Leirvik explores public discourses on Islam and values with reference to national and Muslim identity and interreligious dialogue; Leirvik has personal experience of the latter since its start in 1993. From the Norwegian city of Trondheim, Eli-Anne Vongraven Eriksen and Ulrika Mårtensson chart the evolution of a pan-Islamic organization Muslim Society Trondheim (MST) from a prayer room for university students to the city's main *jami* mosque and Muslim public representative. The analytical focus is on dialogue as an instrument of civic integration, applied to the MST's interactions with the church and the city's public institutions. A contrasting case is explored in Ulrika Mårtensson's study of a Norwegian Salafi organization, whose insistence on scriptural commands and gender segregation prevents its members from fully participating in civic organizational activities, which raises questions about value-driven conditions for democratic participation.

In the Swedish context, Johan Cato and Jonas Otterbeck explore circumstances determining Muslims' political participation through associations and political parties. They show that when Muslims make public claims related to their religion, they are accused of being 'Islamists', i.e., mixing religion and politics, which in the Swedish public sphere is a strong discrediting charge that limits the Muslims' sphere of political action in an undemocratic manner. Next, Anne Sofie Roald discusses multiculturalism's implications for women in Sweden, focusing on the role of 'Swedish values' in Muslims' public deliberations about the Shari'a and including the evolution of Muslims' values from first- to second-generation immigrants. Addressing the question of how Swedish Islamic schools teach 'national values' as required by the national curriculum, Jenny Berglund provides an analysis of the value-contents of Islamic religious education based on observation of teaching practices. In the last article, Göran Larsson describes the Swedish state investigation (2009) of the need for a national training program for imams requested by the government as well as by some Muslims. The investigation concluded that there was no need for the state to put such programs in place, and that Muslims must look to the experiences of free churches and other religious communities and find their own ways to educate imams for service in Sweden.

## **Introduction**

### **‘Public Islam’ and the Nordic Welfare State: Changing Realities?**

Ulrika Mårtensson

#### ***Abstract***

*This is not a stand-alone article but the introduction to the special issue ‘Public Islam and the Nordic Welfare State: Changing Realities?’ The introduction surveys the emergence of the Nordic welfare state model with the Reformation and its development to the present day, focusing on religion, welfare and institutional order, and how national identities correspond and change with the institutional orders, as they develop. Included in this survey is the academic debate about de-secularization, actualized in the European and Nordic contexts by immigration of Muslims. It is argued that the Nordic states are moving towards an increasingly secularized institutional order and national identity, which in itself explains why Muslims are publicly perceived as a potentially problematic group.*

This special issue studies public dimensions of Islam in the four Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway), focusing on the dynamic relationship between public and Islamic institutions and values. In doing so, it contributes both to the study of Nordic Islam and to current debates within Religious Studies. The relevant debate within Religious Studies concerns whether the recent resurgence of religion in public political life reflects a broader process of de-secularization, i.e. the expansion of religion into social spheres from which it was previously excluded. In the Nordic context, any attempt to assess positions in the de-secularization debate must consider the structure of the Nordic welfare state and how it has changed over the last decades

due to the forces of globalized neoliberalism. One important aspect of globalization is immigration. Most Nordic Muslims are of immigrant origins. Islam and Muslims are an interesting case to explore with reference to the debates about de-secularization and the Nordic welfare state, because Islam has been given a problematic role in public debates and in some recent research as particularly resistant to secularization and inimical to the established Nordic Lutheran divisions of power between church and state. Against this background, this special issue investigates different aspects of the institutionalization of Islam in the Nordic context with reference to both the theses of de-secularization and studies of change within the Nordic welfare state. The following introduction surveys the development of the Nordic welfare state from the Reformation to the present, followed by a description of the de-secularization debate and an analysis of its implications for the study of Nordic Islam. The basic approach applied here is to study Nordic Islam in terms of the outcome of relationships between public and Islamic institutions and values.

### **The Nordic Welfare State: From Reformation to Globalization**

#### *Lutheranism and Nordic National Identities*

Since the collection studies developments within the Nordic welfare state primarily in order to address debates pertaining to Religious Studies, the significance of religion for changes within the Nordic welfare state will be highlighted here. The decision to begin the introductory survey with the evasive concept of ‘national identity’ is thus not arbitrary, nor is the choice of the main concept of national identity that is adopted here, namely that of Anthony Smith. In the current context one of the greatest challenges to the general public as well as to academics is the inclusion of Islam into the Nordic national identities, as one among several other religions pertaining to the Nordic peoples. Since Smith stands out in nationalism research for his emphasis on the significance of religion for national identities, his concept has been adopted here.

According to Smith, a nation is ‘a named human population occupying a historic territory and sharing common myths and memories, a public culture, and common laws and customs for all members’ (Smith 2003:24). The nation is defined by its *identity*, i.e.



‘the maintenance and continual reinterpretation of the pattern of values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions that form the distinctive heritage of the nation, and the identification of individuals with that heritage and its pattern’ (Smith 2003:24–5). Smith has also defined religion as a source of national identity. This is particularly clear in medieval contexts. In modern nations the significance of religion is often overshadowed by nationalism. However, drawing on Émile Durkheim’s concept of religion as expressing society’s image of itself, and Elie Kedourie’s analysis of the connection between Christian millennialism and ethno-nationalism, Smith develops a model according to which religion is the source of both civic nationalism and ethno-nationalism. Like nationalism, Smith argues, religion contains within it both universalism and particularism, and inclusivity and exclusivity. Imperial forms of religion are usually universalistic in the sense that the law protects all imperial subjects, which is structurally similar to civic nationalism, whereas millennial religions are exclusive and inclined to reserve rights for the true believers, similarly to ethno-nationalist approaches to ‘other’ ethnic and religious groups. Moreover, nationalism itself consciously draws on traditional religion as it reorganizes the nation’s values, symbols, memories, myths, and traditions into a modern national identity (Smith 2003: 42–3). From this viewpoint, the Nordic national identities are connected with Lutheranism, both as a faith and as a way of structuring relationships between state, church and the people (Ingebritsen 2006:24), which motivates the choice of the Reformation as starting point for the survey of the Nordic welfare state.

When the Reformation officially began in 1517, the Nordic countries were represented by the Kalmar Union (1397–1523), consisting of the kingdoms of Denmark (with Greenland), Norway (with Iceland and the Faroe, Shetland and Orkney Islands) and Sweden (with Finland). The Union was ruled by the Danish king and aligned to the Holy Roman Empire and the Roman Catholic Church, with archbishoprics in Lund, Uppsala and Trondheim. As on the continent, the Nordic Reformation was preceded by the break-up of the agrarian feudal order and the increasing urbanization and commercialization of economies. While it was the monarchs who effected the

conversion to Protestantism, its popular support was with the new commercial class, the burghers (Grell 2000:257–8). The Reformation entailed the dissolution of the Kalmar Union. From 1523, Denmark (now with Norway) and Sweden (with Finland) constituted two separate, Lutheran kingdoms (Grell 1995:4–5).

The Reformation had a lasting impact on Nordic welfare administration. Charity and poor relief had been the responsibility of the Catholic church, funded by revenue from Church lands. The break with Rome subordinated the Church to the Danish and Swedish monarchs enabling them to expropriate the Church's lands and with them the ultimate responsibility for the poor and infirm, even though the Reformed church carried out the actual work (Pestoff 2004:68). This Lutheran state model, where the king wielded sovereign power over the land, people and religion of his realm, was given systemic form on the continent and in the Nordic countries with the Treaty of Westphalia in 1648.

The Westphalia state system was characterized by authoritarian monarchies and, ideally, religious uniformity within each of these monarchies. Eventually the uniformity would be broken up by the emergence of civil rights. According to Saskia Sassen, civil rights are connected with the burgher class and its commercial needs: citizens should be able to move and trade between countries and have their property and capital protected from the state (Sassen 2006: 76–82). This had implications for religion as well. While the Islamic empires had combined international trade with legally protected religious diversity since the seventh century, Europe embarked on this course only in the 1600s. At that point it had become obvious that religious pluralism was a commercial asset (Grell 1996:1–12; 1995:10), as illustrated in this quote from Voltaire:

Take a view of the Royal Exchange in London, a place more venerable than many courts of justice, where the representatives of all nations meet for the benefit of mankind. There the Jew, the Mahometan, and the Christian transact together as tho' they all profess'd the same religion, and give the name of Infidel to none but

bankrupts. There the Presbyterian confides in the Anabaptist, and the Churchman depends on the Quaker's word. And all are satisfied.<sup>1</sup>

In 1689 John Locke composed *Letter concerning Toleration* (1689), proposing 'reason' as a neutral ground on which people of various faiths could convene (Oberman 1996:14–17). Rational, 'natural' religion was the necessary foundation of morality, society and politics because, Locke claimed, every individual strives for salvation. The Dutch Jewish philosopher Baruch Spinoza (d. 1677), contrariwise, held that salvation was not the only thing individuals might strive for, and that morality and politics could just as well be based on rational philosophy as on religion. Spinoza's concept of tolerance focused on individual rights and freedoms against all kinds of institutional authorities, including religion; he was the first to claim the right to think freely and to publish things that might be offensive to the established powers (Grell and Porter 2000:8). Both Locke's and Spinoza's positions were carried further in the Enlightenment. While Locke's religious 'foundationalism' prevailed in political theory, Spinoza's focus on individual freedoms became the main concern of the Enlightenment philosophers (Grell and Porter 2000:8–9).

The Enlightenment vision of a progressive nation had different implications in different countries. Some countries understood it as implying civic nationalism, which meant that civil rights and individual freedoms had to be extended to all citizens on the state's territory, including non-Christians (Wokler 2000). The first country which granted Jews full civil rights was Austria in 1782, followed by the USA in 1786; France in 1791; and England in 1826 (Ben-Sasson 1976:759–60). Germany instead developed an ethnic concept of the nation, which complicated the issue of German citizenship until as recently as 2000. The Nordic states followed Locke's 'religious foundationalism', with full citizenship and access to political office limited to members of the Lutheran state church. According to Byron Nordstrom, in Sweden and Denmark the monarchs had

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<sup>1</sup> Grell and Porter 2000:4, quote from Voltaire, *Letters concerning the English Nation* (London, 1733), 44.

instituted measures associated with the French Revolution before 1789, and without a bourgeois revolution. After co-opting the aristocracy the kings were able to extend property rights to peasants, introduce elementary education for all through the Church, and grant limited civil rights to Catholics and Jews (Sweden 1782; Denmark 1798), although many social and political inequalities remained (Nordstrom 2000:113–14). Peasants' property rights and public education, and the 'memory' that the king protected the people's rights and interests against the aristocracy, became important items in the Nordic national identities and blended neatly with the positive Lutheran view of the state.

The period 1809–1945 marked the waning of the authoritarian monarchies and the emergence of new nation-states and constitutions (Ingebritsen 2006:8). In 1809 Finland was taken from Sweden by Russia as spoils of war when Sweden lost the last of its wars with Russia. Finland was then made into a grand duchy of Russia, and gained national independence in 1917. Norway was taken from Denmark and forced to enter into a union with Sweden in the Vienna peace treaty following the Napoleonic wars, where Denmark had sided with the losing French side and Sweden was among the victors. While subject to the Swedish king, Norway adopted its own new constitution in 1814. The union with Sweden lasted until 1905, when Norway gained full national independence.

There was intense social, political and religious discontent with the authoritarian states and the Lutheran religious monopoly, and the new constitutions reflected real change: '[P]opular sovereignty (the power of the people); separation of powers among several branches of government; and the protection of individual rights. (...) Freedom of expression and freedom of association and assembly are guaranteed, enabling broad participation in the political process.' (Ingebritsen 2006:28). The drive for more democratic constitutions was fuelled by popular movements and associations, starting with the 'free churches', i.e. new Protestant denominations connected with British and US Pentecostalism, Baptism, Mission covenants, and Methodism. The free churches were intimately connected with the somewhat later temperance movement, and to a

lesser degree with the labour unions which appeared at the same time, followed by the suffragette movements. The free churches played a decisive role for the development of civil rights and freedoms and the Lutheran model of church-state symbiosis. In Sweden conversion from the Lutheran state church was legalized in 1860, provided one entered another religious congregation (cf. Locke); not until 1951 could citizens enjoy freedom *from* religion without losing their citizenship, in accordance with the new European Convention on Human Rights (1950). In 1956 Sweden initiated the process of disestablishing the state church which was effectuated in 2000 (Andersen *et al.* 2006:12). In terms of causality, disestablishment of the Swedish Lutheran state church was thus related to increasing Christian religious diversity and human rights conventions but not to mass immigration from Africa and Asia and the arrival of Muslims, which began in the late 1970s.

The Norwegian constitution of 1814 did not grant religious freedom. In 1845 non-Lutheran churches were legalized and in 1851 Jews were allowed into the country; Catholic monks had to wait until 1897. Until May 2012 when the first step towards disestablishment of the church was taken, the Norwegian Constitution specified that at least half the members of parliament must belong to the church of Norway and that Norwegian children must be educated in church teachings.

Finland's Lutheran church was part of the Church of Sweden until 1809, when it became a Finnish state church with the Russian Orthodox Czar as its formal head. In 1869 the Church of Finland was institutionally separated from the state and received an autonomous legislative and doctrinal body, the General Synod. Finnish citizens were required to belong to either the Lutheran or the Orthodox churches until 1889, when other Christian churches were legalized. Full freedom of religion was granted in 1923 when the state redefined the Lutheran church from state church to national church; the latter term signifying 'the church for the Finnish people' rather than 'the church that is identified with the Finnish state'.

Denmark's constitution of 1849 defined the Lutheran state church as 'the people's church' ('folkekirke') and granted full religious freedom for citizens almost a century earlier than Sweden, Norway and Finland. Nevertheless, the Danish church is still a state institution since all legal decisions concerning the church must be taken by parliament and the state department of ecclesiastical affairs.

During the first half of the 1900s the churches lost their most important task which allowed them to teach Lutheran values to the people: basic education. By that time Lutheran monopoly on religious truth was no longer sustainable and the increasingly complex and industrialized economy required new forms of education. State departments of education were established; clergy were replaced by professional teachers and Lutheran dogma by new secular subjects; and religious tolerance became part of school teaching (Larsson 2006: 124). From that point onwards the Lutheran identity of the nations has been formally open to contestation.

*The Nordic Welfare State: Love between the State and the Individual*

While the democratic reforms of the 1800s laid the constitutional foundation of the modern Nordic states, it was the exponential growth in prosperity after 1945 that enabled the famous welfare state. Welfare states can be classified according to the relative responsibility allocated to the market, civil society, and the state in providing social services, as in Esping-Andersen's model of liberal, corporatist and universal welfare states, here described by Andersen and Molander (2003):

In the *liberal* welfare model [the USA, the UK] the state plays a limited and well-defined role in the sense of providing the ultimate floor in cases where the market and civil society do not suffice. State-provided benefits are often targeted, and concern about work incentives plays a dominant role. The *corporatist* or continental European model relies on the family and employers as the backbones of society and therefore also as providers of social services. In its modern form, private insurance schemes play a crucial role, and they are mostly tied to labour-market participation. The activities of the state tend to be directed towards

families rather than individuals. Finally, the *universal* or Scandinavian model has the state in a crucial role as supplier of social services. Benefits tend to be defined at the individual level, but with differences depending on the individual's labour market history. The main financial sources are taxes and fees. (Andersen and Molander 2003:10; italics added).

The Nordic universal welfare state has been combined with strong emphasis on solidarity, in terms of leveling income inequalities and sharing egalitarian values: 'The combination in Scandinavia of economic expansion with an interventionist state committed to use the public sector to reduce economic inequality has, since World War II, abolished the kind of abject poverty that continues to characterize life for significant minorities in other advanced industrial democracies, including Great Britain and the United States' (Einhorn and Logue 2003:16).

However, as Henrik Berggren and Lars Trägårdh have pointed out, solidarity is only one side of the Nordic model. The other is an extraordinarily strong commitment to the principle of individual autonomy and self-development which suffuses public institutions and national values and, in Trägårdh's and Berggren's analysis, explains the fact that the Nordic countries rank highest in the world in social trust (with Denmark as number one). Individual autonomy is connected to the idea that the state provides equal opportunities for all individuals to develop themselves without dependence on socially superiors, and this is what stimulates trust across social boundaries. This has led Berggren and Trägårdh to suggest the term 'Social Investment State' instead of 'welfare state', because the latter implies passive reception of welfare goods by the citizens, whereas the reality is that the state pushes individuals to develop themselves and thereby the social institutions (Berggren and Trägårdh 2011). In Trägårdh's words,

The 'Swedish Model', as it came to be known, was characterized by a particular form of statism built on a vision of a social contract between a strong and good state, on the one hand, and emancipated and autonomous individuals, on the other. Through the institutions of the state, the individual, so it was thought, was

liberated from those institutions of civil society—such as the traditional family, the churches and the charity organizations—that were associated with inequalities and relations of personal dependency. In this scheme, the ideals of social equality, national solidarity and individual autonomy were joined to the beneficial power of the state. This is a social contract that profoundly differs from those of most other Western countries outside of Scandinavia. (Trägårdh 2010:234).

This peculiar relationship between state and individual is reflected also in the Nordic civil society model. While health, school and higher education, and social work have traditionally been the state's responsibilities, sports and leisure, culture, housing cooperatives, consumer organizations, and adult education were organized by associations. Compared with associations in the USA and continental Europe which are funded by their members, the Nordic ones reflect a 'democratic corporatism' where citizens realize their political rights through state-funded, democratically governed associations (Trägårdh 2010:232–3). And whereas in the USA and the UK civil society is intended to check state power, the purpose of the Nordic associations has been to work *with* the state to protect 'ordinary people's interests' against 'bureaucrats, clerics, aristocrats and capitalists' (Pestoff 2004: 66); this being in line with the Lutheran love for the state and the Nordic Enlightenment legacy where the state protected the peasants' ownership rights against the aristocracy. The strong links that were forged between the associations and the Social Democratic and the Agrarian (small farmer) parties meant that these parties governed the Nordic countries from the 1930s and throughout most of the twentieth century, in agreement with industry and the private business sector.

Although class and family patterns of education and profession persist, social mobility did increase after World War II (Jonsson 1993). In particular gender equality has become a key national value and strongly connected with Nordic national identities. After World War II women's participation in the work force was required and public daycare for children was institutionalized (Leira 1992). It has been complemented by generous rights to parental leave: the Swedish norm is 18 months with full pay.



Women's economic independence has produced new concepts of mother- and fatherhood, i.e. both mothers and fathers are now in equal measure providers and nurturers. Sweden is spearheading a campaign for fathers to share parental leave with mothers, and paternity leave is increasingly supported by employers (SvD 2009; SVT 2009; NYT 2010).

Nordic sexual mores, as reflected in law and institutions, are more liberal and egalitarian than in many other countries. For example, the Nordic countries were among the first to legalize same-sex partnerships: Denmark in 1989, Norway in 1993, Sweden in 1994, and Finland on its way; same-sex marriage and the right to adopt children are now recognized in Norway, Sweden and Denmark (BBC 2002; Weekly Standard 2004; Ice News 2010). In World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2007 Sweden, Norway and Finland showed the least gender gaps, while the liberal welfare states rated much lower: the UK at number 11 and the USA at number 31 (World Economic Forum 2007). Currently, gender equality is perhaps the most publicly celebrated element in Nordic national identities.

#### *Changes in the Nordic Welfare State Model?*

Public spending increased in the Nordic countries throughout the 1950s, '60s and '70s, as in Europe at large. At the end of the 1980s the rise in public spending halted, and public spending decreased throughout the 1990s due to slower economic growth; ideological shifts to the right; longer life expectancy and fewer children; increased needs for childcare as more women join the work force on equal terms with men; longer periods of study and education in proportion to years of productive work; and changes due to the globalized economy (Stamsø 2009:20–1; 72–3).

The 1990s also saw a privatization of social service provision as Nordic administrations adopted 'new public management', the neoliberal policy of making public services more efficient by competing with private entrepreneurs and organizations for contracts to provide public services (Stamsø 2009). New public management is supported, as Lars Trägårdh shows, by Anglo-American political science theories that true liberal

democracy and market economy require that the state's urge to govern citizens' private lives through public service is checked by a powerful, state-independent civil society. This liberal civil society model is also associated with 'governance' of citizens through state-independent organizations rather than 'government' through state departments and public services (Trägårdh 2010). And new public management does appear to be related to some changes within the Nordic civil society model. New institutions – the Ombudsman – protect *individual* citizens' rights and interests but the *corporative* force of the Nordic associations has been weakened (Pestoff 2004). New public management has also meant that associations, employers and commercial entrepreneurs are providing some of the welfare services that were previously the state's responsibility (Hjelmtveit 2009:63; Øverbye 2009:344; Trägårdh 2010:237).

Yet the Nordic states still fund welfare provisions, even when these are private enterprises. This remains a major difference between the liberal and the Nordic universal welfare state models (Andersen and Molander 2002:1–22). Neoliberal new public management has thus introduced competition over welfare provisions and reduced public spending, but has not done away with either the universalism of welfare provisions or their tax funding. Civil society too continues to receive public funding (Berggren and Trägårdh 2011).

### **Immigration**

Since the 1970s (in Finland since the 1990s) the Nordic countries have received substantial numbers of immigrants from Latin America, Asia, Africa, and the former Soviet republics (Ingebriksen 2006: 90–1). In the same period, Denmark, Sweden and Finland joined the European Union, while Norway has remained outside but a signatory to the main EU treaties. By 2010, 14.1 per cent of the Swedish population were foreign born; in Norway 10 per cent; in Denmark 8.8 per cent; and in Finland 4.2 per cent (UNPD 2010).

Nordic immigration policies are strongly conditioned by labour market considerations (Brochmann 2003:5). The Nordic populations are ageing and immigration ensures a

vital work force, and is on the whole economically beneficial (Storesletten 2002; Moses 2006; HDR 2009; Leibig 2009). Yet public debates give the impression that immigration is an economic burden on the countries (Hagelund 2003; Migration Information 2004; Hultén 2006; Green-Pedersen 2009; Helsingin Sanomat 2010). Thus, one could say that the public's negative *impression* of immigration poses challenges for Nordic policies of solidarity and equal opportunities, rather than immigration as such.

The European Union's social policy emphasizes that immigrants and cultural minorities should be integrated through a process of mutual accommodation between minorities and majority institutions, and through intercultural dialogue (CBP 2003; DIDCP 2003; Klausen 2005:72–5). Among the Nordic countries, Sweden, Norway and Finland follow the EU's two-way approach to integration, albeit in their own different ways, while Denmark has opted for assimilation, i.e. minority cultural groups are obliged to adapt to the majority culture. Despite such different approaches to culture, all four countries are committed to securing immigrants' equal opportunities on the labour and housing markets and in the education system (IMDi 2008:10–11; Leibig 2009:16; SCB 2009). These commitments reflect the reality that many immigrants face difficulties in the labour market since their professional training is often not recognized in the Nordic countries (OECD 2007), and there is documented discrimination in hiring processes (Leibig 2009:65).

Regarding school education, OECD reports from the Nordic countries show that drop-out from upper secondary school and vocational training programs is significantly higher among immigrant children than among their peers. Concluding that school drop-out is the combined result of socio-economic inequality, segregation, culture barriers, xenophobia and discrimination, OECD evaluators have recommended comprehensive educational programmes for immigrant children, including extra second-language teaching; improving literacy in the first language; *not* separating immigrant children from the other school children in special schools and classes; teacher training in 'multicultural competence and sensitivity', and recruitment of teachers from different

cultural backgrounds; an encouraging school environment; and engaging parents in their children's school work (OECD 2005; OECD 2009a; OECD 2010).

Governments have responded to inequalities in labour markets and education by launching national action plans. Sweden, Finland and Norway have also appointed national Ombudsmen for ethnic discrimination (Hedetoft 2006:4–5; Leibig 2009; BLI 2010), and in 2009 Denmark introduced a Board of Equal Treatment (Safe Future 2009: 5). One example of a government action plan is the Norwegian Ministry of Labour and Social Inclusion, which has identified four target areas: work; upbringing, education and language; equality of opportunities; and participation. Concrete actions within these four areas involve ensuring the participation of immigrants' children in nursery schools from the age of four to stimulate learning the Norwegian language; free nursery school places for poor immigrant families; campaigns and education to prevent the early and sometimes forced marriages of young boys and girls; campaigns against female genital mutilation; more substantial 'introductory learning packages' about Norwegian language and society for new immigrants; initiatives in the public sector to actively recruit immigrants; specifically targeted networking activities; apprenticeships; and subsidized initial salaries and extended trial periods (Leibig 2009:26; BLI 2010).

However, not all political parties agree that immigrants should have equal opportunities. Electoral systems in the Nordic countries are proportional which enables anti-immigrant radical right populist parties (RRPs) to enter parliament.<sup>2</sup> Denmark, Norway and Finland have large RRP parties which emerged in the 1970s as protest parties calling for lower taxes and more welfare for 'the real workers'. In the 1990s they switched to ethno-nationalist rhetoric: immigrants are not of 'the people' and have no right to the nation's resources, a message which resonates well in times of economic recession and provides a lucrative electoral campaigning topic (Rydgren 2010; BBC 2011a; BBC 2011b).

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<sup>2</sup> Rydberg 2002:29: '[Radical right populist] RRP parties have ... strong ethnic nationalism and xenophobia in common with right-wing extremist and fascist parties, and ... populism in common with protest parties'.

Sweden has a smaller but even more explicitly racist anti-immigrant party with origins in neo-Nazi circles (SvD 2010). Since the late 1990s these parties have selected Muslims as their principal target, arguing that Islamic culture threatens the Nordic cultures which are identified as Christian and secular (since Christianity, unlike Islam, is considered to be compatible with a secular social order). In this they are imitating the European new right which over the last decades has replaced the concept of ‘race’ with ‘culture’ to explain why immigrants cannot be included in the nation (Stolcke 1995). Right-wing groups and parties thus identify the Nordic nations with ‘Christian culture’ in ethno-nationalist ways that exclude all immigrants and particularly Muslims.

While the radical right populist parties are democratic and represented by members of parliament, they have connections to anti-democratic extreme right-wing groups and often act as spokespersons for far-right views of immigrants, giving these views a semblance of normality (Pedahzur and Weinberg 2001). The following citation from 2007 is from a Norwegian far-right blogger, Jens Anfindsen, whose views appear identical with those of Anders Behring Breivik who killed 77 people on 22 July 2012 for their association with the governing Labor Party and its integration policy:

[W]e have the means of tackling the budding islamization of our nation at our disposal. First and foremost, we can simply restrict our immigration laws. An essential step in that regard would be to follow in the footsteps of Denmark and tighten the conditions for family reunifications. This is something my organization, **Human Rights Service**, actively works to promote. Secondly, we can stop government support of organizations that support Islamic terror. Thirdly, we can abandon the ridiculous idea that all religions are equal, and, consequently, the principle that all religions should be treated equal. We can face up to it that we are a country with a specific cultural heritage, that our values and the norms we want to uphold in our society are shaped by Christianity and by humanist enlightenment, and we can acknowledge that this is an heritage we want to preserve. We can, democratically, demand that those values and those norms, not those of Medina, be preserved as the foundations

for our society. It shouldn't really be that hard to do. So it will be my conclusion that, at present, **the greatest threats concerning the islamization of Norway do [not] stem from the Islamists themselves, but from relativism, multiculturalism and political correctness within our own ranks** (Anfindsen 2007; bold in the English original).

While the topic is Muslims, the quotation shows that the real target is those among the people who support Muslims' equal rights; an echo of traditional extreme right-wing views of the left. Yet the part about the irreconcilable difference between Christian-humanist Norway and Islam is commonplace in Norwegian radical right-wing populist rhetoric too (Akkerman and Hagelund 2007).

### **Nordic Muslims**

The majority of Nordic Muslims are of immigrant background, their presence in Nordic countries dating back no further than the late 1960s (Larsson 2009a). Danish and Swedish Muslims represent around 60 nationalities, the largest groups being Turks, Kurds, Moroccans, Iranians, Iraqis, Pakistanis, Bosnians, Kosovo Albanians, Somalis and Afghans (Larsson 2009b: 57; Schmidt 2009: 42). In Norway, Pakistanis from Punjab are the largest Muslim group. They were recruited as menial labourers in the 1970s and were followed by their families; but most of the other nationalities represented in Denmark and Sweden are also present (Jacobsen 2009:18). Finland boasts an indigenous Muslim population, the Tatars, who settled in the 1870s during the Russian duchy. After Finland's independence in 1925 Islam gained official recognition as a national religion. Following recent immigration, Finnish Muslims today also include the same nationalities as Danish, Swedish and Norwegian Muslims (Martikainen 2009:76–7, 79, 81).

Converts to Islam made up approximately 1.5 per cent of Swedish and Norwegian Muslims, and approximately 2.5 per cent of Danish Muslims (2004). Due to their familiarity with majority society, public institutions and norms, they often assume leading roles in Islamic organizations. This holds true also for women converts who

have been more ambitious to assume leadership roles than other Muslim women (Roald 2004:1).

In line with the publicly funded civil society model, in Sweden, Norway and Finland all religious organizations – including Islamic ones – receive public funding based on membership registers. In Denmark there is no public funding scheme for religious organizations other than the national church but private financial contributions are tax deductible.

Nordic Islamic organizations can be purely local as well as national, and their membership body can consist of one nationality or several, and they may also have transnational ties (Larsson 2009a). The most common transnational organizations with Nordic representation are the Muslim Brotherhood; Hizb al-Tahrir; Tablighi Jama‘at and Jama‘at-i Islami, which intersect with the Indo-Pakistani Deobandi and Barelwi schools; Minhaj ul-Qur’an; Sufi brotherhoods; the Turkish government organization Diyanet as well as the ‘non-governmental’ Fethullah Gülen, Milli Görüs, Süleymanli, and Nurcu; the ‘sectarian’ Ahmadiyya; Shiite organizations; and Salafism.<sup>3</sup> Local Nordic Islamic organizations are usually members of national ‘umbrella organizations’, except Salafis who tend to remain outside for doctrinal reasons. Some national organizations have European-level representation as well. For example, Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated organizations converge with the Brussels-based Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) (Pew 2010; FIOE 2011) and its European Council of Fatwa and Research, which coordinates the production of *fatwas* that are in line with each European country’s national law.

In particular the Muslim Brotherhood-related organizations are ‘theorizing integration’ in a systematic way, because the Brotherhood in general is committed to a methodology (*minhaj*) of applying Islam to find solutions to all the issues that Muslims face in

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<sup>3</sup> See contributions in Larsson 2009. Concerning Salafism in Scandinavia, see Roald 2001:53–4; on Scandinavian Muslim converts and Salafism, see Roald 2004:154–61.

society. This ‘applied Islam’ is also, according to their methodology, the true and ‘authentic’ form of Islam (Lia 1998). Hence, in the Nordic context the Muslim Brotherhood promotes Muslims’ integration in majority society *through* applied Islam, arguing that it is cultural practices wrongly associated with Islam that prevent Muslims from integrating into society, not Islam ‘as it really is’ when applied in all spheres of individual and social life. The Salafis occupy a special place as opponents of the Brotherhood, because they too are committed to applying Islam to all spheres of life and society but in a different way. Where the Brotherhood develop their positions with only tangential reference to Islamic scriptures, the Salafis constantly engage with scripture, insisting that Muslims must follow the Prophet’s *sunna* as embodied in the traditions.<sup>4</sup> Even so, the non-violent among the Salafis are moving towards the same position as the Brotherhood regarding the need to interpret Sharia in accordance with national law.<sup>5</sup> Thus, even though integration is not a key concept in Salafi discourse as it is for the Brotherhood, and even though Salafis emphasize their difference from non-Muslims, they are still adapting Islam to the Nordic societies. Salafi insistence on following the Prophet’s *sunna* can thus be compatible with being a law-abiding Nordic citizen (see Mårtensson in this volume).

### **Islam as a Public Challenge**

As members of a European and international community, the Nordic countries are committed to freedom of religion and its public manifestation, and the right to non-discrimination on grounds of culture, religion and ethnicity. Yet the presence of Muslims and the notion that Islam is a part of Nordic national cultures and identities poses a variety of challenges to the general public.

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<sup>4</sup> On Salafism and relations with the Muslim Brotherhood in Europe, see e.g. Maréchal 2008:300–3; on general demarcation lines between the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafism, see Meijer 2009:1–32; and on Muslim Brothers and Salafis in Sweden, see Roald 2004:154–61.

<sup>5</sup> This was clearly expressed at two conferences with Salafi preachers in Norway (Oslo and Trondheim) during spring and early summer 2012, attended by the author.



First and foremost, Islam challenges Nordic commitments to rights. Mediatized public debates about the integration of Muslims are almost exclusively occupied with the duties of Muslims to become democratic, inclusive and gender equal, but ignore the question of Muslims' rights. The Open Society Report on Muslims in European cities (including Gothenburg and Copenhagen) found that Muslims were more supportive of religious freedom – even for other religions than Islam – and experienced more discrimination than non-Muslims. The report therefore recommended strengthening of commitments to human rights among the general populations (Open Society Report 2010: 101–6). A report by the Norwegian Directorate for Integration and Plurality (IMDi 2009) found that matters related to Islam and Muslims are given disproportionately large media attention given that Muslims constitute around 3 per cent of the population; that Muslims are overwhelmingly negatively represented; and that Muslims actually experience more discrimination than other minorities in the labour and housing markets. There is thus a connection between media discourses that are negative towards Muslims and actual discrimination against Muslims.

Even though there are obvious cases of Muslims' values clashing with such national values as gender equality and liberal sexual mores, the broader picture is not one of value clashes. The World Values Surveys data show that European and Nordic Muslims' values are evolving from the mainstream values of their countries of origins towards those of their European countries. Concerning democracy differences are insignificant. Significant differences concern gender equality and tolerance. But even here Muslims' values are moving towards the national averages and are comparable with those of conservative Christians (Inglehart and Norris 2009). However, this is not generally known. A Norwegian survey shows that non-Muslims think that Muslims are much more religious than they actually are, and that they do not share common Norwegian values, which Norwegian Muslims do to a much higher degree than the non-Muslims think. The discrepancies are thought to depend on media coverage of Islam and Muslims which is the only source of information about Muslims for many non-Muslim citizens (Antirasistisk Senter 2010; on Danish Muslims and democratic values,

see Gundelach 2012). Similar findings are brought out also in a study of Swedish non-Muslims' views of Muslims: the more non-Muslims know Muslims the less prejudice they have against them (Bevelander and Otterbeck 2012). Of course this lack of contacts and networks is part of the explanation for Muslims' unequal opportunities in the labour market, both for first- and second-generation immigrants (Leibig 2009:61–3; cf. Mustafa Hussain in this volume).

The traditional Nordic civil society model seems to be working quite well for Muslims, at least in Sweden, Norway and Finland, where public institutions engage with publicly funded Islamic organizations at national and local levels (Borell and Gerdner 2011; cf. Mårtensson and Vongraven Eriksen; Cato and Otterbeck; and Martikainen in this volume). In Denmark, which does not publicly fund religious organizations, the first national umbrella organization was established as late as 2006 and it is not serving as a contact point for public and state authorities as in the other Nordic countries (Kühle 2012).

Most Nordic Islamic organizations recruit their imams from abroad. The exception is the Finnish Tatars who traditionally recruited imams from their former Russian homelands and Turkey but are now educating imams from their own Finnish community (Martikainen 2009: 79). Foreign recruitment means that many imams are unfamiliar with the language, laws, public institutions and 'public affairs' of the countries in which they are supposed to guide their community. Swedish, Norwegian and non-Tatar Finnish Muslims have thus expressed a need for national training of imams (DN 2009; Utrop 2009; Helsinki Times 2010; YLE 2011). Deliberations over imams and education coincided in time with 9/11, when politicians came to see imams as key allies in counter-extremism and integration strategies. The security dimension turned education of imams into a polarizing issue, among academics and practitioners alike. Nevertheless concrete efforts towards establishing training programmes are being made. Norway has come furthest. After requests from immigrant leaders from a range of religions, a very successful two-year university course was set up in 2007 by Oslo University's Faculty of Theology. It includes Norwegian history and society; human

rights; spiritual counselling; and scripture and interpretation. Oslo University is also developing a programme for higher Islamic studies which, combined with theological studies at Islamic universities abroad, could provide formal qualifications for imams (Utrop 2009). Those engaged in these educational efforts in Norway are largely the same individuals who have been engaged in interfaith dialogue since the early 1990s, which partly explains the success in reaching common understanding of objectives and ways to proceed. In Sweden a government enquiry (SOU 2009; see Larsson in this volume) concluded there should be no special efforts by the state to establish higher Islamic studies, since that would imply state interference in Islamic internal affairs and singling out of Muslims among other religious communities. Yet the Swedish Christian Council (SKR) supported a state initiative:

[W]e find that the state can contribute to education of religious leaders of foreign background. Furthermore we suggest that certain stimulating measures, for example of an economic nature, are implemented immediately so that education can get under way and equality between communities be achieved in the long run. (SKR 2009).

It is interesting to note that the churches are now pioneering equal opportunities for Muslims. The Church of Sweden, formerly the guardian of Sweden's Lutheran national identity and creed, has gone ahead and employed an imam for an interreligious youth dialogue project (Svenska Kyrkan 2011); and in Norway the state church has encouraged the state Health Department to employ two 'hospital imams' in Oslo and Trondheim, inspired by hospital imams in Copenhagen (Mårtensson and Vongraven Eriksen in this volume; see also Baig 2012).

At the level of primary and secondary schools in Denmark, Sweden and Norway, Islam is taught as one of the world religions, although the Religious Studies curriculum is still dominated by Lutheran Christianity. Islamic schools – i.e. schools which follow national curricula and add Islamic subjects – were established in Denmark in the 1970s and in Sweden in the 1990s, as publicly funded but privately run 'independent schools'

(in line with new public management). In 1996 as many as 30 per cent of Muslim school children in some Danish cities attended Islamic schools (Pedersen 1996:208; Kuyucoglu 2009; Berglund 2010). In Norway the state funds around 70 per cent of the budget of private schools, including religious ones. One Islamic school started in 2001 and shut down in 2004 because of internal conflicts. However, three new primary and secondary schools have been granted permission to start in 2012 (NRK 2011a; NRK 2011b). Yet public debates are very negative towards Islamic schools, claiming that they obstruct integration by enforcing separate identities and authoritarian values. This is paradoxical since many Muslim parents choose Islamic schools because *they* experience that it is the *public* schools that cultivate exclusive identities and authoritarian values by refusing to accommodate their children's religious practices and by failing to encourage their school work (Pedersen 1996:208–10; Berglund and Hussain this volume); the parents' experiences are supported by OECD country surveys. In Finland – world-leading in the quality of school education – children are taught their own religion in public schools by teachers who have university degrees in a specific religion (mostly their own), which means that Muslim children are taught Islam by Muslim teachers with university degrees in the subject. Since 2001 Islamic teachers' training courses are provided by Finnish universities (Sakaranaho 2009). This system keeps Muslim children in public schools in the same time as it provides for high quality teaching of Islam.

Another challenging public issue is Sharia. Some academics argue that both national and international law, and precedents established by Jews and Catholics, implies that Sharia family law could be easily accommodated with current civil law (Sayed 2009; Christoffersen 2010; Modéer 2010). For example, Sayed (2009) in his Law dissertation from Uppsala University argues that international law and Swedish multiculturalism gives Swedish Muslims the right to follow Sharia family law, and that the specific Sharia ruling regarding different inheritance shares for sons and daughters can be accommodated within Swedish law through parents' right to give different shares to children. Yet Muslims are divided over the issue. The main Swedish Islamic umbrella

organization has declared that Swedish Muslims do not wish to institutionalize Sharia law, while the leader of another organization claims they do (Roald, this volume). Roald argues that support for Sharia law is mainly found among the first-generation immigrants while the second generation tends not to think that Islam requires it, not least because their values regarding gender equality are in line with general Nordic values. If so, debates about Sharia are likely to continue.

The most notorious public case related to Islam so far is the Cartoon Crisis, which erupted after the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-posten* in September 2005 published a series of twelve cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad, reprinted in February 2006 by the Norwegian right-wing Christian magazine *Magazinet*. Events unfolded quite differently in Denmark and Norway. The Danish prime minister initially rejected dialogue with Muslim representatives, the public debate focused on Muslims' failure to commit to freedom of expression, and Denmark's standing in the international community was quite damaged (Klausen 2009). In Norway the government engaged with the well-established dialogue between the Church of Norway and the Islamic Council of Norway. Consensus was reached that while freedom of expression is absolute, non-violent protests against perceived offences are protected by the same freedom (Leirvik 2011; cf. Leirvik, and Mårtensson and Vongraven Eriksen, in this volume). Sweden suffered a lesser cartoon crisis in 2007 which was managed in line with the Norwegian approach (Larsson and Lindekilde 2009). In Norway in particular, the interfaith dialogue and the government's support of Muslims' right to peaceful protests against offensive cartoons seriously challenged those who might have thought that Muslims are opposed to freedom of expression while 'Norwegians' identify with it.

A democratic challenge is the fact that Nordic Muslims are underrepresented in party politics and face difficulties participating in public debates. Johan Cato and Jonas Otterbeck's contribution to this collection illustrates how the Nordic association-model functions well so long as no public claims are made. As soon as Muslims publicly make

claims related to Islam they are liable to be accused of ‘Islamism’ which is depicted as a mixing of religion and politics that is incompatible with Nordic secularism.<sup>6</sup> The charge ‘Islamist’ has been directed against Muslim party politicians by their own party fellows as well as by rival parties and is highly discrediting. Muslim politicians who wish to deliberate ‘Muslim issues’ publicly thus put their careers at risk, which is a serious democratic problem.

As mentioned, media representations of Muslims often distort reality. In the Danish media the Nørrebro district of Copenhagen tends to be described as an internally segregated area with large numbers of ‘un-integrated’ Muslims. However, Mustafa Hussain shows that social cohesion between Muslims and non-Muslims in Nørrebro is considerably stronger than public debates suggest, and that the municipality is much more willing to consider Muslims’ concerns than one would expect from media reports about Danish officialdom’s fraught relationship with Islam. Muslims in Nørrebro also feel much greater trust in local politicians and inhabitants than in ‘Danish society’ as an abstract entity which they learn about mainly through media’s problem-oriented coverage. The main drawback identified by Nørrebro Muslims is the public schools: children are not sufficiently encouraged and there is little cultural understanding from school staff.

These challenges can be seen as having different layers. At the surface they reflect the obvious fact that Islam and Muslims differ from ‘Nordic standards’ and challenge the still highly uniform majority society to accept cultural diversity, to which there is considerable resistance. At a deeper level, however, these cases suggest not only differences but also similarities and contact points. It may well be that the Nordic publics are challenged not only to accept a new degree of cultural diversity, but also to see that different cultural practices and religious beliefs may conceal common concerns

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and values. It is tempting to suggest that Nordic pride in the uniqueness of our values can obstruct our ability to identify the same values in ‘others’. The following section will deal with this problem in more detail, with special reference to the relationship between Islam and secularization.

### **Public Islam and De-Secularization Debates**

A recurrent trope in media debates and academic research about Islam and Muslims is that secularism in the sense of ‘religion-free zones’ is something specifically Christian/European, and that Islam is interwoven with politics in a way that Christianity is not (Jung 2012; see for example Asad 1993; 2003). This topic will be explored below, with reference to academic debates about de-secularization.

The Nordic countries are the most secularized in the world and ‘secular’ is rapidly emerging as a significant attribute to Nordic national identities alongside ‘Lutheran’ (Zuckerman 2009). Phil Zuckerman explains this as a result of the longstanding Lutheran monopolies with their ‘secular’ division of power between state and church; secure welfare societies; and extraordinarily high participation by women in the work force which weakens the family’s role as religious socializer (Zuckerman 2009). In line with this, Trägårdh points out that the universal and individual-state oriented welfare mechanism has changed the family’s role from economic mainstay for individuals and enforcer of norms into a caretaker whose task is to support the individual’s autonomous life choices (Trägårdh 2010:235).

However, Finland shows stronger religious commitments in the population than the other three Nordic countries. Steve Bruce explains this in terms of a more recent and less stable welfare state and prosperity than in the other countries; but above all in terms of Finland’s more precarious national autonomy vis-à-vis Russia which has strengthened Finnish national identity and its religious (Lutheran and Orthodox) foundation (Bruce 2000). Tuomas Martikainen (in this volume) argues that Finland is undergoing de-secularization due to the effects of globalization, i.e. immigration; neo-liberal economics and new public management; and economic recession. All of which

gives more scope for religious actors in welfare services and, due to global concerns over Muslims and post-9/11 security, as dialogue partners with the government. Martikainen's research is part of the project 'Post-Secular Culture and a Changing Religious Landscape' (PCCR) based at Åbo Akademi University (2010–2014), which critically explores how religion takes new shapes and social roles in the context of modernity, globalization and neo-liberalism. Similarly, Yeung (2010) has found that while the Finnish churches always played a significant role in social work and services, this function declined during the economic growth during the 1970s and 1980s but has returned with the 1990s and the economic downturn.

In Sweden Uppsala University hosts a similar project framing research on religion, churches and welfare in Europe and the Nordic countries in terms of 'post-secular' society and new public roles for religion. Findings show that while churches in Germany, France and southern Europe often provide welfare services instead of the state, the Nordic churches provide substantial welfare services but of a kind that complements rather than substitutes for public provisions, such as extra assistance to specific groups. Yet the Nordic churches often 'take on a *vanguard* and *value-guardian* role in certain fields', especially community building efforts with such vulnerable groups as asylum seekers and new immigrants (Bäckström *et al.* 2011: 37; cf. Vongraven Eriksen and Mårtensson in this volume). The findings show that while the Nordic universal welfare state model remains intact the post-1990s recessions have made the churches' additional services more needed (especially in Finland), which gives them a new presence also in political deliberations over religion's public roles; this new public consciousness about religion signifies 'post-secular society' (Bäckström *et al.* 2011: chapters 1 and 2).

Concerning Muslims specifically and with reference to Sweden, Susanne Olsson argues that Swedish Islam is integration-oriented because its boundaries are negotiated in the public sphere and the Swedish general public says that Muslims must integrate. It is thus, according to Olsson, meaningful to say that even though Swedish Islam complies with Swedish secular norms, it represents what José Casanova (1994) has termed 'de-



privatized public religion', i.e. religious activists who break a pattern of privatization of religion by publicly negotiating established social boundaries for religion and norms for public debates (Olsson 2009:285–6).

Another study which includes Sweden compares Muslims' birth rates and religiosity with the European averages (Kaufmann, Goujon and Skirbekk 2011). The authors argue that population samples used in the European Values Surveys have included disproportionately low numbers of Muslims and therefore provide skewed data for assessments of the impact of Muslims on religion in European societies. On the basis of other data, the study finds that European (including Swedish) Muslims have significantly higher birth rates and higher religiosity than the population average, even among second-generation immigrants, and that de-secularization is likely to follow as the proportion of Muslims in the population increases (Kaufmann, Goujon and Skirbekk 2011).

This review of the empirical literature indicates that significant changes in religion's social roles are underway in the Nordic countries related to globalization, state welfare policies and Islam. In order to assess the implications of these changes a closer look at the broader debate about de-secularization and Islam is warranted.

The classic secularization thesis is associated with the founding fathers of sociology, Émile Durkheim (d. 1917) and Max Weber (d. 1920). They claimed that modernity entailed secularization in three senses: differentiation and separation between 'religious' and 'secular' functions in society (the state, the law, the economy, science, medicine, etc.); privatization, or the retreat of religion into the private sphere of personal faith and morality; and decline in the importance of religion both as worldview and as social institution (Casanova 1994: 19–20). Up to the 1980s the thesis appeared to be supported by surveys of declining church activities and watered-down beliefs within mainstream congregations (Dobbelaere 2002:17 *passim*). From the 1980s, however, new types of data showed significant differences in religious developments between countries; that religion continued to be important for individuals even in institutionally secularized

countries (Halman and Riis 2003); the rise of new politically active religions (Berger 1999); and the popularity of new religious movements. In Grace Davie's words, the social sciences now needed to 'embrace the fact that for most people in most parts of the world, to be religious is an integral *part of* their modernity, not a reaction to this' (Davie 2008:21).

José Casanova in his classic *Public Religions in the Modern World* (1994) conceptualized these new findings as 'de-privatized public religion':

Religion in the 1980s 'went public' in a dual sense. It entered the 'public sphere' and gained, thereby, 'publicity.' Various 'publics'—the mass media, social scientists, professional politicians, and the 'public at large'—suddenly began to pay attention to religion. The unexpected public interest derived from the fact that religion, leaving its assigned place in the private sphere, has thrust itself into the public arena of moral and political contestation. Above all, four seemingly unrelated yet almost simultaneously unfolding developments gave religion the kind of global publicity which forced a reassessment of its place and role in the modern world. These four developments were the Islamic revolution in Iran; the rise of the Solidarity movement in Poland; the role of Catholicism in the Sandinista revolution and in other political conflicts throughout Latin America; and the public reemergence of Protestant fundamentalism as a force in American politics (Casanova 1994: 3).

Casanova makes a point of keeping the three dimensions of the classical secularization thesis apart analytically. The differentiation dimension remains valid: societies around the world are increasingly functionally differentiated and religious institutions have not recaptured their pre-modern dominance over other functions and over individuals. It is the dimensions concerning privatization and decline of religion which need revising:

[T]he term ‘deprivatization’ is also meant to signify the emergence of new historical developments which, at least qualitatively, amount to a certain reversal of what appeared to be secular trends. Religions throughout the world are entering the public sphere and the arena of political contestation not only to defend their traditional turf, as they have done in the past, but also to participate in the very struggles to define and set the modern boundaries between the private and public spheres, between system and life-world, between legality and morality, between individual and society, between family, civil society, and state, between nations, states, civilizations, and the world system. (Casanova 1994:6).

One of Casanova’s interlocutors is Peter Berger. Responding to the cases of resurgent religious political activism documented in the five tomes of The University of Chicago’s *The Fundamentalism Project* (Appleby and Marty 1991–95), Berger revised his previous agreement with the classic secularization thesis:

[S]ecularization theory has ... been falsified by the results of adaptation strategies by religious institutions. If we really lived in a highly secularized world, then religious institutions could be expected to survive to the degree that they manage to adapt to secularity... What has in fact occurred is that, by and large, religious communities have survived and even flourished to the degree that they have *not* tried to adapt themselves to the alleged requirements of a secularized world. To put it simply, experiments with secularized religion have generally failed; religious movements with beliefs and practices dripping with reactionary supernaturalism ... have widely succeeded. (Berger 1999:4)

The fact that these movements are inspired by religion rather than by ‘secular’ factors such as human rights, economic equality, etc., implies that ‘counter-secularization is at least as important a phenomenon in the contemporary world as secularization’ (Berger 1999: 6).

In Berger's view Europe is the exception to this global pattern. Since the 1960s secularization has spread from the north-western to the southern and eastern parts of Europe, and it has transformed even strongly religious countries like Ireland. Berger suggests this is due to the combined effects of state power over the church and thereby crucially over school education; and high levels of individualism (Berger 2001: 446–48). Thus he disagrees with Grace Davie and Danièle Hervieu-Léger who claim that Europeans' religious beliefs are significant enough to claim that Europe is *not* becoming progressively more secular, in spite of falling church attendance (Berger 2001: 447).

Another important voice in the debate is Steve Bruce. Bruce claims that the classical secularization thesis holds true not only for Europe but for the USA as well, and he has criticized Berger's reasons for abandoning the paradigm (Bruce 2001: 89). According to Bruce, what matters is not what happens in the same short period across a range of countries—such as public appearances of religious activist movements—but 'what happens when the changes that purportedly cause secularization occur' (Bruce 2001: 89). For example, urbanization is connected with secularization in Europe and since it has occurred later in the USA than in Europe it has affected US religious life to a lesser degree than in Europe. But the trend is also turning in the USA. Statistics show no real growth in 'activist' evangelical churches if population growth and increased longevity are controlled for, and church-going in general is declining; hence even though US evangelicals have had a strong public presence the population is becoming less religiously active (Bruce 2001: 89; cf. Norris and Inglehart 2011: 89–95). Large numbers of religions in society can also be a misleading measure of de-secularization. Provided that states are neutral and allow religions to compete on equal terms, plurality furthers consciousness of alternatives and choice which is intrinsic to secular modernity (Bruce 2001: 88). In *God is Dead: Secularization in the West* (2002), Bruce concludes:

The combination of cultural diversity and egalitarianism prevent our children being raised in a common faith, stop our beliefs being constantly reaffirmed by religious celebrations of the turning of the seasons and the key events in the life cycle, and remove from everyday interaction the 'controversial' reaffirmation of a

shared faith... Nothing in the secularization paradigm requires that this be the fate of all societies. However, where diversity and egalitarianism have become deeply embedded in the public consciousness and embodied in liberal democracy, where states remain sufficiently prosperous and stable that the fact of diversity and the attitude of egalitarianism is not swept away by some currently unimaginable cataclysm, I see no grounds to expect secularization to be reversed (Bruce 2002: 240–41).

The decisive change which really impacts on secularization is thus capitalist economy and liberal democracy, which can sustain numerous publicly visible religions in the same time as religion's *overall* social significance decreases (Bruce 2002: 41). Hence, the establishment of the Islamic Republic in Iran in 1979–80, typically considered one of the major de-secularizing events, cannot be a sign of de-secularization because pre-revolution Iran was not a secularized society: the Shah was an autocrat; state modernization programmes had limited effects; urbanization was marginal; and the religious institution was powerful and socially significant. Similarly, the anti-religious communist regimes never achieved proper secularization because the mere fact that religion was considered harmful for the people gave it supreme social significance. The flourishing of religion in post-communist Europe may thus be a step on the way to secularization rather than a sign of de-secularization. Strong preoccupation with religion from the state, even if it is in a restrictive sense, thus signifies a strong social significance for religion, while neutrality implies that religion is insignificant even though there are many religions around. Even immigration of new and more religiously committed groups has no real impact on such a system, as evidenced by British Pakistanis. In spite of sizeable numbers in some cities and the strong social significance that they ascribe to Islam, they have not changed any structures in Britain; and their children and grandchildren display similar indifference to religion as their peer groups (Bruce 2002: 39–40). Bruce's findings thus contradict Kaufmann *et al.* (2011) who claim that second-generation Muslims have a stronger and different religiosity from other Europeans and that this could de-secularize Europe.

From Bruce's perspective the Nordic countries are actually becoming more secularized, not less, especially if we consider the disestablishment of state churches as religious neutralization of the state in order to accommodate religious diversity. The Swedish Lutheran church was disestablished in 2000 but the process was initiated in the 1950s in response to the 'free churches'; Norway took the first step towards disestablishment on 21 May 2012. From this viewpoint, the significance of religion can be predicted to *decrease* rather than increase due to globalization and its concomitant liberal democracy and neoliberal capitalism.

Regarding Muslims, we have seen how Steve Bruce claims that Europe secularizes Muslim immigrants. However, he also claims that majority Muslim countries are the last not to have become secularized. Yet experts on Muslim majority countries have identified the processes which Bruce sees as leading to secularization. Dale Eickelman's studies of political Islam show that modern mass education, media and politics have brought about 'objectification of Islam'. Instead of simply believing and practising Islam as everyone else does, modern individuals have made Islam an object of reflection, asking what Islam means *for them*. This implies recognizing that there are several competing interpretations of Islam, the prerequisite for the diversity-consciousness that Bruce associates with liberal democracy and secularization (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996:37–45). Eickelman has explored this topic further in a study of new media and 'Islamic public sphere', i.e. transnational debate forums where interpretations of Islam serve as the frame of reference:

As in earlier public spheres, challenges to authority revolve around rights to interpret. Consequently, Muslim politics is less an expression of a unitary voice ... than an engagement to argue over correct interpretations. What is new today is that these engagements spill out of a few specialized channels into many generalized ones. They do not necessarily become more public than in the past—mosque universities were public places and legal writings were public documents, although few had access to them; they instead become public in different ways. Their characteristic feature is more, and new, interpreters and, from them, the

engagement of a more diverse and wider public. (Eickelman and Anderson 1999/2003:6).

The use of new media also signifies political change, as Augustus Norton has pointed out: ‘The focus of new media overlaps with a heightened interest in civic pluralism in the Muslim world’ (Norton 2003:21). In 2011 and 2012 popular uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Yemen brought down authoritarian regimes, and Islamists formed political parties and competed democratically in free and fair elections. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood has been a formidable civil society actor since the 1930s. In 2011 Muslim Brothers established the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) which is subject to the new national laws for political parties, not to the Muslim Brotherhood. The latter remains a religious organization whose principles inform the political party’s programme but which is administratively autonomous. While the FJP (and the Salafi al-Nour Party) represent a new type of religion-based party in Egypt, they do not represent de-secularization because Egypt has never been secularized in the sense proposed by Steve Bruce. Rather, these parties potentially comply with secularization in the sense of functional differentiation: as political parties they are subject to political not religious rules, much like European Christian Democrat parties. Provided that Egypt continues to develop in a democratic direction political participation by Islamist parties will only further secularization.

These examples show that even in Muslim majority countries and even with political Islam as the case in point, developments are too complex to warrant the conclusion that Islam is resilient to secularization.

### **‘Post-secular Society’: Religion as Democratic Challenge**

In this final section Jürgen Habermas’ concept of ‘post-secular society’ (Habermas 2008) will be addressed. The above-mentioned Åbo Akademi and Uppsala University projects on ‘post-secular society’ imply that we are already there, i.e. we live in a post-secular society. However, Habermas’ use of the same concept is as much normative as it

is descriptive which has implications for how it should be used with reference to the de-secularization issue.

Habermas' thought in general revolves around the problem of political legitimacy in liberal democracy. Recently he has focused on the problem that while there is a global resurgence of religious political activism involving Europe, religious European citizens are largely excluded from public political deliberations, sometimes because of the exclusive nature of their arguments but increasingly often because of the exclusive approach towards religion taken by members of the 'secular' public. Exclusion of religious citizens from public deliberative discourse constitutes a problem for democratic legitimacy:

[T]he content of political decisions that can be enforced by the state *must be formulated in a language that is equally accessible to all citizens and it must be possible to justify them* in this language. Therefore, majority rule turns into repression if the majority, in the course of democratic opinion and will formulation, refuses to offer those publicly accessible justifications which the losing minority, be it secular or of a different faith, must be able to follow and to value by its own standards (Habermas 2007:16; italics in the original).

The problem is not solved by abandoning political and legal secularism, because that is the prerequisite for plurality and liberal democracy itself. Instead religious citizens should 'translate' religious arguments and concepts into secular terminology, and non-religious citizens should consider the relevance of 'translated' religious concepts for the common good (Habermas 2007:16–18). The result would be 'post-metaphysical thought', i.e. the recognition that political concepts such as autonomy, individuality, emancipation, solidarity, and social contract have ancient genealogies within the Judeo-Christian religious traditions. While Habermas' examples are limited to these religions, the Islamic scripture and Prophetic legacy reflect a concept of social contract founded on the principle of individual legal responsibility and publicly known, written laws (Mårtensson 2008; 2010). Post-metaphysical thought, thus,



is prepared to learn from religion while remaining strictly agnostic. It insists on the difference between certainties of faith and validity claims that can be publicly redeemed or criticized; but it refrains from the rationalist temptation that it can itself decide which part of a religious doctrine is rational and which part is not. This ambivalent attitude to religion expresses an epistemic attitude which secular citizens must adopt, if they are to be able and willing to learn something from religious contributions to public debates—provided it turns out to be something that can also be spelled out in a generally accessible language. (Habermas 2007: 19).

Post-metaphysical thought would be an attribute of ‘post-secular society’, the next conceptual step in Habermas’ thought on religion (Habermas 2008). Post-secular society is functionally differentiated but includes religious individuals in all of its functions, including public political deliberation. Thus it implies a *change in consciousness and public discourse* rather than in social organization. This change is triggered by three circumstances. Firstly, the public is aware that religion plays an important role in globalized conflicts and that modernity will not bring about religion’s demise. Secondly, new religious actors appear in national public spheres acting as mediators between religious groups and majority society. Thirdly, both global and national public religious actors are identified with immigrants’ communities and the challenges European countries’ face as they try to accommodate the cultural plurality associated with immigration (Habermas 2008:19–20). While these three circumstances are quite present, the inclusion of religious citizens in public political deliberation is a norm that remains unfulfilled. This becomes particularly clear when ‘post-secular society’ is seen in relation to ‘post-metaphysical thought’: Muslim Nordic citizens cannot yet participate in public deliberations about the common good. Post-secular society thus signifies an objectification of secularization, i.e. instead of simply living it we are now able to take a critical distance from it and reflect over what it means and does, as it is going on. One of the things it does, according to Habermas, is to exclude religious citizens from deliberating on the common good.

However, this has not kept Muslims from trying. The Muslim Brotherhood, which in Europe represents an integration-oriented concept of Islam, is a case in point. Their network, the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE; Pew 2010), has developed a platform for European Muslim citizenship which frames key civic concepts such as active citizenship, rights, and tolerance as core Islamic values and shows awareness that they must convince a suspicious general public of the goodness of Islam:

The Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) is a cultural organization, with hundreds of member organizations spread across 28 European States, all subscribing to a common belief in a methodology based on moderation and balance, which represents the tolerance of Islam. The Federation was founded in 1989 as a natural outcome of the development of Islamic work in Europe, to organize efforts, and prevent fragmentation. In a short time, it was able to secure many achievements, to mention a few; unifying the political discourse, and embracing the idea of establishing Islam as an intrinsic and positive element in European life. As a result of these endeavors, Muslims were transformed from mere powerless migrants into positively contributing citizens: enjoying the same rights, and shouldering the same responsibilities as the native population. Today, the Federation, in representing the principles embodying the humane dimension in Islam, is an asset to the European arena that cannot be underestimated, bringing exemplary added value to European civilization, which has long imbibed from the fountain of Islamic civilization—benefiting from its sciences to achieve European Enlightenment. In the context of organizing its work, the Federation formulated a constitution that is an expression of its methodology as a European Islamic institution seeking to serve European society, with the goal of achieving security and prosperity. Moreover, cooperating with the other constituents of society to consolidate the principles of social justice, protect citizens from all forms of discrimination, and combat all kinds of crime. The efforts of the Federation—as the largest Islamic organization on the European level—were ceaseless in seeking to remove the barrier built on fear of the Islamic presence in the West; a fear fed

by biased media, and some political forces that advocate hostile language and attitudes against the Muslim minorities. These Federation efforts were crowned with the announcement of the European Muslim Charter on the 10th of January 2008 in the capital of the European Union—Brussels, which reassured Europeans and emphasized that the Islamic presence represents exemplary added value, and cultural wealth to the advantage of Europe (FIOE 2011).

According to the FIOE, then, the European Enlightenment itself has Islamic roots, which makes Islam the *source* of modern *secular* European polities. The approach counters claims by Muslims and non-Muslims alike that European values associated with the Enlightenment are incompatible with Islam, and it puts FIOE forward as mediator and ‘translator’ between Muslim communities and the general public. Through FIOE’s sub-organization, the European Council of Fatwa and Research (ECFR), which assists imams and Muslim leaders to interpret Sharia in accordance with European national laws and policies, FIOE’s concept of Muslim citizenship is being activated at national levels (Caeiro 2004; see also Leirvik, and Vongraven Eriksen and Mårtensson in this volume concerning the Muslim Brotherhood in Norway). ECFR and its local users thus present interesting cases for the study of ‘translations’ between Islamic and secular concepts, or overlaps and similarities between seemingly different Islamic and public values and concerns.

To conclude, Habermas’ concept ‘post-secular society’ signifies the democratic legitimacy problems that ensue from two simultaneous conditions: that society contains a range of religions whose members must be included in public institutions and discourse on the same conditions as other citizens; and that the general public tends to reject religious citizens’ contributions to the common good because these are seen to clash with secular concepts and values. In this sense the concept ‘post-secular society’ addresses democracy deficits related to religious groups and their participation in public discourse, rather than processes of de-secularization. It is therefore well suited to the Nordic context where secularism is simultaneously either associated with Lutheran

Christianity as the foundation of national identities, or replacing it, depending on the proponent.

**Conclusion: Changing Realities?**

The universal and individual-oriented Nordic welfare state model has changed due to globalization and its neoliberal economic dimension. Welfare services are now provided both by the public sector and by private entrepreneurs and civil society organizations. However, these private welfare service provisions and civil society organizations remain largely publicly funded and subject to public regulations, which is the feature that continues to distinguish the Nordic welfare state and civil society from its liberal and corporative counterparts.

Another significant dimension of globalization for changes related to religion is international law, here human rights and in particular freedom of religion and rights to non-discrimination. The European Convention on Human Rights and Freedoms entered into force in 1953. At the very same time Sweden initiated a process to disestablish its Lutheran state church because the proliferation of ‘free’ Protestant churches required separation between citizenship and membership of the state church. Once that step was taken the route was set towards the religious neutralization of the state. Following Steve Bruce, who premises secularization on the kind of liberal democracy that is the political side of human rights, even though this development might be accompanied by more numerous and more active religions in civil society, it is nonetheless a process of increasing secularization, not de-secularization.

Bruce’s approach has paradoxical implications concerning political Islam, in Muslim majority countries as well as in Europe and the Nordic countries. It implies that Islamic political parties and civil society organizations which take part in democratic politics and submit to its political rules are furthering secularization, not de-secularization. The objectification of Islam in which they are currently engaged is done with reference to such secular concepts as citizenship, human rights and freedom of religion, and it is thus no surprise to find that in the European and Nordic contexts it is also these ‘Islamist’

organizations that most systematically engage in translating Islam to civic concepts. If we combine Bruce's approach with Habermas' 'post'-concepts, the implication is that since the Nordic public has not yet started to consider seriously Muslims' contributions to the common good, it is the former who are insufficiently secularized: they fail to identify the secular meanings of religion, and especially Islam. The fact that we find the Lutheran churches at the forefront of pioneering efforts to promote equal rights and employment opportunities in order to integrate Muslims into the welfare state system, with its secular rules and regulations, further underlines this curious possibility that religion is promoting secularization. However, given that Islam is as adaptable to this as Lutheranism, one cannot attribute this development to any secularism inherent in Nordic Lutheranism but rather to the secularizing forces of liberal democracy. The final twist would thus be to say that in so far as the churches are promoting Muslims' equal rights and opportunities to a higher extent than public authorities, the churches are the true proponents of liberal democracy and human rights. This development represents an enormous progressive change in the Church's view of the nation and of non-Lutheran religions' rights, due to the forces of international law.

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## **Public Islam in the Contemporary World: A View on the American Case**

Rhys H. Williams

### ***Abstract***

*The article reviews the status of the highly diverse community of American Muslims, with reference to US national identity and immigration history, history of Islam in the USA, and civil society organization. It is found that on average, and after the civil right movement of the 1960s, Muslims are very well assimilated into the US society and economy, in which the specific American civil society and religious organizations play an important enabling part, providing networks and inroads to society for newcomers as well as vehicles for preserving ethnic-cultural distinctiveness. This broad pattern of development has not changed in the aftermath of 9/11 and ensuing wars on terror. Compared with the Nordic context, where Muslims are often considered challenging to a secular social order, American Muslims do not stand out as more or differently religious, or any less American, than other religious communities. It is tentatively concluded that, downsides apart, US national identity and civil society structure could be more favorable for the social integration of Muslims than the Nordic welfare state model.*

Thinking about Islam in the Nordic world, particularly in comparison with the United States, brings into relief long-standing issues in understanding religion in the modern world. On the one hand, there is the venerable theoretical framework generally called ‘secularization theory’ that posits that industrialization produces a ‘modern’ society in which religion recedes into the private or personal sphere (if it continues to exist at all)

and in which the public becomes secular. The Scandinavian countries in many ways are the paradigmatic example of that theoretical expectation, as state churches have become largely irrelevant to politics and play a mostly ceremonial role in public life, and many if not most people live happily and well with little formal religious involvement.

On the other hand, the United States has always been a statistical outlier in secularization theory, with continuing high rates of religious belief, attendance, and public impact, combined with significant economic development. While the institutional ‘separation of church and state’ is written into the U.S. Constitution, religion matters in American politics, it shapes many aspects of American culture, and it is a vital part of American civil society—including a central role in social welfare provision.

Another deep assumption in much sociological theorizing posits that religion is integral to, and may be necessary for, social cohesion.<sup>1</sup> From this perspective, religious diversity undermines the feelings of solidarity and the shared values and norms that enable smooth social functioning and collective identity. Again, the Nordic countries and the U.S.A. provide a contrast. The former are generally thought to be characterized by a high degree of collective identity and social solidarity, while the U.S.A. is socially diverse, with marked strains of cultural individualism. Moreover, the U.S.A. has been a vibrant empirical example of religious pluralism, as it may now be the most religiously diverse country in the world.

It should be noted that secularization theory may not be quite so ‘wrong’ concerning the U.S. case, as there is evidence that church attendance reports are inflated and religious groups significantly accommodate secular culture (e.g., Hadaway, et al 1993; Demerath and Williams 1992; C. Smith 2003). Further, religious diversity in the U.S.A. may not be a true religious ‘pluralism’—that is, the social fact of diversity is well beyond the cultural value that celebrates such differences; indeed, many Americans see religious diversity as a threat to their society.

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<sup>1</sup> The classic statement of this perspective is found in Emile Durkheim’s (1912/1995), but it has appeared in many forms by many different authors; see, for example, Peter L. Berger (1967).

Whatever one holds about the general trajectory of religion, the visible role of Islam in world affairs in the past few decades—from the revolution in Iran, to the repelling of the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, to the attacks of 9/11, to the recent ‘Arab Spring’—seems to be the paradigmatic case of Casanova’s (1994) ‘de-privatization’ of religion. As Juergensmeyer (1993) noted, the secular nationalism and liberal nation-state that were central to modernization theory failed people in much of the global semi-periphery, whatever the success in the developed North and West. In many Islamic societies these political and economic failures clearly set the stage for the type of ‘religious nationalism’ that many Islamist movements advocate. And many Western societies, including the U.S.A. and the Nordic nations, are experiencing, and often struggling with, a fairly recent influx of Muslim immigrants. Thus, the role of religion in contemporary society has attained renewed urgency, and much of it centres on Islam and the West.

This essay will make the argument that the situation of Islam in the U.S.A. must be understood within the context of a society particularly accommodating towards religious diversity. Due to its history of immigration, a culture of individualism, and a structure of civil society that is open to minority group initiatives, the U.S.A. has the resources to accommodate new populations successfully. One result is that some of the challenges facing Nordic societies as they deal with current Muslim immigrants are less pressing in the U.S.A., and at the least, American society will respond to them differently. Through a review of the history of immigration and religious diversity in the U.S.A., and Islam’s developing place in it, I argue that far from this being an exceptional historical moment, the current challenges fit within a longer national story that has usually ended ‘successfully’. Several institutional, legal, and cultural features of the U.S.A. have produced the combination of high religious involvement along with economic development (see also Warner 2008). That religious involvement, particularly among immigrants and religious minorities, is about much more than belief in the divine. Religious organizations do significant sociological work and—intentionally or not—are important players in the process of immigrant incorporation.

### **Islam in U.S. History**

In some ways, the story of Islam in the U.S.A. is an old story in that there have been small numbers of Muslims in North America for many years. For example, there have been Muslims in the Chicago area since the 1893 Columbian Exposition, for which a small number of Muslims from around the world travelled for the Midway's exhibits.<sup>2</sup> More significantly, beginning in the first decades of the twentieth century, groups of Muslims emerged in the U.S.A. within African-American communities in several cities (an undetermined number of African slaves brought to the Americas were Muslim as well). The most significant of these communities eventually developed into the Nation of Islam, now headquartered in Chicago, but other Islamic sectarian groups and communities developed in New York, Detroit, and other major cities (see J. Smith 2010; McCloud 2003).

These communities, while significant in terms of their place in African-American history, and being wonderful examples of the innovative and syncretic character of American religion, did not force many Americans to deal with Islam as a public religion, that is, as a major part of the American religious mosaic that would need to be encountered in public life. The political, economic, and social isolation of African Americans in residential ghettos and working-class jobs—during a period of both *de jure* and *de facto* racial apartheid—kept African-American Islam from making much of an impact on the wider American society until relatively recently. Whatever its contributions to Black America, African-American Islam did not make much of an impression on the white majority. Thus, it is reasonable to understand the *public* issues connected to Islam in the U.S.A. as being a development of the post-1965 era of immigration, and its attendant concerns with diversity, pluralism, and post-9/11 national security.

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<sup>2</sup> See Schmidt (2004). The 'Midway' was the part of the Exposition's grounds that featured cultural and social displays of peoples from many different parts of the world. It was a key reason the Exposition was often referred to as the 'World's Fair.'

*Immigration to the United States*

From the early 1920s until 1965, U.S. immigration policy was a national quota system. A designated number of immigrants were granted admission to the country each year; the quota number was based on a percentage (2%) of the number of persons of that nationality already present in the U.S. population (Daniels 1990; Zolberg 2006). The quota system was designed to reproduce a population mostly descended from western and northern Europeans, and overwhelmingly Protestant Christian (with a significant minority of Roman Catholics). The policy developed in response to the fact that the immigrants arriving in the U.S.A. from the 1880s to 1920 were disproportionately from southern and eastern European countries (e.g., Italy, Greece, Poland, and Russia) and were Catholic and Jewish. These immigrants prompted nativist worries that the U.S.A. was losing its western European, Protestant character. Indeed, this nativist concern is shown clearly in that the first quota policy in 1920 pegged its quota numbers not to the U.S. population in that year, but to the numbers in the 1890 U.S. census—when the population had been even more western European and Protestant. Further, immigrants from East Asia were almost totally barred by the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act and the 1909 ‘Gentleman’s Agreement’ with Japan; thus, the 1920–65 period saw very small numbers of Asian immigrants (many of them Japanese and Korean ‘war brides’ of American military personnel). It should be noted, however, that a policy known as the *bracero* programme actually encouraged low-wage agricultural labour from Mexico (demonstrating the complicated ways in which U.S. immigration policy has been a mix of cultural, political, and economic concerns; Zolberg 2006:245).

The 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act changed the quota system by raising the total number of immigrants allowed in, and altered the quotas from being based on individual nations to a division between the eastern and western global hemispheres. These changes produced two significant effects. Over the next decades the pace of immigration picked up, as more people were allowed in and those countries with more eager migrants were less restricted by national quotas. Second, the regions of origin for immigrants changed dramatically, and for the first time in national history the bulk of

immigration began to come from non-European countries, in particular countries in East Asia, South Asia, and the Middle East. Ironically, while the 1965 Act did impose a quota on the Western Hemisphere, between economic pressures and relatively loose border security Mexicans now made up a significant portion of current immigrants.

Along with the post-1965 expansion of racial and ethnic diversity in new immigrant populations came religious diversity, and for the first time large numbers of Muslim, Hindu, and Buddhists began arriving in the U.S.A. (Wuthnow 2005). While the U.S.A. remains an overwhelmingly Christian country (estimates are about 75% of those identifying with a religion are at least nominally Christian), there were significant numbers of non-Christian, non-western religious people, and buildings, for the first time. Just as was the case with the arrival of substantial numbers of Catholics in the 1840s and '50s, and the very visible numbers of Jews in the 1890s–1910s, the large and visible numbers of Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists have become for some a source of political and cultural concern—and at the same time a source of national pride at the American ability to absorb religious diversity (Wuthnow 2005:75-78).

Consistent with this history, most immigrant Muslims to the U.S.A. came after the 1965 legal and policy changes. As noted, there were small numbers of immigrant Muslims prior to then (many from Turkey or the Balkans), however, the rapid growth since the 1970s has led to a general distinction in American Islam between 'immigrant' and 'indigenous' (mostly meaning African American) Muslims; about 66–70% of current U.S. Muslims are either immigrants or descendants of recent immigrants (Leonard 2007). Most of these are either from the South Asian subcontinent (about one third of all U.S. Muslims) or the Arab world (slightly over one quarter). This means that the American Muslim community is highly diverse racially, culturally, and ethnically. In general, the Muslim community is fairly well educated and has significant numbers of



professionals, small business owners, and others in the middle class (Pew Research Center 2007).<sup>3</sup>

It should be noted that these figures on religious affiliation, diversity, and demographic characteristics are approximations. The provisions of the U.S. Constitution that separate church and state have been interpreted to mean that government-sponsored information gathering does not ask individuals about their religious affiliations, beliefs, or practices. Consequently, what is the best, most complete, dataset about the American people (the decennial census) does not include religion. Of course, religious organizations keep membership records, but the accuracy of those records, and the varying definitions used by different religious institutions as to who counts as a ‘member’, mean that those numbers are not particularly reliable.

The best efforts at counting the religious affiliations of individual Americans have come from social scientists—since 1972 in the General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, and the more recent American Religious Identification Survey by the Leonard E Greenberg Center at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. These surveys estimate that approximately three-quarters of the U.S. population identify as ‘Christian’, about 14–16% express no religious affiliation, about 2–3% are Jewish, while Buddhism, Hinduism, and ‘others’ comprise 2.5–3%. These numbers mean that just about 1% of the American people consider themselves Muslim, at the time of writing about 3 million (Kosmin and Keysar 2009; Pew Research Center 2007). This number is politically controversial, with both those promoting Islam in the U.S.A., and those deeply concerned about the number of Muslims in the country, often using numbers in the range of 6 or 7 million. As Tom Smith of the National Opinion Research Center has shown (2001; 2002), for those latter numbers to be true, every reputable academic and scholarly survey would need to be off

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<sup>3</sup> This education and occupation profile is partly explained by the preferences in American immigration policy toward admitting those with education and easily marketable job skills; see also, Pew Research Center (2007).

by a factor of two. The numbers are increasing fairly rapidly, but approximately 3 million is the best estimate from the best surveys now.

*The Response to Muslim Immigration*

Americans' attitudes about immigrants have varied over time; they also vary based on the specific immigrants in question. Some newcomers have always been more 'acceptable' than others; as Zolberg (2006:1) says, 'A nation of immigrants, to be sure, but not just any immigrants.' In a country founded by and overwhelmingly populated by northern and western European Protestants, the variation in acceptance has been embedded in racial and religious identities. Many of the fears about immigrants seem to revolve around similar themes—for example, the threat to national or cultural identity, or the economic threat of low-wage work—but these memes are applied to groups differentially, usually based on racial or religious 'otherness' (see Williams 2013).

This intersects, then, with other cultural and racial suspicions. While the presence of significant numbers of Muslim immigrants is a fairly recent development, scholars have noted a long history of suspicion of Muslims and Arabs manifested in American media, popular culture, and cultural stereotypes (Cainkar 2009:64-68). Building on these images in recent decades were tensions with Middle Eastern oil-producing states since the 1970s, the Iranian hostage crisis in 1979, and the continuing loyalty to Israel felt by many Americans. In the aftermath of the attacks of September 11, 2001 all of these suspicions and assumptions were easily resurrected and often manifested in xenophobia, nativism, and political fears. Incidents of harassment and hate crimes against Muslims (and people perceived to be Muslim—for example, a Sikh man was shot to death in Arizona) increased and many Muslims reported an increased sense of being watched and being treated as less than fully 'American' (Peek 2010). Further, a general cultural wariness of Islam may be increasing in the U.S.A., according to Bail (2012).

Other incidents reveal the ways in which what may be generalized social and cultural anxiety have been recently focused on Muslims. For example, the state of Oklahoma adopted an amendment to the State Constitution in 2010 that would forbid its courts

from accommodating Islamic *Shar'ia* law (the amendment was struck down by a Federal appeal court in January 2012). This even though Oklahoma's population is less than 1% Muslim and no other religiously based legal system was mentioned in the amendment. In another high profile example, Terry Jones, leader of a conservative Christian centre in Florida, has on more than one occasion publicly burned copies of the Qur'an. And there have been public demonstrations against the building of mosques in places as diverse as New York City, Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and Riverside County, California.

However, the backlash that might have been expected post-9/11 in many ways did not materialize. Without discounting the many examples of discrimination or harassment, or the extent to which Muslim Americans have experienced a sense of 'homeland insecurity' (Cainkar 2009), the American majority's response in the twenty-first century has been qualitatively different from the relocation camps in which Japanese-Americans were confined in World War II. And there has been nothing approaching the communal violence that has often marked inter-religion conflict in India, Nigeria, or the U.S.A. in the 1850s. Many Americans express suspicion of, or worry about, Muslims in the U.S.A.; many are willing to curtail Muslims' civil rights as a result (Wuthnow 2005). But many others do not share those concerns, or do not think that such concerns should result in severe curtailment of civil liberties, or discrimination, or anti-immigrant reform.

For many American Muslims, their commitment to the U.S.A. and to the lives they are building there was mostly unshaken in the last decade and has often intensified. Cainkar (2009) found that the sense of insecurity about being distrusted was accompanied by a simultaneous appreciation for life in the U.S.A. and a sense of being 'American'. The Pew Research Center (2007) subtitled a report on Muslim Americans 'Middle Class and Mostly Mainstream'. Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009) found that in many ways Muslims became more 'American' following 9/11.<sup>4</sup> The organizations that represent

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<sup>4</sup> Echoing this theme, see also Bilici (2011) and Williams (2010).

the interests of Muslims in America, such as the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), became more active and professionalized after the attacks, and incorporated into their claims the very American themes of individual rights, civil liberties, and religious freedom. And fascinatingly, there is evidence that even while anti-Muslim messages may be more prevalent than before 9/11, attitudes towards Muslims and suspicion of Islam have not significantly affected native-born Americans' concerns about immigration. That is, while security issues have been and remain one argument for curtailing current rates of immigration into the country, those most concerned about immigration are often most concerned about unauthorized immigration, and that concern focuses on immigrants from Mexico and Latin America (Timberlake and Williams 2012).

Nonetheless, post-9/11 the U.S.A. has thrown a public light on Islam and produced a vibrant debate about its place in the American religious and social mosaic. During controversies over mosque building or *Shar'ia* law some Americans have loudly proclaimed that America is a 'Christian Nation' and thus Islam fundamentally does not belong (Williams 2011). On the other hand, consistent immigration by people of Islamic origins—often having education and skills needed by the U.S. economy, who have deep commitments to education and family, and in a context in which increasingly significant second and third generations are becoming comfortable in the U.S.A., have convinced many scholars that full incorporation of Islam into the U.S.A. is mostly a matter of time (Williams 2011).

### **American Incorporation of Immigrant Populations**

There has been a lively debate among scholars about the ways in which immigrant populations are incorporated—or not—into American society. In the mid-twentieth century the dominant paradigm was one of 'assimilation'. The view was that the incorporation process developed more or less naturally through incorporation of new immigrants into the economy, the adoption of cultural values, and then integration into social networks (the classic statement is Gordon 1964). Given the historical period, it is not too surprising that this idea fitted the general trend of European groups that came to

the U.S.A. in the nineteenth century. Critics of this perspective argued that while it was applicable to certain European immigrants in particular historical circumstances, it was far from a universal process, even during the historical heyday of late nineteenth-century immigration. Criteria such as immigrants' skin colour, skills and human capital assets, and other cultural markers (such as language or religion) determined different trajectories for different groups. The accumulation of these critiques meant that for some time the term 'assimilation' was rarely used in sociological writing. The continued disadvantage of racial groups such as African Americans, Native Americans, and dark-skinned Latino/as seemed to undercut the 'America as a nation of immigrants' narrative.

The post-1965 immigrant groups have been as varied in circumstances as they are in national origin and religion, however. As a result, the blanket rejection of assimilationist ideas has also needed some re-thinking. Drawing on more recent analyses of newer and often middle-class immigrants, Portes and Zhou (1993) introduced the idea of 'segmented assimilation'. They noted that many immigrant communities, particularly those with a growing second generation, were prospering in the American economy and flocking to higher education—yet they were not becoming thoroughly assimilated in terms of cultural or social networks. Immigrant communities were maintaining religious, ethnic, and sometimes even linguistic continuity with their homelands, but were moving relatively smoothly into the host country's economy. This was true not just of small business owners who served the immigrant community itself, but the incorporation was also powered by engineers, professionals, computer programmers, and others in solidly middle-class niches. In sum, the assimilation was segmented—structurally and economically integrating while maintaining some cultural distinction. And it was segmented among different immigrant groups, some incorporating well and others staying quite apart. Tellingly, the vehicle for this cultural preservation is often religious organizations, especially for the first generation and often for their children.

### **Religion and the New Immigrants**

Religion has been a key part of American culture and society since the early national period of the early nineteenth century. In a sparsely settled, largely agricultural society,

local religious congregations were the foremost organizations of American civil society, with a social influence so pervasive that Alexis de Tocqueville, in his deeply influential *Democracy in America*, wrote:

Religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society, but it must be regarded as the first of their political institutions; for if it does not impart a taste for freedom, it facilitates the use of it ... I am certain that they hold it to be indispensable to the maintenance of republican institutions. (de Tocqueville 1835/2003:295)

Further, as Max Weber re-affirmed in an essay based on his travels in the United States in the first years of the twentieth century, church membership was taken to be an important sign of social respectability and community membership. It had significant cultural meaning, as well as being key to social and economic networks and opportunities (Weber 1958). And, as is often reported in political polls and scholarly surveys, religion remains so important in American culture that many Americans report they would not vote for an atheist for President and they consider atheists significantly different from themselves (Edgell et al. 2006).

Thus, there is a long history of new immigrants to the U.S.A. finding religious institutions to be enormously useful in adapting to their new home. Some of this is about religious faith and the comfort, guidance, and inspiration that faith can provide. But in sociological terms, the functionality of religious involvement is much wider. As sociologists have shown in the past decade or so, immigrants find religious congregations a place to relax, find comfort among compatriots, and maintain extended family connections—at the same time as they learn how to succeed in American education, make important business or employment connections, and draw upon collective expertise in navigating their dealings with native-born Americans (for examples, see Warner and Wittner 1998; Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Leonard et al. 2005). Religious congregations are places where immigrants build ‘social capital’, learning civic skills while remaining connected to a cultural and religious community

that can diffuse and de-fuse the potential alienation that comes with such a move (see Foley and Hoge 2007). Thus, nurturing cultural and religious ties to their communities of origin is a vital process immigrants use in managing their simultaneous adaptation to new lives and a new society.

More recent research shows that religious organizations can have similar functions for the second generation as well, if in somewhat different ways. The second generation is usually more facile with English language than their parents, and understands American culture in many other ways as well. They are often surrounded by non-immigrant peers in school, on sports teams, even in their neighbourhoods, yet their parents' culture is also familiar, and their parents' faith is often one they admire. As a result, religious organizations, some of which the second-generation members themselves found and run, provide a vital link between their parents' immigrant culture and their American context (see Kim 2006; Min 2009; Warner and Williams 2010; Williams 2011).

The organizational form of the religious voluntary association and the cultural route of the subcultural reproduction but economic incorporation are available to immigrants due to America's historic cultural tolerance for religion and religious diversity. That tolerance may not be as expansive as national mythology holds, but one area in which Americans seem to tolerate and even promote differences is in religious expression. One of the reasons many immigrants become more involved with their religion in the U.S.A. as compared with their practice in their home countries is the legitimate place of religion in American civil society. Religious congregations are the most widespread and common form of organizational participation in American society—it is not too much of an exaggeration to say that one *becomes* 'American' through voluntary religious involvement.

### **Religion in American Public Life**

I have argued thus far that there are two potentially contradictory streams in American culture regarding minority faith communities. On the one hand there is the cultural legitimacy of religion as a public identity in the U.S.A., while on the other hand there is

the social ‘otherness’ of minority identity and the assumption by many that the U.S.A. should be a ‘Christian nation’. In the case of Islam these two forces have led to a situation in which many American Muslims have begun to consider their primary identity as ‘Muslim’ rather than Pakistani, ‘Arab’ or some other ethno-racial or national identity. This development is dictated, in part, by the identities imposed on immigrants by native-born members of U.S. society. Many Americans do not know much about the world and the differences between Arabs and South Asians are not clear to them. Further, the recent salience of Islam worldwide, and the cultural Islamophobia that has long been a minor strain in American culture, means that the category of ‘Muslim’ has reached wide-spread public consciousness and has become an easy way to label people. So it may not be surprising that Muslim religious identity would get primacy. And, of course, many Muslims are deeply committed to their faith and their religious identity is important to them. The concept of the *ummah* means that many Muslims themselves prize religious identity over national, racial, or ethnic labels.

Having a *religious* identity as a primary social identification has definite advantages in American society.<sup>5</sup> It is common for Americans to engage in public life through organizations of civil society, especially religious congregations. That is acceptable and deeply legitimate culturally. Further, constitutional and legal protections of religious freedom reinforce the rights to free association, and make religious organizations a valuable, even critical, organizational form in the institutional order. The tax structure yields advantages to religious institutions in organizing collective action. Many of the social functions and services provided by the developed welfare state in western and northern European countries are thought to be properly handled by religious groups in the U.S.A. Thus, for a relatively new minority to push its religious identity and organizations to the forefront is a wise move socially and politically.

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<sup>5</sup> Pyong Gap Min (2009) shows that among many second-generation Korean Americans, their Evangelical Protestant religious identity becomes more important than their ethnic-cultural identification.



America's valuing of civil society and voluntary associations, and its lack of a developed welfare state, has implications for the tasks confronting religious organizations. The first task is, of course, the spiritual nurture and growth of congregants. But congregations, particularly for minority communities, often branch into providing services for community members. Childcare, language or job training classes, food banks, and emergency resources for families in distress are the types of services many congregations provide their members. It is for these reasons that new immigrants find religious organizations so socially useful as well as culturally important, as mentioned above (Williams 2007).

As communities and populations grow, and particularly in cases where education and economic success lead to some prosperity among a segment of community members, other organizations form to seek wider influence in public affairs. Such organizations are the substance of what Bakalian and Bozorgmehr (2009) call 'organized Islam'— for example, the Council on American-Islamic Relations or the Muslim Public Affairs Council. These organizations advocate on behalf of American Muslims, representing the interests of the community in civic discourse, speaking to elected officials, and sponsoring programmes that interpret Islam and Muslims to the general public. More recently, other organizations such as the American Muslim Alliance have developed with the distinct agenda of increasing political influence through electing Muslim politicians to office. One can see a progression from service provision within the community, to representing group interests, to speaking to the public on issues of particular importance to the Muslim community. This is a progression not unlike that experienced by other ethnic and religious groups in the U.S.A. At some point, one might expect American Muslim organizations to speak *for* the public rather than just *to* the public; that is, they may begin articulating a view of the public good on issues beyond those narrowly concerned with their own people. In this regard, the open nature of American civil society and the prominent place of religious institutions within it are specific resources for new immigrants generally and American Muslims specifically.

### **The Particularity of the American Case**

Both the Nordic countries and the U.S.A. are developed post-industrial societies with traditions of political democracy and civil liberties that make them attractive to immigrants; concomitantly, abetted by legal orders and cultural norms that protect and value social diversity, they are also places where newcomers can thrive. But there are significant differences between the U.S.A. and Nordic countries that have in turn shaped social responses to immigrants and the immigrants' trajectories of adaptation.

The first is that the U.S.A. is a very large country with a dramatically diverse population. Its history since its founding as a haven for immigrants from many parts of the world, along with regional variations in settlement patterns, have sometimes worked to diffuse immigrant populations and de-fuse anti-immigrant hostility. Combining with the social reality of immigration and diversity is the salient national mythology of the U.S.A. as a 'nation of immigrants'. As noted above, the national story may paint American history as more accepting than it has been, but there is a decided history there, that even those wary about current immigration levels feel they must acknowledge and honor. Similarly, even though Christianity has been the *de facto* established faith in American society since the founding, both the legal protections for religious freedom and the cultural value placed on that freedom give those in other faiths a way to claim fidelity with American traditions. That the nation has not always lived up to its ideals does not mean that Americans cannot use those very ideals to call the current reality to account. Immigrants have powerful cultural claims on American identity, which has helped facilitate the incorporation of millions of migrants within the country.

A second feature of the U.S.A. that has shaped immigrant adaptation and incorporation is American cultural individualism. This individualism has done much to prevent a state-based welfare system from developing as a truly equitable social safety net—Americans are supposed to provide for themselves and are wary of governmental power. There is also a cultural presumption that people can—and should—remake themselves according to their own consciences. Voluntary commitments are valued,

even in religion it is the freely chosen religious identity that is viewed as authentic; the idea that one must be ‘born again’ to be truly committed is deeply anchored in American religious and political culture. The notion that America represents a ‘new world’, liberated from the strictures of the old, has given many immigrants the opportunities to forge new, hybrid identities. The American mythology of the western frontier is similarly about starting over and making a new life. This cultural theme has also produced among Americans some sense of obligation to accept such new identities among others who are striving to form new lives. The narrative of re-making oneself does put pressure on immigrants to assimilate, but it also pushes the native-born to accept newcomers.

Importantly, this is often understood as a primarily individual process. Just as the American legal system instantiates and protects individual rather than collective rights, the trajectory through life is understood to be a matter of individual ability and will. A staple of American literature and film is the person overly constrained by societal norms, laws, or expectations from which they fight to free themselves (as opposed to mobilizing a collective action). ‘I did it my way’ is an iconic American sentiment.

For immigrants—even those such as Muslims that meet with nativist suspicion—this individualism does provide a pathway around prejudice or social obstacles. It is neither complete nor equally open to all individuals in any given immigrant group. But many immigrants can forge culturally hybrid identities, emphasize their individual characteristics and attributes, and claim to be fully American. That they can do this while also claiming a minority religious faith and being involved in a vibrant congregation is the combination of contexts that has facilitated the incorporation and acceptance of many immigrants in American history, including contemporary Muslims.

### **Conclusion**

I have painted a basically optimistic view of Islam in the U.S.A. I have offered an argument as to why the arrival and incorporation of Muslims into American life continues to progress—despite nativist fears, political suspicion, and a stratified racial

order. There is the risk of this seeming too idyllic. The U.S.A. has tremendous levels of economic inequality and poverty that it seems relatively unwilling to do anything about, and that would be unacceptable in most advanced, post-industrial societies. That Americans must rely more heavily on the voluntary associations of civil society than the welfare state to deal with this has meant that religious institutions remain important in society, but has not effectively addressed basic inequality. Racism, xenophobic attitudes, and an often inchoate Christian nationalism have led to external wars and internal hate crimes. Nonetheless, I am arguing that a de-centralized and privatized civil society, and a widespread cultural individualism, have decreased some of the points of tension and conflict between immigrants and native-born Americans over resources and often opened avenues into full social citizenship. It has moreover helped to keep religion vibrant in American life—as a valued cultural domain, a source of important social and economic resources, and a central part of American national mythology. Whatever the current prejudice against and the travails of American Muslims, I see no reason that these dynamics will not eventually result in their fuller incorporation into the U.S. social and religious mosaic.

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# Muslim Immigrants, Public Religion and Developments towards a Post-Secular Finnish Welfare State

Tuomas Martikainen

## *Abstract*

*The article addresses the question whether, with Finland as the case, the Nordic welfare state is undergoing profound change under the influence of neo-liberal global economics and new forms of governance. The article starts with a critique of Nancy Foner and Richard Alba's (2008) comparison of the position of Muslims in the USA and Western Europe and claims that their comparison does not take into account more recent changes in the ways how West European states deal with religion. Instead the article argues that state-religion relations have been influenced by the neo-liberal restructuring of society and it presents an alternative way to look at state-religion relations. It is claimed the societal location of religion is now better understood within the context of civil society rather than an institutional sphere of its own.*

Muslim immigrants and their offspring have been at the centre of major scholarly attention in Western societies for some time, and they have been studied from a variety of social scientific theoretical positions. In the 2000s, the input of political science in the study of Muslim minorities has become stronger and in this context state–church/religion relations have been seen as significant in explaining differences between immigrant receiving countries and how they handle their immigrant-origin Muslim minorities (for overviews, see Fetzer & Soper 2005; Maussen 2007). Much of the research starts from a standpoint that presumes a modern, secularized nation-state, where immigrants and the Religious Other are an anomaly that the state attempts to

accommodate and regulate through various policies and programmes. States are expected to base their policies in their respective national traditions, which differ markedly (Robbers 2005) but share an ethos of secularism. In this context, Islam is often portrayed as including non-secularized elements that pose a problem to pre-existing societal practices (Casanova 2007).

The role of the state is obviously the larger the more interventionist it is in its nature. The Scandinavian or Nordic welfare states are known for their spirit of social engineering, where inclusion in the labour force has been their main target combined with an ethos of social class and gender equality.<sup>1</sup> The general labour market orientation is combined with financial support and co-operation with civil society for the common good, and hence there is no clear boundary between the third sector of associations and the state apparatus. This is in marked contrast with the Anglo-American and, especially, the US tradition, where the state has had a more restricted role and civil society more autonomy. While these differences should not be exaggerated—as the state nevertheless sets the rules of the game and directs non-governmental actors through legal and other means as well as by the allocation of resources—they are of importance as mentalities of rule and regulation, and also visible in scholarly discussions as normative presumptions. Nevertheless, there is some recent scholarship that argues that during the last thirty years many states around the world have created new types of bonds with civil society organizations, including the UK and the USA, so that civil society's actual independence of state concerns can be questioned in many cases (Sinha 2005).

The focus of this article is the incorporation of Muslim immigrants in the context of the changing Finnish welfare state. It takes as its main discussion partner Nancy Foner and Richard Alba's (2008) article, 'Immigrant Religion in the U.S. and Western Europe: Bridge or Barrier to Inclusion?'. Foner and Alba's text is selected here because it summarizes well the results and spirit of many studies on the topic of immigration,

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<sup>1</sup> See the introductory chapter to this special issue by Ulrika Mårtensson.

integration and Islam, and engages in transatlantic academic debate of the role of religion in immigrant social integration. Here I will argue, however, that Foner and Alba's position rests on problematic theoretical grounds that do not take enough into account the changes in welfare state structures since the 1980s and, hence, provides a partial view on the state–civil society–religion dynamics in the era of neoliberal globalization. Foner and Alba also tend to overemphasize the differences between Muslims and other immigrants. Consequently, this article starts with a presentation of Foner and Alba's analysis and proceeds to discuss changes in the Finnish welfare state. After that, the focus turns to immigrant Muslims and examples of new forms of public engagement with Muslims, the state and civil society in Finland will be presented. The final section of the article engages in discussion of Islam as a public religion in post-secular Finland, with reference to José Casanova's (1994) and Jürgen Habermas' (2008) views on the nature of contemporary religion. Casanova and Habermas are selected because both are referred to extensively in current theoretical debates on religion and modernity.

### **Foner and Alba on Immigrant Religion in Western Europe and the United States**

Nancy Foner and Richard Alba are both senior US scholars in ethnic and migration studies. Their article 'Immigrant Religion in the U.S. and Western Europe: Bridge or Barrier to Inclusion?' was published in *International Migration Review* in June 2008. The article aims to explain 'why the views of immigrant religion are so different on the two sides of the Atlantic and how they correspond with on-the-ground social realities' (Foner & Alba 2008: 361). The authors argue 'that the difference is anchored in whether or not religion as belief system, institution, and community can play a major role for immigrants and the second generation as a bridge to inclusion in the new society' (Foner & Alba 2008: 361). The focus of the article is the USA, France, Germany, Britain and the Netherlands, but they claim that 'much of what we say applies to Western European countries generally' (Foner & Alba 2008: 361). Hence, their observations and arguments should also be valid in Finland.

According to Foner and Alba, religion is generally viewed as something positive in the USA. Among other things, it helps newcomers to find a positive community that brings many kinds of benefits to participants, including help to reshape their identities and support the socialization of their children. Moreover, in immigrant religious communities new immigrants can learn necessary and useful civic skills by taking part in extra-religious activities provided by religious organizations. Quoting Diana Eck, the authors describe American immigrant congregations as ‘training grounds in participatory democracy’ (Foner & Alba 2008: 364–5). In short, ‘religion helps to turn immigrants into Americans and gives them and their children a sense of belonging or membership in the United States’ (Foner & Alba 2008: 365). In this manner, Foner and Alba draw attention to the great significance played by religious organizations which represent virtually every immigrant religion.

In Europe, where, following Foner and Alba, Islam is the predominant immigrant religion, the picture is different. Muslims are considered with suspicion, if not with outright hostility, and they are suspected of constituting a threat to ‘the liberal values of European states’ (Foner & Alba 2008: 369). Muslims are overall portrayed as discriminated against and as facing prejudice, and their religio-cultural practices are met with mistrust. Again, according to Foner and Alba, public representations of Islam and Muslims are dominated by such topics as the oppression of women, speculations about the creation of parallel societies and Muslims living on social benefits. Islam is cast as a religion that generates conflicts of various kinds; for example, Muslims are said to be increasingly viewed as having ‘oppositional identities’ (Foner & Alba 2008: 373) and as being associated with radicalization and terrorism. We may conclude that Foner and Alba’s representation of Muslims in Europe focuses on the negative and conflictual public visibility of Islam, and problems with public authorities and structural or overt discrimination against Muslims, but they do not address the role of religious institutions in social integration with reference to Europe in the same detailed way as they did with reference to the USA.

The apparent dissonance between the US and European experiences was something that Foner and Alba assumed and set out to explain. In the article they highlight three sets of reasons, which even imply a degree of causality. First, whereas in the USA Muslims constitute only a small segment of all immigrants, in Europe Muslims are the largest post-war religious minority. European Muslims are associated with and overrepresented among the less successfully integrated immigrants, as they are to a large extent less skilled labour migrants or their children,<sup>2</sup> which is a major contrast to the more prosperous and highly skilled US Muslims. Second, being religious is socially approved in the US, while religion is considered with suspicion in Europe. Hence, public religious claims are not automatically acknowledged in Europe and their legitimacy is often questioned. Third, the institutionalization of religion is different in the US and Europe. While Foner and Alba note differences in church–state relations between various European countries, they claim that Muslims have it more difficult in Europe if the comparison is made with historical established churches, which in most cases have strong connections to national identity and the state.<sup>3</sup> For these reasons, the European system has much more inbuilt potential for conflicts than the US model. In sum, Foner and Alba conclude that ‘religious similarity between natives and immigrants, historically rooted institutional structures, and the religiosity of the native population’ (Foner & Alba 2008: 383–4) explain the differences in the degree of welcoming immigrant religions to Europe and the US. The authors also note that

because the social science literature inevitably reflects the concerns and realities in the societies under study, we can also expect social science work on immigrant religion to continue to be characterized by the patterns we have described here, with an emphasis on its positive role in immigrant adjustment and assimilation in the United States and its links to the difficulties of incorporating Muslim

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<sup>2</sup> Foner & Alba 2008: 374–6. The authors do not mention refugees and asylum seekers of Muslim background, even though they constitute a major share of Muslims in many European countries. Nor do they take into account other reasons of migration, and their eventual implications for social integration.

<sup>3</sup> A similar stance is shared, among others, by Casanova 2007.

immigrants and their children into Western European societies. (Foner & Alba 2008: 387)

In the following, some of Foner and Alba's central arguments will be analysed from the perspective of developments in Finland. As that article covers many topics, it is not possible to take all relevant issues into account here, and the commentary will focus on the religious background of immigrants and historically rooted institutional structures.<sup>4</sup> These will be put both in a historical as well as contemporary context of the Finnish welfare state, to which we shall turn next.

### **The Restructuration of the Finnish Welfare State and Religion**

The general development of the Scandinavian welfare states is described in the introductory chapter of this special issue. In the following, the focus is on recent changes in the Finnish welfare state, including simultaneous—but not coincidental—changes in state–church/religion relationships. The perspective pursues current discussions of governance as something broader and more widely encompassing than government, a scholarly trend which in itself hints at the erosion of previous social structures (Kjær 2007: 7) As Anne Mette Kjær (2004: 19) notes:

In public administration, the governance debate is about changes that have taken place in the public sector since the 1980s. From a model based on Weberian principles of hierarchy, neutrality and career civil servants, public sector reforms introduced other models of governing: those of markets and networks.

In Finland, the turn of the 1990s marked the end of the Cold War era, and the fall of the Soviet Union allowed more political flexibility for Finnish decision-makers, developments which eventually led to more open borders and changes in all sectors of society. Until then, Finnish decision-makers were careful not to upset Soviet leaders,

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<sup>4</sup> At the time of writing this article, there were no available studies comparing the religiosity of immigrants and natives in Finland, so it was not possible to provide data on that matter.

even though the country was independent. The eventual restructuring of the Finnish welfare state has its roots in the rapid internationalization of Finnish society, including the growing importance of the global economy and Europeanization. Finland became a member state of the European Union in 1995.

Some Finnish social scientists have described the welfare state transition as a move from a 'planning economy' to a 'competition economy' (Alasuutari 2006), the latter captured in notions such as 'competitiveness society' (Heiskala 2006) and 'project society' (Sulkunen 2006). Risto Heiskala (2006: 37) summarizes some central aspects of the transformation as follows: The aim of the state has shifted from regional and social equality to economic efficiency, innovation and economic growth, and citizens are increasingly conceived of as customers. Governmental co-ordination has moved from hierarchical planning to market mechanisms, including network management and privatization. Previous homogenous cultural values and preferences, collectivism and national protectionism have been replaced by heterogeneity, individualism, cultural openness, and international competition.

Key developments in the competitiveness society include new public management, outsourcing and privatization of welfare services, and the growth of projects and programmes as new forms of governance. Major administrative changes of state structures are undertaken on a regular basis, with the result that institutional boundaries are constantly redrawn, and enduring structures have been replaced, eroded or complemented by more temporary and market-based solutions. The extent and nature of these reforms is difficult to analyse in Finland as well as internationally, because of the complex ways in which they overlap with traditional societal sectors. As Brenner et al. (2010: 189) note, 'market-oriented regulatory reform (...) [is] associated with unpredictable "layering" effects in relation to inherited institutional landscapes'. The analysis of these changes must be done on a case by case basis, because the changes take different forms in different social structures, at the same time as they are embedded in 'transnational fields of policy transfer' (Brenner et al. 2010: 189). Also the role of legal practice has changed, with law becoming increasingly important in solving various

kinds of conflicts, including socio-cultural ones, a development that resonates with the contractual nature of capitalism. Or, as Ran Hirschl (2004: 71, italics in original) frames it, ‘over the past two decades the world has witnessed an astonishingly rapid transition to what may be called *juristocracy*’.

The Finnish restructuration is part of a global trend of neoliberal policies, whereby the state to an extent retreats from some of its previous societal core functions, or at least redefines its role in service provision, and opens new spaces for market forces to operate (Arestis & Sawyer 2005; MacGregor 2005). The roots of these developments are the new rules and regulations of global economy that emerged in the late 1970s, and which became mainstream in the following decade. The state’s retreat from the role of sole caretaker of the nation entailed growing expectations of other sectors of society to deliver not only services and goods but also identities and forms of belonging. Consequently, we have witnessed an increase of public debates about social capital and civil society, where associations and other voluntary organizations are expected to take a more prominent position than before in creating ‘social cohesion’ and general welfare (Kjær 2004: 4; Rathgeb & Smyth 2010: 274). Simultaneously, the Evangelical Lutheran majority church in Finland has redefined its identity from a folk church to a moral voice in civil society, which includes taking a more critical stance in relation to the state than previously.

While changes such as those just described have been under investigation since the 1980s in the social sciences, related changes in state–church/religion relations have not been of major interest in Finland.<sup>5</sup> This has several reasons. Firstly, secularization

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<sup>5</sup> The lack of interest is not specific to Finland, but seems to apply internationally as well. However, I shall leave aside the international scholarly dimension in this article, as it deserves a thorough analysis of its own. Recently, however, several academic currents in the study of contemporary religion are increasingly sensitive to the restructuration of the state and its effects on religion. These include the role of churches in service provision, the study of faith based organizations and commodification and marketization of religion. See, Martikainen & Gauthier 2013.



theory is still the dominant paradigm in mainstream analyses of religion and society in Finland. From that perspective nothing dramatic has happened, even though an increasing role of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland in welfare provision and various networks has been noted, as well as the Church's new public visibility (Pessi 2010). This is related to the dominant idea of functional differentiation as a key aspect of secularization, which misses the cross-sectoral nature of current governance reforms, where networks and other temporary solutions are of increasing importance. As Matthias Koenig (2009: 295) notes, 'a linear theory of functional differentiation provides unsatisfactory explanations of the politics of religious diversity'.

Second, since religious changes occur, as it were, on the fringes of institutional power, they have been viewed as unimportant or marginal. This might explain why there is only peripheral interest in minority religions and religious diversity as a challenge to the status quo, as well as in developments inside the dominant Evangelical Lutheran Church.<sup>6</sup> Processes of internal differentiation have often been viewed rather as examples of classical secularization than as new, emerging forms of religious practice and belief. Even legislative changes as discussed below appear minor in the context of traditional secularization theory, and it is only when a variety of variables are taken into account that a different picture starts to emerge, as demonstrated by ongoing research projects.<sup>7</sup>

As indicated in the Introduction chapter, the Lutheran and Orthodox Churches in Finland have historically had special rights that granted them wide autonomy,<sup>8</sup> a

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<sup>6</sup> The main exception to this is interest in the Lutheran Churches' increasing role in service provision, which is a growing field of study in Finland and other Nordic countries. See, Bäckström & Davie 2010.

<sup>7</sup> For example, both the 'The Role of Religion in the Public Sphere: A Comparative Study of the Five Nordic Countries' (in Finland: Church Research Institute, 2009–2013, <http://www.kifo.no/index.cfm?id=266100>) and the 'Post-Secular Culture and a Changing Religious Landscape' (Åbo Akademi University, 2010-2014, <http://web.abo.fi/fak/hf/relvet/pccr/>) essentially deal with issues that are at the core of welfare state reform and its impact on religion in the public sphere.

<sup>8</sup> In 2008, 80, 7% of Finns were members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, 1.1% of the Finnish Orthodox Church, 1.3% of other registered religious organizations and 16.9% did not belong to any

privileged position and closeness to secular decision makers. Minority religions and the non-religious were granted their rights in the Religious Freedom Act of 1922, but these groups remained at the margins of society until recently.<sup>9</sup> Religious pluralism has gradually grown since the establishment of religious freedom and, especially since the 1990s, there has been a qualitative and quantitative leap in religious diversity. This is related both to the increasing international mobility of Finns and increasing immigration, which were also taken into account in the process leading to the reform of the Religious Freedom Act in 2003, ‘The religio-political situation has changed and, due to internationalization, Finland has also religiously changed to a more multicultural country’<sup>10</sup> (Ministry of Education 2001: 19). The new act changed in spirit from negative to positive freedom of religion, and improved the position of minority religions, for instance, in religious education in schools. The planning committee also suggested public financial support for minority religions, which eventually took place in 2008.

To summarize this brief sketch of change in the Finnish welfare state, we can conclude that the state itself has transformed from a paternalistic caretaker to a professional manager, and the state apparatus is increasingly organized via markets and networks. Simultaneously, historical institutional structures are changing, and new, often temporary, alliances formed. Only a few of these changes have directly affected the formal and legal position of religion. Those that have include a growing separation between the state and the majority churches in the 1990s and a reform of religious freedom legislation—affecting all other organized religions—in the 2000s. Beyond that there are signs that religious organizations of many faiths are increasingly becoming part of local and national networks, and co-operating with secular organizations. These

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religion. The share of Orthodox has always been quite low, and the Lutheran Church is much more visible (Statistics Finland: 2009:4).

<sup>9</sup> See the introductory chapter by Ulrika Mårtensson. See also, Heikkilä, Knuutila & Scheinin 2005.

<sup>10</sup> Author’s translation, original in Finnish: “Uskontopoliittinen tilanne on muuttunut ja Suomi on kansainvälistymisen myötä muuttunut myös uskonnollisesti monikulttuurisemmaksi maaksi.”

again are becoming partners of public actors through various interest group networks and funding mechanisms associated with them. This shift follows a twofold path. On the one hand, the historically privileged Lutheran and Orthodox Churches are loosening their ties with the state, and, on the other hand, minority religions are coming closer to the state. The development involves changes of the societal and identity positions of the respective organizations towards actors in civil society that are also expected to take some responsibility for public welfare. In the following sections these changes will be further explored, with focus specifically on the role of Muslim migrants and communities.

### **Muslim Immigration**

Finland has been a predominantly Lutheran society since the Reformation in the 1520s, when Finland was the eastern province of Sweden. In 1809, Finland was annexed to Imperial Russia whereby the Russian Orthodox tsar also became the official head of the church. Being part of the multi-religious Russian Empire did not dramatically change Finland's religious composition or legislation, but rather strengthened the position of the historical Orthodox minority in the eastern part of the country and introduced small Orthodox and other religious minorities in various areas of the country. The history of a permanently settled Muslim presence in Finland goes back to the 1870s, when the first so-called Tatar Muslims arrived in the country from the Nizhni Novgorod region. Although they numbered fewer than one thousand individuals, the Tatars were able to institutionalize and gained formal acceptance as an Islamic organization in 1925 based on the then new Religious Freedom Act, which followed the independence of Finland in December 1917. Tatar immigration ended in the mid 1920s due to the closing of the border with the Soviet Union (Martikainen 2009: 78–83).

Muslim migration remained at low levels until the 1960s, but gradually increased due to work, study and marriage migration. As Finland was a post-war emigration country, there was little labour immigration until the 1980s, and, thus, Finland has no major Muslim labour migrant groups like the many other Northern and Central European countries. Net migration flows to Finland began to increase in the 1980s, and they continued to grow in the following decades. Besides increasing work, study and

marriage migration, Finland started to accept refugees of the Iran-Iraq war in the late 1980s under the quota administered by the UNHCR. Furthermore, from the early 1990s onwards more people of Muslim background were to arrive, mostly as UNHCR refugees or independent asylum seekers from the conflict-ridden countries of Somalia, former Yugoslavia (Bosnians and Kosovo Albanians) and Afghanistan. As a result, the majority of Finnish Muslims are of recent refugee background, despite the history of Tatars which now extends to the fifth generation (Martikainen 2009: 79).

The number of Muslim immigrants is difficult to estimate, but various attempts have been made. According to my estimate of the religious background of first-generation immigrants (foreign born) in Finland from 1990 to 2009; Christians constituted 61 per cent, Muslims 19 per cent, non-religious 11 per cent, Buddhists 4 per cent, ethno-religionists 2 per cent and Hindus 1 per cent in 2009 (see Table 1). The share of Muslims has risen over the years, as there were approximately 4,000 first-generation Muslim immigrants in 1990 and 45,000 in 2009. That implies a trebling of Muslims from 6 to 19 per cent among first-generation immigrants. The largest Muslim groups are from Somalia, Iraq, Turkey and former Yugoslavia (Martikainen 2011). Even though this is a rough estimate, it shows that Muslims constitute about one fifth of all immigrants.

	1990	1995	2000	2005	2009
Buddhist	2%	2%	3%	3%	4%
Christian	76%	69%	66%	64%	61%
Ethnoreligionist	1%	2%	2%	2%	2%
Hindu	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Muslim	6%	14%	17%	18%	19%
Non-religious	9%	10%	10%	10%	11%
Unknown	4%	2%	2%	1%	1%

Table 1. The estimated religious background of first-generation immigrants in Finland from 1990 to 2009, percentages. Source: Martikainen 2011.

Even though the share of Muslims among immigrants is significant, they are not the largest religious group as Foner and Alba suggest. While this can in part be explained by the lack of postwar (Muslim) labour migration to Finland, it points to a more serious shortcoming of Foner and Alba's analysis, or more precisely of the data on which they rely. European postwar labour immigration relied mainly on three distinct types of sending countries: migration from the neighbouring countries, from former colonies and from other countries via bilateral labour movement agreements. Many, but not all, immigrants arriving via the two latter types were of Muslim background, but much less so from the neighbouring countries. Neighbouring countries, however, often constitute a major share of all immigrants, as in the case of Sweden (Finns), the UK (Irish) and Germany (Italians, Poles, Greeks, etc.) (Castles & Miller 2009: 97–119). Additionally, many immigrants have not arrived because of work, but due to other reasons, including family reunification, marriage and study, which also bear certain religious characteristics. Pre-migratory selection processes may in some cases lead to overrepresentation of some religious groups among immigrants, if they are overrepresented, for instance, in certain occupations, different social classes or regions dominated by emigration.

However, for a number of reasons, academic research has extensively focused on immigrants arriving from outside Europe, and this selection overemphasizes the role of Muslims as migrants. The large numbers of Christian immigrants have remained outside of the scope of research—including in Finland—and, hence, at the periphery of academic analysis. Considering these Finnish realities, one might question Foner and Alba's view that 'social science literature inevitably reflects the concerns and *realities* in the societies under study' (Foner & Alba 2008: 387, emphasis added), at least if we are to gain a comprehensive account of the religious background of immigrants, and the eventual implications for receiving societies. Another reason related to this imbalanced picture is the quality and type of data on which numbers and estimates of Muslims in Europe rely. The figures often aim to provide the maximum number of Muslims living in a certain country, but do not break the numbers into immigrant generations and

therefore overemphasize the actual numbers of Muslims among immigrants, a category that Muslims are associated with.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, the number of other immigrant religions is much less often examined. Foner and Alba's analysis concerning the numbers and actual significance of Muslim immigrants thus appears to miss the target on three accounts. First, on the basis of literature they presume that Muslim immigrants in Europe are the only really significant group, and leave the discussion of other religions to the side. Second, they do not question the numbers or try to compare them with the total number of immigrants. Third, they do not define what constitutes an 'immigrant', which confuses these figures even further.

Foner and Alba are correct in their observation that Muslim immigrants have been studied more intensely than other religiously identified immigrant groups, but by leaving aside the existing and growing literature on other immigrant religions, including studies of Christian, Buddhist, Hindu and other religions, they do not truly engage in a comparative study. A different picture starts to emerge when these other groups are taken into account and the focus is turned to the organizational level. In a comparative study of immigrant congregations in the city of Turku in Finland, which has the country's second largest immigrant population, it was argued that the communities in question provided all the positive aspects that Foner and Alba were describing as typical features of US immigrant religions. These positive aspects were present in all congregations studied, including the Muslim ones. One major difference between this Finnish case and the USA remained though—the congregations were not particularly focusing on general welfare activities, as those were taken care of by the municipality and the state (Martikainen 2004). While this observation may appear somewhat contradictory to the argumentation of this article, it is not necessarily so, because the data was gathered in the early 2000s, and based on ongoing research among the same

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<sup>11</sup> Problems with estimating the religious background of immigrants are well known, and it makes country comparisons difficult. This was also noted in the introduction of the *Yearbook of Muslims in Europe* (Nielsen *et al.*, 2009), where the editors deliberately chose *not* to provide a summary table of the number of Muslims in different countries, even though the book has the best available information on the topic!

communities, increasing levels of co-operation with public authorities can be identified. Moreover, as the historical differences between the USA and Finnish welfare structures are distinctly different, the statement should be understood in that context. Hence, the service structure of the state affects activities on the community level that is related to the religion--state relations to which we shall turn next.

### **State–Muslim Relations**

The Finnish state views itself as religiously neutral, even though the special historical roles and rights of the Lutheran and Orthodox Churches are recognized. Religious actors are seen as interest groups like any other, and there is no major pressure to change the existing state of affairs. Among others, religious school education in the pupil's own religion is available for many minority religions, and it should be non-confessional in its nature, as specified by the Religious Freedom Act in 2003. Hence, in the Finnish context religious neutrality does not imply the state's indifference to the religious needs of citizens. Criticism of church/religion and state relations also exists in the form of an increasingly visible New Atheism and among many in the political left, especially in the middle-size party The Green League, but it is more directed at equal treatment than to the total abolition of existing regulations.

The religious institutionalization of the Tatar Muslims in the 1920s was resourced by the community itself, as was the case for all other minority religions as well. Initially, most of the newly organized groups were Protestant Free Churches, but the same regulations applied to the Catholic Church as well as the few non-Christian groups.<sup>12</sup> As

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<sup>12</sup> In Finland, formal registration is usually a necessary precondition for any voluntary association to function. The organizational forms to which the article refers are those of a 'registered religious community organization' (Finnish, *rekisteröity uskonnollinen yhdyskunta*) and 'registered association' (Finnish, *rekisteröity yhdistys*). The former includes a thorough evaluation process and such organizations may be granted specific rights, such as the ability to perform formally approved marriages and the right to have religious education in state schools. The latter is a less demanding process, where the association has the right to have its own finances. Currently, the legislation regarding these two organizational forms is similar. We also need to bear in mind that the formal religious registration process to be recognized as a

the number of Muslims rose rapidly in the 1990s, a wave of Islamic institutionalization followed with the establishment of numerous local mosques and other Muslim societies. Local authorities encouraged these groups to apply for formal recognition as ‘religious community organizations’ or ‘registered associations’. The rationale was that by doing so the groups would be able to apply for municipal support, which was welcome as the majority of new Muslims were of refugee background with few resources of their own. Most local Muslim groups were quick to organize, and hence they gradually became approved as bodies representative of local Muslim interests. By the end of the 1990s, there was a nationwide, state recognized network of mosque and other Islamic associations, but with few stable links between the communities. Local variations notwithstanding, it seems that public authorities and other interested people played a crucial role in this process. In the language of new institutionalism, it was a question of *institutional isomorphism*, as Muslim activists realized that they were required to set up formal organizations in order to gain public approval (*coercive isomorphism*) and they also copied each other’s strategies (*mimetic isomorphism*). (Cadge 2008: 351–2) The process illustrates well the importance of the institutional context and how it shapes forms of organization.

The rapid Islamic institutionalization was accompanied by an even more extensive organization of immigrants generally into various kinds of cultural, ethnic, sporting etc. associations taking place around the country during the 1990s. The reasons for this were the same: the need of formal approval and resources. A noteworthy feature of these institutionalization processes was that they touched overwhelmingly people of recent refugee background, many of whom also happened to be Muslim. Compared with the Muslims, other immigrant groups were much less active during the same period. (Pyykkönen 2007a: 72–4) Miikka Pyykkönen (2007a: 116–17) relates these

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religion by the state has been conducted only by some religious minority groups, and many smaller communities have in legal terms remained as registered associations. However, many Muslim groups have opted for the deeper regulation to be recognized as a registered religious community organization, and have successfully undergone the process.



formalization processes to the emergence of project society, whereby immigrant associations since the late 1990s could increasingly become partners in integration projects and thus gain some resources; this development coincided with the largest wave of formal institutionalization. After Finland joined the EU in 1995, projects became a major tool for public administration to develop, create and support immigrant integration activities. With the support of funding, especially, from the European Social Fund and Finland's national lottery fund, The Slot Machine Association, hundreds of local projects have been started, many including immigrant associations as partners. In this way the associational governance embedded in new public management has been a prominent part of the post-1990 immigrant associational life in Finland (Martikainen, Valtonen & Wahlbeck 2012).

One type of project that some of the Muslim organizations have engaged in is the immigrant integration project. The large and influential mosque communities especially have attempted to gain from this kind of project. Traditionally, as well as in most contemporary cases, the key activities of immigrant religious organizations in Finland focus on cultic and educational activities, in addition to providing a meeting place for social and festive occasions (Martikainen 2004: 225–33). However, the project market, and especially the integration projects, encourages religious organizations to engage in matters that used to be taken care of by the municipality and the state. Drawing on the terminology of Michel Foucault and Mitchell Dean, Miikka Pyykkönen (2007b:201) calls this process the *governmentalization of civil society* in Finland. It is also worth noticing that while the same processes have affected religious organizations generally in Finland, the circumstance that these public reforms have provided occupational opportunities especially for post-1990 immigrants implies that the impact of new public management has been particularly strong among immigrant associations.

If the 1990s can be characterized by immigrants' local institutionalization into communities of shared interest, such as mosque communities and women's societies, the 2000s evidence a trend to create local, regional and national pan-ethnic representative bodies that can function as mediators between the public sector and the

myriad of immigrant, including Muslim, associations. The demand for these came from the public sector, which was at loss as to who should be consulted regarding various issues, but also from entrepreneurial immigrant activists. Several pan-ethnic organizations have thus been founded around Finland, and the state has expanded the range of activities of the Advisory Board for Ethnic Relations (ETNO), an expert body with national and regional boards run by the Finnish Government. ETNO's function is to

(1) Promote interaction between Finland's ethnic minorities and the authorities, NGOs and the political parties in Parliament, equally at the national, regional and local level; and

(2) Provide the ministries with immigration policy expertise in the interests of furthering an ethnically equal and diversified society.

(Ministry of the Interior 2010)

ETNO is a new broker in ethnic and immigration affairs, but an even more important actor is the Ombudsman for Minorities. The Office of the Ombudsman for Minorities was founded in 2002 as part of new legislative and administrative changes related to the implementation of EU anti-discrimination and equality directives, whereby multicultural issues were assigned to the state administration. The first Ombudsman soon realized that many topical issues were related to Muslims, but the state had no interlocutor to represent the Muslim immigrants. This circumstance initiated a process that led to the establishment of the Islamic Council of Finland. The Ombudsman played a central role in the process, by providing legal assistance and helping to raise state funds to the new organization from its beginning (Martikainen 2007). As far as I know, such close state involvement in minority religion affairs has only one historical precedent, the Finnicization of the Orthodox Church in post-independence Finland in the 1920s (Laitila & Loima 2004: 156–81).

The emergence of Islam as a concern for the Finnish state can be explained in terms of four main reasons. Firstly, media reporting from elsewhere in Europe and the world has given Islam a problematic reputation among the public, and with post-1990 migration these became also national debates. We should, however, note that public perceptions and social realities do not equate. While a generally negative view of any given subject does not necessarily contribute to anything positive, it is still different from actual behaviour and experiences. As we have seen in the above examples, it can be argued that Finnish public authorities have been highly receptive of Muslim interests, even though it has been a slow learning process. Secondly, many of the less affluent immigrants who are in need of welfare benefits have Muslim religious background, and, thus, Islam has become something to be noted in public administration in association with non-religious social problems. Thirdly, the growing securitization of Islam, especially since 9/11, has forced Finnish authorities to monitor and react to potential terrorist threats in Finland, if only to conform with EU security co-operation. Also, the Finnish Security Police (Supo) has been assigned more resources for counterterrorism surveillance, and the threat of Islamic radicalization did play a role (albeit small) in the Finnish Internal Security Programme of 2008 (Ministry of the Interior 2008: 70–1). Fourth, the very structure of the welfare state itself—old and new—provides ample occasions for contact between the people and the state. Some of these occasions are specifically related to religion.

### **Islam as a Public Religion in Post-Secular Finland**

José Casanova and Jürgen Habermas are only two among several social theorists and commentators who have noted a new presence of religion in the public sphere. This general observation is also true in Finland, where various forms of religion have gained new prominence not only in public debate and visibility, but also in academic research. Casanova relates the emergence of public religion—or ‘deprivatization’—to ‘the fact that religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them’ (Casanova 1994: 5). In this vein, he refers to political developments

that gained international importance during the 1980s, especially the Islamic revolution in Iran, the Solidarity movement in Poland, religious developments in Latin America and Protestant fundamentalism in US politics (Casanova 1994: 3).

From the perspective of his philosophical interest in the public sphere and procedures of public debate, Jürgen Habermas has recently become concerned with the significance of public religion in developments towards a new, 'post-secular' society. According to Habermas, post-secularity has three characteristics. First, the relativization of European secularism through globally mediated images 'hinging on religious strife' (Habermas 2008:20) which questions the determinism that established a causal connection between modernity and an ever-more thoroughgoing secularization. Second, religious pluralization, whereby churches and other religious organizations increasingly create their own 'communities of interpretation' (Habermas 2008: 20) in the public arena; the most notable examples being Christian and Muslim fundamentalists. This is related to such publicly debated issues as abortion, same-sex relations, and religious dress. Third, a realization of the permanence of a new, originally Immigrant Other, whose values are traditional and collectivist and strongly associated with religion. For Habermas, post-secularity implies that society remains organized by secular legal institutions and law, which nevertheless are obliged to enable religion to maintain 'a public influence and relevance' (Habermas 2008: 21), which in turn will erode 'the secularist certainty that religion will disappear worldwide in the course of modernization' (Habermas 2008: 21; Habermas 2006).

While these and other internationally recognized religious developments without doubt have played an important role in bringing religion to the fore in the public debate and in research, changes in the global political economy and related transformations in welfare states that began in the 1980s and intensified during the next two decades are certainly important too. The ongoing transformation of the Finnish post-war welfare state has had both intended and unintended consequences. Among the intended consequences are the

outsourcing of former state services to the private sector and increasing partnerships with 'civil society'.<sup>13</sup> As noted by Anne Mette Kjær, outsourcing involves a fundamental change in the way things are regulated. As the line of command changes from hierarchical rule by command to policy network steering by reciprocity and trust, the state's capacity to guide results is weakened, even though it still has power via the allocation of resources and the setting of rules (Kjær 2004: 19, 43). Of course Finnish state administrators have not actively been planning to change the existing forms of governance of religion, but what we see is rather the effect of other, broader public policies and general trends which have generated a new state of affairs as a by-product.

To summarize the discussion so far, we can say that the social location of Islam in Finland has transformed as follows (see Table 2). The relationship of Muslim organizations to the state has shifted from neutral and marginal (the Tatars) to an active one (post-1990 immigrant Muslims). The Islamic Council of Finland and several other (policy) networks and platforms have been created as interlocutors with the state. To secure their existence, the state has guaranteed initial funding, hence creating a bond of financial dependence. Muslim organizations are increasingly seen as locations of active citizenship and as arenas of social integration, or at least that would be the preferred state of affairs. A significant force behind this state interest has been the threat of Islamic radicalization and terrorism, forces which, the government hopes, will be tamed and domesticated by active political involvement in decision making. Hence, an ongoing, though currently fairly modest, securitization of Islam has become evident

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<sup>13</sup> Historically, 'civil society' has not been a central ordering concept in Finnish and Nordic countries, but it is rather an invention of the 1980s to describe and legitimize the new roles available for voluntary associations. Despite national differences, the close bond between 'state' and 'society' in the Nordic social democratic tradition has included 'civil society' actors in it, often embedded in the concept of 'society'. The emerging debate of 'civil society' in the 1980s has brought in a Tocquevillean understanding of 'civil society' which is in line with neoliberal policies. This differs markedly from the Hegelian tradition that is the historical base for understanding 'civil society' in Finland. For a thorough discussion of the historical development of the concept of 'civil society' in Finland, see: Kettunen 2008: 51–60, 140–2.

during the 2000s. Presumably, Islam’s persistently bad public reputation also keeps the administration’s concern with security alive; in the Netherlands the intelligence agencies have been arguing since the 1990s that negative public debate about Islam contributes to radicalization among young Muslims, rather than preventing it (Groen & Kranenberg 2010: 7).

<b>Social location of Islam</b>	<b>Post-war welfare state</b>	<b>Neoliberalized welfare state</b>
Relationship to state	Neutral, marginal	Active, more central
State partnerships	None	Growing in numbers
Security concerns	None	Very high
Public image	Irrelevant and distant	Negative and present

Table 2. Changes in the social location of Islam in Finland.

Finnish Islam is definitively a public religion in Casanova’s sense of the concept, and Habermas’ concept of the post-secular also makes sense of the situation. However, while I am not in fundamental disagreement with Casanova’s and Habermas’ positions, it is worth pointing out that they both share the view that modernity in its construction is still in force. The arguments of deprivatization, public religion, and post-secularity require the existence of a functionally differentiated society, where the state ultimately also has concerns other than that of a manager and regulator. The state, of course, has not disappeared, but rather changed its ways of functioning and its ethos. Even though the currently pervasive state concern with Islam appears to prove otherwise, it is not necessarily so. If we accept this fundamental transformation of the state’s role, it remains difficult to hold any historical institutions as solid as they still appear. Rather, what we should look for are fractures and cracks in its organization, and analyze how deep they are. In this article I do not claim that we have fully entered a new era, but rather that we are living in a liminal phase, where both old and new structures live side by side, but the new order seems to be gaining the upper hand. If Thomas Luckmann’s (1999) views on the contemporary social forms of religion are correct, the next step is

an increasing marketization of religion, of which there are many signs already, as the previous institutional structures are transforming.

### **Conclusion**

The focus of this article is the institutionalization of Islam in the context of the changing Finnish welfare state. The point of departure is a critique of Nancy Foner and Richard Alba's views of the different receptions of immigrant religions in the USA and Europe. It is argued that Foner and Alba over-emphasized the role of Islam in Europe, and did not compare like with like in their analysis. In this context, I have argued that in so far as classical state–church/religion relations are used as frameworks of analysis, their changing nature must also be considered; Foner and Alba serve as examples of a study that has failed to consider this circumstance and consequently has produced a limited view of what is really happening. In the last section, José Casanova's and Jürgen Habermas' views on contemporary religion were discussed. Even though their respective concepts of 'public religion' and 'post-secular society' inevitably tell us something important about the current state of affairs, it was argued that they rely too much on a taken for granted acceptance of a continuous differentiation of societies as a fundamental aspect of modernity.

This article has brought forward an alternative view for understanding and analysing the position of Muslim minority organizations and their relationship to the Finnish state. While there is a relatively high degree of public interventions, they do only modestly make sense within the framework of historical state–church/religion relations. Rather, they were viewed as examples of the transforming governance of religions that is based on the emergence of a neoliberalized project society. These interventions erode the classical place of a minority religion in Finland, and invite the group in question to participate actively in the construction of social capital and social cohesion for the common good—an activity that the state has increasingly outsourced to civil society.

The role of Islam and Muslim organizations has been, in the case of Finland, that of an accelerant. Already emergent ways of thinking and doing were mobilized as the

administrative system needed to react. Except for the high-level security concern over radical Islam, there is nothing that makes the Muslim experience different from those of other religions in the country. It actually seems that the social positions of all religions are becoming closer to each other, including the nationally specific Lutheran and Orthodox Churches, and potentially more controversial. It is in this sense that religion has become public and Finland post-secular.

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## **Muslims in Copenhagen: Social Cohesion or a Parallel Society? Results from an Empirical Survey 2008–09**

Mustafa Hussain

### ***Abstract***

*The Nørrebro sub-district of Copenhagen, where 14% of the population belong to ethnic minorities, mainly Muslim, has stood on the Danish media's agenda for many years as a problem-ridden area, developing into a parallel society with ethnic ghettos, crime and deviancy among the second generation and lack of social cohesion and integration. This article introduces results from the survey 'At Home in Europe: Muslims in the European Cities' commissioned by the Open Society Institute, which examines the current policy and patterns of Muslim integration in eleven municipal districts of the seven metropolises of the EU countries. It argues that when measured across a range of parameters to ascertain the social, cultural and economic integration of the Muslim minorities, the empirical data and the documentary evidence gathered from, and about, the sub-district (2008-9) contradict the political claims and the media rhetoric of a parallel society.*

This article reports a study that set out to understand the everyday experiences of ordinary Muslims living in the Inner Nørrebro sub-district of Copenhagen, with a particular focus on the impact and perception of public policies aimed at improving integration and social inclusion. Integration here is understood as a two-way process that requires engagements by individuals as well as opportunities for participation.

Existing academic research on Muslims and Islam in Denmark and in the rest of the European Union has as its main focus Muslim integration at a national level, covering

such topics as encounters between Muslim minorities and national institutions (e.g. schools, legal structures, and hospitals), youth and radicalization, international terrorism and extremist groups, Muslim families and gender equality. Besides this and some research on theological approaches to the main tenets of Islam, there are also many ethnographic studies of Muslim culture(s), sectarian divides among Muslims, and historical accounts of strained relationships between the West and the Islamic world. Meanwhile, the aftermath of 9/11 has not only seen a renewed interest in the Muslim presence in Europe, but also the rise of far-right political movements across the Western world, against multiculturalism, Muslims and Islam. The ‘Muslim question’ has also stood high on the mainstream political agenda.

It is interesting to note, however, that even today many students and scholars involved in research on Muslim communities still end up collecting data from the holy scriptures of Islam, by frequenting mosques to interview clergy and political Islamists, or by monitoring their ideological propaganda—just as is the case with the mainstream media. Such inquiries paint an abstract, decontextualized and generalized image of ordinary Muslims and their everyday life. These generalized images often reproduce an us-them dichotomy on the dimensions of cultural norms, custom, and values. This sociological study, in contrast, embarked on exploring Muslim integration by highlighting the views and concerns of the average Muslim in two distinct aspects. First, how the average Muslim experiences day-to-day life through encounters with the local non-Muslim population, and perceptions of local welfare policies and practices of governmental institutions and—hence—what concerns are expressed about such interactions with the surrounding society. And second, how having a Muslim identity impacts on the perception of belonging to the city, and what prevents successful social integration. By bracketing the doctrinal divides between Islam and Christianity and between traditional religiosity and modern secularism, the survey provides a first-hand account of what Muslims themselves think and say regarding their daily lives and integration.

For the analysis of integration trends, the main parameters that are hypothesized to be crucial for social integration are education, employment, health, and civic and political

participation. Measurement of these is supplemented with informal contacts and communication between the Muslim and non-Muslim population in the residential areas explored in the survey.

The survey was conducted during 2008 in the Inner Nørrebro sub-district of Copenhagen, which has an ethnic minority population of more than 14.6% of the district's total number of residents, which was 71,330 in January 2007, according to the municipal office of statistics. The overwhelming majority of the minority population in Nørrebro is believed to be of Muslim background.

### **Methodology**

The survey was based on a common research design for all the eleven EU cities studied in the 'At Home in Europe' project of the Open Society Foundation, a think-tank supported by George Soros' Open Society Institute (OSI). This research was thus based on a uniform questionnaire survey conducted amongst 100 Muslim and 100 non-Muslim residents of the Inner Nørrebro sub-district, lasting on average one and a half to two hours. Six focus groups with an average of eight to ten Muslim participants, different from those who took part in the questionnaires, were also held in Nørrebro with self-identifying Muslims. In addition, eight in-depth qualitative interviews were held with local officials, members of non-government organizations and experts engaged on integration issues in Copenhagen and the country at large after the preliminary analyses of the survey data.

The sample frame for the quantitative data was designed to target the maximum representation of different ethno-national communities of Muslims as well as non-Muslims and was sub-sampled on the further dimensions of age and gender. In the category of the self-defined non-Muslims, 78% are native Danes and the rest are foreign nationals from various countries of Asia, Europe, America and Africa.

The six focus groups among the Muslims, with an average of eight participants, both males and females, were held to elicit debate on the main topics of education and employment, health and welfare services, policing and civil and political participation.

*Perception of Muslims at national level*

A good deal of national and international research and inquiries suggest that attitudes in Denmark towards ethnic minorities have deteriorated since the late 1980s. Both the media discourse and the anti-immigrant rhetoric in parliament have become harsher towards Muslims in particular. Studies point to a change of direction in perceptions, attitudes and institutional behaviour, namely legislation about migration and integration, representation and portrayal in the mainstream media, political rhetoric about Islam and Muslims, or their depiction in the popular culture, such as television fiction, film and drama. Muslims are conceived as a culturally homogeneous group of ‘foreigners’ and in a binary opposition to all that is Danish. Several studies have focused on the role of the media in the reproduction of exclusionary discourse and practice (Hussain et al., 1997; Hervik et al., 1999; Hussain, 2000; Madsen, 2000; Hervik, 2003; Andreassen, 2005).

A recent EU-wide discrimination survey by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) has explored perceptions of discrimination amongst two Muslim groups in Denmark, the Somalis and the Turks. It found that 61% of Somalis and 58% of Turks believed that discrimination based on ethnic or immigrant origin was widespread in the country (EU-MIDIS, 2009:6). A 2008 survey assessing discrimination based on religious identity in the EU countries revealed that an average of 42% of respondents were of the opinion that discrimination due to one’s faith or religion was widespread in the EU countries. However, for Denmark the figure was not only significantly higher than the EU average, but it was also the highest among all the 27 countries, at 62% (Eurobarometer, 2008).

An analysis comparing the political rhetoric and perception of the Muslims in parliamentary debates between 1967 and 2005 with perception of Russian Jewish immigrants of the early twentieth century (1903–1945) concludes that the Muslims are



talked about in the same way, as a threat to Danish values and culture, as Jews were talked and debated about in the Danish parliament in the pre-war period (Jacobson 2009).

An international Gallop poll conducted in 27 Muslim and Western countries commissioned by World Economic Forum (WEF) prior to its meeting in Davos in January 2008 was reported on Danmark Radio's Text-TV. According to the DR's own wording it read, 'Danes are the most Islam-critical. 79% of the Danes look at greater interaction with the Muslim world as a threat. In Spain, Holland, Italy and Sweden this share is between 65 and 67%'.<sup>1</sup>

#### *Identity, belonging and social interaction*

In the questionnaires, respondents were asked to identify the five things they felt said something important about them when describing themselves to others. For both Muslims (80%) and non-Muslims (50%) family emerged as the most important aspect of identity. The two groups differed significantly on the importance of religion in their identity. Almost one fifth of the Muslim respondents (18%) identified religion as important to their identity compared with 2% of non-Muslims. Thus among Muslims religion is viewed as the second most important aspect of their identity after the family in describing themselves to others. A striking result is that not many from the various ethno-national groups of Muslims regarded their ethnicity, culture or national origin as that important, at least not in the context of defining their self-identity. Also identity through work or profession scored low among them.

Over 40% of non-Muslims indicated that they did not believe in any religion. However, contrary to the popular myth that Muslims give too much importance to their religion, the survey data demonstrated that for almost 80% of them religion was not the most

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<sup>1</sup> Danmark Radio, 21 January 2008. Such international surveys are hardly reported, or debated, in the mass media. Note also the strategy of mitigation in the expression "Islam-critical". Expressions such as islamophobe, Islamophobia, anti-Muslim or anti-Islam are not used any more in the media language.

important marker of their identity in their day-to-day life.<sup>2</sup> Another such indicator can be read through the response to a question for which the respondents, both Muslim and non-Muslim, were asked to indicate where they encountered people from ethnic and cultural backgrounds other than their own. Not many Muslims reported such encounters at prayer houses or mosques. However, the ‘don’t know’ category for both Muslims and non-Muslims remained high. This is obviously due to the fact that not many respondents visited churches, mosques or other places of worship on sufficiently regular basis to recall an accurate response to the question.

Regarding daily interaction across the ethnic groups, 75% of Muslims and 45% of non-Muslims reported work, schools or colleges, and even a higher percentage from both the groups indicated shops and markets, as the prime locations of frequent encounters with people from various cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Among other variables hypothesized to be of importance, three possible indicators to measure levels of social cohesion are; levels of trust of people in the neighbourhood, whether the residents of the city or a residential area believe that people in their neighbourhood are willing to help their neighbours, and whether they think people in their area share the same values. Only 10% of Muslims and 5% of non-Muslims categorically denied that people in the neighbourhood could be trusted. The rest from both the groups responded positively to the question, though the percentage of non-Muslims responding positively was slightly higher. This difference is probably due to the fact that vast majority among the non-Muslims were ethnic Danes, some of whom had resided in the area for much longer, and across generations, compared with the Muslim immigrants. They thus have wider social networks in the local neighbourhoods that provide a sense of ontological security. The language barrier could be another main factor, as not all among the Muslims speak the same language, nor do all of them have

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<sup>2</sup> Less than c. 17–18% of Muslims in Denmark go to a mosque for Friday prayers (see, Kühle 2007; Mikkelsen 2008). An international survey (Pew 2008) resonates with the results that about 80% of Muslims globally do not practise their faith literally or its prescribed rituals, such as five prayers a day.

proficiency in Danish. However, the percentage of responses indicating mutual trust in the sub-district of Nørrebro turned out to be higher than the average in all the European cities surveyed by the project.<sup>3</sup>

On the question of whether they agreed or disagreed that people living in their residential quarter were helpful neighbours, over 80% agreed, or strongly agreed, in the affirmative: a sign of a good deal of social cohesion and solidarity. But it is the third dimension of shared values that demonstrates the most notable difference in responses. More non-Muslims (59%) had the view that people living in their area did not share the same values than did Muslims (41%), whilst about 13 per cent from both groups had no opinion.<sup>4</sup> These responses can be viewed against the national debate in Denmark—as in other EU countries—for the past decade or so that has been replete with ‘our values’ (Danish, Christian, Western) versus ‘their values’ (Muslim, Islamic, Arabic etc.). This rhetoric is not confined merely to the outspokenly anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim Danish People’s Party, but is discernible in contributions to political debates on integration by mainstream parties and the media. This value debate has apparently had an impact on responses to the question for both groups, where the Muslim respondents may be more on the defensive to the issue of value differences. Without being patronizing, however, it is also plausible that many respondents from the Muslim groups, among whom the literacy rate is lower than the non-Muslim group, are unable to reflect on this complex issue.

Despite this gap between the two groups on perception of common values, the overall impression from the survey results indicates that there is a greater sense of reciprocal acceptability between Muslims and non-Muslims than there is a social distance of any significance. Against the backdrop of the popular perception of ‘ghettos’ and ‘ethnic enclaves’ that has dominated the political and media discourses, about 69% of Muslims

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<sup>3</sup> For detailed comparisons, see further, OSI (2009).

<sup>4</sup> The average for all the cities for the non-Muslims who did not believe that people share the same values in their neighbourhood was 55.2%, and 49.9% for the Muslims.

and 78% of non-Muslims agreed that people from different backgrounds in their local area get along well with each other.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim respondents identified similar barriers to people getting on well with each other in their neighbourhoods. A lack of cultural understanding was identified as the main barrier. Lack of language skills and prejudice and discrimination were also pointed out as important obstacles. Surprisingly, more non-Muslim respondents pointed at discrimination and prejudice against ethnic minorities as an obstacle towards meaningful social interaction (19%) than did Muslims themselves (12%).

One interesting result of the survey is that few respondents identified crime or violence as a causal factor, despite the fact that during the period of monitoring for this survey Nørrebro had witnessed some of the most dramatic events of violent confrontations between the police and the minority ethnic youth and sporadic but recurrent shootings between Danish rockers and criminal gangs dominated by some minority ethnic youth.

The research reveals that both Muslims and non-Muslims have a strong sense of belonging to their local area. About 80% of both the groups have a 'very' or 'fairly' strong sense of belonging to their local area. Results of belonging to the city of Copenhagen are also positive, 81% and 86% respectively.

Another important aspect of identity and belonging can be viewed by asking not only about how the respondents looked at themselves, but also how they would like to be viewed by the surrounding society. Among Muslims, 38% said that they considered themselves Danish and 58% that they did not. The response of non-Muslims was obviously higher; 88% of respondents said they saw themselves as Danish. While 38% of Muslim respondents viewed themselves as Danish, and a majority of Muslims

respondents (51%) wanted to be seen as Danish, only 14% felt that other people regard them as Danish.<sup>5</sup>

Both Muslims and non-Muslims mentioned the lack of proficiency in the Danish language as the main obstacle to being seen as Danish. Being a non-white minority member was given as the second significant reason by Muslim respondents. Other research indicates that fair-skinned Bosnian Muslims complain far less about discrimination than Muslim groups such as Somalis, Turks and Arabs.<sup>6</sup>

The questionnaire data suggests that the most frequent interaction across the ethnic boundaries takes place at workplaces and educational institutions, followed by shopping malls and stores. To be more specific on interfaith relations and social encounters, the respondents were asked how often they had met and talked with people from a different religious background than their own in the past year. Among Muslim respondents, 72% said that they had such contacts on a daily or weekly basis, whilst 53% of non-Muslim respondents said they had such contacts at various places on a weekly or daily basis. However, one way to look at how meaningful such social contacts across faith and cultural backgrounds are is to ascertain whether people socialize privately with each other. The table below summarizes the frequencies of meetings in private homes across religious backgrounds.

<b>Response</b>	<b>Muslim</b>	<b>Non-Muslim</b>	<b>Total</b>
Daily	15	14	<b>29</b>
At least once a week	13	18	<b>31</b>
At least once a month	16	20	<b>36</b>

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<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that a good number of the respondents are naturalized Danish citizens (52%) and some of them were born and educated in Denmark.

<sup>6</sup> This observation is based on a range of periodic telephone surveys by Catinét, Copenhagen – a private firm – and also by Møller and Togeby (1999).

At least once a year	20	9	<b>29</b>
Not at all	2	3	<b>5</b>
Don't know	33	35	<b>68</b>
No response	1	1	<b>2</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>200</b>

Table 1. How often do you meet with people of other faiths at home?

Source: Open Society Institute (OSI 2008)

If the category 'don't know' is excluded, it is clear from the table that about two-thirds of respondents get together socially at their private homes with people from other faiths or religions on various occasions. A tentative conclusion, supported also by the suggestion given by the respondents themselves when asked what prevents people from different background getting along with each other, could be that it is not religion *per se*, but often the language barrier, common interests and social standing which may hamper social interaction across ethnic identities in the neighbourhood.

### **Education**

Education, especially in public schools, is one of the most important pillars of integration. The education system provides individuals with the skills and qualifications for participation in the labour market. It also plays a formative role in the socialization of young people in the unspoken rules and values of society.<sup>7</sup> Schools also contribute to integration by providing opportunities for interaction between pupils and parents of different ethnic and religious backgrounds. Schools, alongside workplaces and shopping malls, are a key location for encounters between people of different backgrounds. However, such encounters become less frequent, both for parents and children, when schools become segregated on ethnic lines. The Copenhagen city council acknowledges the problem that many native Danes in the city, including Nørrebro, move their children

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<sup>7</sup> See, for instance, Schiffauer 2001.

to private schools to avoid too many ‘bilingual’ pupils (those of other ethnic origins) in the public schools.

The tendency of moving children to private schools<sup>8</sup> is not confined to native Danish parents only. Many Muslim parents who can afford it enrol their children either in ethno-national schools or in international schools with English as their medium of instruction<sup>9</sup> that are situated outside the vicinity of Nørrebro. As a result many public schools in Nørrebro and in the surrounding areas are dominated by pupils from low-income groups and families with limited social and cultural capital. The majority of these are from Muslim families. This state of affairs reproduces a vicious circle of marginalization and failure in further education and skills for the labour market, because the drop-out rate remains higher for these children:

The unsatisfactory results in primary and lower-secondary schools contribute to a high drop-out rate among ethnic minorities on further education programmes. When leaving school, the majority of all youngsters—95 per cent—start study programmes or courses to qualify them for the labour market, but approximately 20 per cent drop out each year. The drop-out rate is notably highest on vocational training courses, where up to half of the students drop out.<sup>10</sup>

According to a study by Dahl and Jacobsen (2005), the low performance and higher drop-out among the minority children can be explained by at least five different factors:

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<sup>8</sup> In the city of Copenhagen as a whole 25% of pupils were enrolled in private schools in 2007, whilst the average for the country as a whole was merely 13% (Statusrapport, 2008 by Dept. of Employment and Integration. City Council, Copenhagen).

<sup>9</sup> In the inner Nørrebro sub-district there are five municipal schools and five private schools; Nørrebro Lille Skole, ISRA and DIA, two Muslim schools, the Free Gymnasium and a Catholic school, Sankt Ankar skole.

<sup>10</sup> Integration Policy (2007: 20), Copenhagen Municipality.

1. Lack of proficiency in Danish and poor qualifications from primary schools
2. Negative social inheritance (poor resources in the family) and thus lack of knowledge about the Danish educational system.
3. Lack of 'ethnic capital' (lack of knowledge of Danish culture and society).
4. Ethnic prejudice and discrimination (for example, bullying in schools and playgrounds)
5. A limited network beyond one's own ethno-national background.

A study by the Rockwool Foundation indicates some improvement in the educational trends of minority pupils, but drop-out rates, especially in vocational training colleges, remain higher than for natives at the national level (Jensen & Rasmussen 2008), though a much more recent media report has noted that due to intensive efforts by the municipality of Copenhagen, native Danish parents have shown a greater tendency to choose the nearest public school for their children than was the case in the previous years.<sup>11</sup> Copenhagen Municipality's Integration Policy Document<sup>12</sup> refers to the PISA Survey 2004 and states that there is a constant performance gap between monolingual (with Danish as mother-tongue) pupils and bilingual pupils. The performance gap is attributed to socio-economic differentials and lesser resources among the parents to help children with homework. The Integration Policy aims to narrow the gap in performance between these two groups.

In the OSI survey, education services provided by the municipality emerged as the service that both Muslim and non-Muslim respondents were least satisfied with, after rubbish collection. The survey results reveal that 54% of Muslims and 22% of non-Muslims were highly or fairly satisfied with the primary schools, while the rate of satisfaction was 48% and 24% respectively for the higher secondary schools and vocational colleges in the area. Eleven out of 65 Muslim respondents and 16 out of 87 non-Muslims expressed dissatisfaction with the municipal schools for poor standards

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<sup>11</sup> *Berlingske Tidende* 4 March 2010.

<sup>12</sup> Integration Policy 2007.



and performance. some . 56% of Muslims and 49% of non-Muslims reported that the public schools respected the religious customs of their pupils: the average reported for all the cities surveyed is 51.8 and 57.4%, respectively.

Discussion of public schools in the focus group sessions for Muslim women highlighted one salient issue, that Danish parents avoid sending their children to the schools in the local area if they find ‘too many’ pupils with minority backgrounds in the school. Other topics that became part of the discussions included swimming classes, diet, the right to take a day off school on a Muslim holiday, and teachers’ concerns that fasting by small children during Ramadan hampered their concentration in the classroom. The following exchange in one focus group session indicates some of the parents’ concerns:

(Voice A) The main problem is that when the kids have to go swimming, the Danish kids take off their clothes in front of everyone and swim but our kids cannot do that. I tell my kids, such as to my daughter, ‘You cannot take off your clothes in front of others; don’t say it’s me who told you this but say that you yourself don’t like to show your naked body to others’.

(Voice B) I know about the school where her daughter goes and my kids have been ... that they have separate arrangements for boys and girls. They know that Muslim girls will not shower in front of boys and so they have separate bathrooms for girls; each girl showers separately and comes out after dressing up. They have separated it all for boys and girls.

(Voice C) It is so in many Copenhagen schools but it is possible that this may not be the case outside Copenhagen; it is done where the majority of pupils are Muslim.

Generally, though, the discussants seemed to be satisfied with the ways in which these issues were being handled by the school authorities. It should also be mentioned here

that there is no particular dress code for Danish public schools, and as such there is no restriction on Muslim girls wearing the hijab.<sup>13</sup>

Criticism of state-run public schools came to the surface also during the focus group session on education and employment. One of the participants, who himself had been pupil in a public school, said that atmosphere for the Muslim pupils was not pleasant and that private schools had a better standard of education and space for recognition of the Muslim identity:

Regrettably the public schools in Copenhagen are not performing well... I can recall, when I came to Denmark, how much you had to fight against, when you were in a public school. And it is also frustrating, when you are young and you are finding out who you are, that you are also up against racism and prejudice and other problems... The international schools have no such problems.

The Copenhagen City Council has a range of projects running to improve the situation in the public schools,<sup>14</sup> but according to an educational consultant at the municipality, their failure or success depends very much on the attitudes of the teachers and the management at the specific schools. According to the consultant, an overarching problem is that due to a general perception in society about immigrants from less developed countries, many teachers entertain low expectations of the children of these migrant families, which has a negative impact on the children's self-esteem. Children from some vulnerable families either drop out of school or become involved in anti-social activities in reaction to non-recognition. The consultant interviewed for the

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<sup>13</sup> Headgear. Muslim scholars differ on whether *hijab* in the Koran refers to an attitude of modesty or a piece of cloth.

<sup>14</sup> The details and the nature of these projects are available on the City of Copenhagen website at <http://www.kk.dk/integration> (accessed October 2009).

survey stressed a need for reforms and structural changes in the school such as training staff in multicultural pedagogy.<sup>15</sup>

### **Employment**

Until the 2008 crisis in the international finance markets, Denmark enjoyed one of the highest rates of employment among the EU countries. Some sectors of the economy were suffering acute shortage of labour to the extent that immigration rules for skilled labour and expertise had to be relaxed to meet the increasing demand for professionals in particular industries and service sectors. The upswing in the economy prior to the recent recession also helped the minority ethnic communities whose unemployment rate had been much higher than the native Danes for many years. In Copenhagen, 74% of working-age people of Danish origin (men and women combined) were employed in 2005, but the figure for immigrants from non-Western countries was far below, at 47%. The picture was more dismal for minority women. While 74% of native Danish women worked, the figure for non-Western women in the city was just under 41%.<sup>16</sup> The Copenhagen City Council suggests two explanations for the lower employment rate for immigrants:

One is that there is a very large group of immigrants that has absolutely no contact with the labour market: More than one in three immigrants of employment age is outside the labour market, while the figure for Danes is just under one in five. The second explanation is that immigrants who are actually on the labour market are more likely than Danes to be unemployed. The unemployment rate in Copenhagen is approximately 6 per cent for Danes, compared with 19 per cent for immigrants. In addition to this, immigrants

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Assad Ahmed (Copenhagen, 21 August 2009). A survey by Bo Ertman from the Centre for Theory and Method Research reported that 70% of those migrant youth who are involved in petty street-crimes hail from vulnerable refugee families suffering from traumas of wars and violence. DR Text-TV, 27 December 2008.

<sup>16</sup> Integration Policy 2007.

typically work in specific industries in which pay is often lower, job security poorer and skill enhancement opportunities fewer, compared to other industries.<sup>17</sup>

The situation for the self-employed in Copenhagen is no less precarious, as many Muslims living in the city make their living through kiosk-shops, grocery stores, and driving taxis. According to the City Council, 30% of new businesses launched by entrepreneurs with an immigrant background close within their first year, compared with 20% of new businesses launched by entrepreneurs with a native Danish background.

Among respondents in the OSI survey, 28% of Muslims and 34% of non-Muslims were, at the time of the survey (2008), in full-time employment, while a further 14% of both groups were in part-time employment. A greater proportion of Muslim respondents (14%) than non-Muslim respondents were self-employed. A greater proportion of Muslim respondents (10%) than non-Muslim respondents (6%) were unemployed and looking for work. Muslim respondents (10%) were also more likely than the non-Muslims (2%) to be out of the labour market due to sickness or disability.

A starker contrast between the labour market participation of Muslim and non-Muslim respondents emerges when account is taken of the types of jobs people take. Among the Muslim respondents in employment, the largest number was found in routine manual or service occupations followed by semi-routine manual and service occupations. By contrast, the largest group of non-Muslim respondents were in modern professional occupations and clerical or intermediate occupations.

Over the last decade or so the network theory has gained increasing importance in explaining differences in labour market participation. Most vacancies, especially in routine manual work and semi-routine manual work in services and manufacturing, are

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

filled through network relations. Very often employers make sure that they can trust a new employee through personal references by those who are already in the firm. At the same time many job-seekers obtain information about employment opportunities through their personal networks of friends and family. This state of affairs can put migrants in a disadvantageous position such that they end up finding the same type of jobs which their close networks are already engaged with: dead-end jobs, low-paid and in an ethnic niche.<sup>18</sup>

Respondents to the OSI Survey were asked how they obtained their jobs. It was obvious from the responses that the largest proportion of the employed, both Muslims and the non-Muslims, relied on network relations followed by personal initiatives of contacting the potential employers. A negligible number of the employed got their jobs through municipal job centres.<sup>19</sup> The importance of networks beyond one's own ethnic community was also emphasized in the focus group on education and employment: there was general feeling that immigrants generally lack network- relations beyond their own ethno-national groups or communities.

A well-educated female participant in the group observed that she had not personally faced discrimination in the employment market, but she acknowledged that discrimination was a problem. This was exemplified by the high demand for labour in the health sector, which meant that many Muslim girls would like to learn and work in the sector, but the national hijab debate and signals of distance to Muslim staff wearing head-scarves in hospitals inhibits their motivation. On the other hand, she was not in favour of solving the problem of prejudice and discrimination in the private labour market through legislative sanctions.

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<sup>18</sup> In his 1999 book, *Durable Inequalities*, touching upon Italian immigrants in New York, sociologist Charles Tilly, however, holds that the network ties do produce general inequalities in the labour market but are also a source of protection, especially for new arrivals of immigrants.

<sup>19</sup> Their inefficiency has often been criticized in a range of reports in the media..

A quantitative survey conducted on behalf of the Danish Federation of Labour Organizations (LO) on attitudes among Danes towards Muslim colleagues at workplaces suggests that there is a good deal of scepticism about Muslims despite the personal experience of working with them. The survey indicates that one third of non-Muslims are of the view that Muslim women should not be allowed to wear the hijab at the workplace, and a majority think that Muslims should not be allowed to perform the ritual prayer in working hours. Almost half of the respondents wished not to be confronted with the religious practices of their colleagues at their workplace. The vast majority believed that Muslims were creating problems by making demands for special treatment because of their religion. However, the survey also revealed that the majority of respondents had no objection to their Muslim colleague's right to halal food and that they should have the right to time off on their crucial holy days (i.e. *Eid*).<sup>20</sup>

### **Health, Social Care and Welfare**

A few social science studies concerning health were performed during the 1980s, mainly of an anthropological nature, focusing on traditional Muslim cultures and covering topics such as the traditional Muslim culture's encounter with modern Danish hospitals, superstitious belief systems about illness and health among Muslims, the use of amulets among immigrants against the 'evil eye', the concepts of 'hot' and 'cold' food and beverages, believed to influence the body, and so on.<sup>21</sup> Today, the focus has turned more to the real-life health problems prevalent among Muslim immigrants and their descendants, covering topics such as complications during birth and pregnancy, and frequently diagnosed diseases among immigrant communities such as diabetes, cardiovascular problems, health hazards due to diet and lifestyle, and so on. A good deal of medical research is already in progress at various medical faculties and research institutes across the country.

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<sup>20</sup> Ugebrev A4, no. 200913.

<sup>21</sup> See, for example, Elverdam (1991) and bibliographical references there.

One such study provides evidence of the positive effects of having female health visitors for mothers from minority communities. According to this study, female health visitors provide a bridge to the surrounding society and its institutions for many migrant families; they are a source for information about matters such as how to secure a place in a nursery or apply for a better dwelling after the extension of the family (Jeppesen & Nielsen 1998). Nielsen (2002) finds that other benefits also arise from having female health visitors, including ensuring the timely vaccination of babies and a reduced level of hospitalization. The health visitors thus not only provide a good deal of useful information about how to solve various problems falling outside of the health sector, but also timely guidance to safeguard against health risks, which reduces the frequency of visits to physicians and hospitalization. The difficulties of communication that arise from the lack of fluency in Danish among some first-generation migrants are a problem identified by Nielsen (2002). Language barriers and communication problems make it difficult to diagnose and treat patients.<sup>22</sup> Nielsen recommends provision of qualified interpreters by the municipal social services and hospitals, as this can reduce the levels of unnecessary hospitalization of minority patients.

The frequency of psychological problems is reported to be high among members of ethnic minorities. This is partly explained by the fact that a large section of the population has fled wars and torture. Singla (2004) analysed psychosocial strains experienced by minority youth due to intergenerational gaps with their parents, and their own identity struggle in a discriminatory environment. Skytte (2002b) explored the various aspects of traumas and tragedies faced by children and their parents from foreign (including Muslim) cultures when municipal social authorities take children away from troubled families and place them in the custody of Danish families. She also explored the situation of the most vulnerable sections of the minority ethnic communities, such as the elderly in need of social protection and care (Skytte 2002a).

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<sup>22</sup> The language barrier has been noted by other scholars as well. See on this, for instance, Skytte, 2002a; Barfod & Leimand, 1996; Barfod, 1997; Barfod & Persson, 2000.

In the OSI survey, respondents were asked to express their opinion on a range of municipal social services. For the health services in general the vast majority from both the samples, Muslims and non-Muslims, expressed great satisfaction. The Muslim respondents who were not satisfied (18%) had their main concern with lack of interpretation facilities during visits to their doctors or hospitals. Some provided anecdotal examples of using children as the interpreters for their parents.

Health was also an issue that was brought forth in discussions in several sessions of focus groups. Talking about why members of ethnic minorities were found to be more prone to diabetes and heart diseases and whether it was linked to lack of information, a respondent from one focus group had the view that

There are so many good programmes about health, doctors give talks, but the majority of our people do not understand them. That is why the general information disseminated by the Department of Health does not reach our people. I will give you a small example. About a year and half ago, there was a women's group in ... which provided information about health, particularly diabetes, and the women asked that if two persons were eating from the same plate and one had diabetes, would the other catch the disease? This shows the extent of lack of knowledge among our people... There is a severe lack of knowledge and information.

Lack of proficiency in Danish and thus lack of exposure to the daily news media became a focus of discussion in several sessions, and the participants were of the view that this creates problems not only in the health sector but in many areas of daily life such as adequate information on rules and regulations about retirement and pensions, educational institutions and the provision of social services. However, the overall impression about the healthcare provision in the municipality was positive—worries about the old-age care notwithstanding—in all the sessions in which issues of health-care became the focus of talk.



As far as social protection is concerned, complaints of dissatisfaction with the social services in the survey were rare. An interview with the administrative head of the Women's Centre for Immigrant Women in Nørrebro, however, provides a glimpse of the problems for which the immigrant women visit this centre, partly financed by the municipality and partly financed by private donations. The head of the centre noted that, in addition to those regular visitors at the centre for pastimes, hobbies and chat with like-minded women, the centre was used by an average of 250 women per year for counselling on a range of social problems. These included domestic conflicts, psychological problems, poverty and economic issues, troubles with social authorities if living on social welfare benefits, advice about children and so on.<sup>23</sup>

### **Citizenship, political and civic participation**

Seen from the formal legal perspectives, Muslim immigrants in Denmark enjoy all those universal rights on civic and social dimensions and political and economic citizenship that are considered vital for a vibrant democracy in a modern welfare state. Although there is no restriction on practising any faith or religion, it is the exercise of cultural citizenship that has been one of the core issues on the agenda, ever since the labour migrants of the 1960s began to organize themselves on political, national or cultural platforms in the mid-1970s (Hussain, 2002; Mikkelsen, 2002; 2003).

In the OSI survey, 52% of Muslim and 83% of non-Muslim respondents said that they were eligible to vote in national elections. Two things are to be noted here regarding participation in the formal democratic processes. First, that almost half of the Muslims, at the time of the survey, did not have voting rights for the national parliament, because only Danish citizens are eligible to vote. And out of the 52 Muslim respondents who had Danish citizenship, ten did not cast their vote, whereas only four out of the 83 eligible non-Muslims respondents did not vote in the last national election. When the data for voting at local elections is examined, we see that only 18 respondents from the Muslim group and 8 non-Muslims said they did not have the voting rights for local and

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Margrethe Wivel, Women Centre for Immigrant Women, Nørrebro (14.09.2009).

regional councils, yet proportionally more Muslims than non-Muslims abstained from using their voting rights. Nonetheless, 74% of Muslims voted in the last local elections, while 87% of non-Muslims took part in the elections.

The propensity to participate in political processes, including motivation to vote, increases under normal circumstances if people believe that their vote can bring a change for the better for themselves. The OSI survey shows that the majority of both Muslims and non-Muslims had little trust in the national government. Regarding local government there was far greater trust among Muslims, who are more likely than non-Muslims to say they have ‘a lot’ of trust in local government.

At the national level, 61% of Muslims but only 34% of non-Muslims believed that they had no influence on political decision-making. In comparison, 56% of Muslims and only 28% of non-Muslims held the view that they had no influence on decisions affecting their city, despite the fact that during the survey period there were five elected minority members serving on the City Council, of whom at least four can be said to have a Muslim background. Although the sample frame from Nørrebro is not strictly a representative sample in the statistical terms, the results showing the relatively lower political motivation among the Muslim residents in Nørrebro correspond to the results of national surveys (see further, Mikkelsen 2008).

Respondents were also asked whether they had taken part in consultation or public meetings about local services or problems in their local area in the last 12 months: 26 respondents (n=100) from the non-Muslim sample and 21 from the Muslim sample (n=100) answered in the affirmative to this question. Among those who had been active, many took part in the elections of their local associations of residents or tenants, and in local initiatives for better integration in their residential quarter or neighbourhood.

In the special focus group for discussions on policing and civil and political participation conducted among the relatively well educated and professionals, a range of topics concerning political participation was brought onto the agenda. These included

general apathy among Muslim citizens, a lack of social and cultural capital among Muslim politicians, lack of cooperation between the elected politicians from ethnic minorities in the city council, and the negative attitude towards the minority associations and organisations in the mass media. A female participant spoke about participation in the democratic process:

I always feel that being a Muslim one has to do [a good deal of] extra work just to be recognised for what one stands for. [Already] in school it is not enough that you are brilliant but you have to prove that you are the best before you are recognized on equal footings like your classmates. So I do not feel that it is so [that you have the same opportunities].

Another participant mentioned the general suspicion about the Muslims in the country;

One thing is to have the possibilities and rights to take part in the societal processes. But it is quite another thing, how you are treated as a citizen. This can be the case in the local areas but it is also a broader case. And with the latest measures which we are witnessing at the moment, we are reaching the [former East German] DDR situation. And with that I mean that we have begun to talk about how school-teachers, managers and coaches in sports clubs, and scout-leaders shall keep eye on [Muslim youth] to monitor increasing radicalization among the youth without ever bothering to define what radicalization is all about.

Visible signs of being a Muslim, like wearing a hijab, were discussed with reference to a Danish debate on whether a Muslim woman wearing a headscarf can be a member of jury or a judge,<sup>24</sup> and whether she be allowed to speak from the podium of Danish parliament. One participant held the view that showing any sign of religiosity by

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<sup>24</sup> This national debate ended with the Danish parliament passing a bill prohibiting any judge or a jury member from entering a court while wearing religious clothing or symbols.

politicians renders them less objective in the public eye: ‘So if you are not religious, you will be considered the most neutral, but if you have religion, be it Islam, Christianity or any other religion, also Judaism, so we are not taken as neutral’. No one disagreed.

### **Conclusion**

Integration of Muslims in Denmark has been on the political and media agenda for several years, and this is the only faith community among all the immigrant communities whose integration into society is problematized on a regular basis in public debates. The survey which this article reports had focused on Muslim integration at the city level on the assumption that social cohesion and reciprocal integration at a societal level always begin in the local residential areas and neighbourhoods through interaction with the institutions and the resident population of the area.

The OSI survey results reveal that, in contrast to a negative perception of Muslims and to anti-Islam attitudes at the national level, the city council of Copenhagen has taken a pragmatic approach in its effort to integrate its Muslim citizens. Muslim respondents expressed a greater trust in the local government than in the national government, and their sense of belonging to their local residential areas and the city was significantly higher than their sense of belonging to the society at large.

For the standard questionnaire, a control group of 100 self-defined non-Muslims in the sub-district were also interviewed to analyse whether the Muslim identity affected their perceptions of social relations and opinions about city policies, provision of the welfare services, and inter-ethnic relations across the ethno-national boundaries. This demonstrated that, contrary to popular rhetoric about some urban areas turning into ‘parallel societies’ and secluded ghettos, there are signs of a good deal of meaningful social interaction between the minorities and the majority living in the district. However, the factors that may prevent meaningful social encounters between various ethnic or faith groups or individuals are reported to be; lack of language proficiency, a

lack of cross-cultural understanding, and different interests based on socio-economic position and professions, not the religious identity *per se*.

The overall results from the survey suggest that, despite some neighbourhoods in the area surveyed having an overwhelming multi-ethnic composition and an excess of socially and economically vulnerable citizens, there are no signs of seclusion of the Muslim communities from the rest of the surrounding society, or of the development of a parallel society. People belonging to various faith communities have frequent interaction with each other in both formal and informal sites and arenas. The vast majority (more than 80%) of both the groups were quite satisfied with living in their respective residential quarters and were getting along well with each other and expressed a strong sense of belonging to their local area and the city. Contrary to media images of Nørrebro as a conflict-ridden area of crime and youth deviancy, residents felt themselves secure and safe in their neighbourhoods. All such indicators point towards social cohesion and integration.

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## Muslims in Norway: Value Discourses and Interreligious Dialogue

Oddbjørn Leirvik

### *Abstract*

*This article discusses value discourses among Muslims in Norway in the light of political frameworks and public debates. It particularly analyses Norwegian Muslims' relation to values associated with the welfare state and gender equality, and the role of interreligious dialogue in Norwegian society. Among the findings are, that while generational changes contribute to some young Norwegian Muslims' identification with institutionalized Norwegian values and practices related to dialogue and gender, others choose to identify with strongly conservative values, not least concerning gender; and others again, although very few, identify with Islamic political extremism.*

In order to understand the socio-political position of Muslims in Norway and prevailing value discourses among citizens who identify themselves as Muslims, it is necessary to bear in mind some special features of Norwegian society such as the egalitarian tradition, the welfare state legacy and the strong position of feminism in Scandinavia.<sup>1</sup>

Another influential feature is the still prevailing state church system which implies that Muslim organizations—like other registered faith communities—receive financial support from the state.

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<sup>1</sup> In the field of education, the egalitarian 'one school for all' system seems so far to be supported by the Muslim community. Reflecting both Muslims' priorities, relatively strict policies towards religious schools and the fact that the issue of Muslim private schools is a controversial one in general society, there are presently (2012) no private Muslim schools in the country. Cf. 'Sier nei til muslimske skoler', *Aftenposten* 17 April 2012.

Norway may also boast of a relatively strong culture of dialogue, at least between leaders of the faith communities. The climate in public debates about Islam, however, is markedly different—influenced by Islamophobic discourses in general society and confrontational identity discourses in some Muslim circles.

In tune with the general aim of this volume—to investigate the dynamic relationship between Islamic and public institutions and values (cf. the introductory chapter)—I will try to elucidate some *relational* aspects of Muslim identity discourses in Norway, as they have developed in the framework of the welfare state and in organized dialogue with Christian and Humanist partners.

### **Islam in Norway**

Muslims in Norway either trace their Norwegian roots back to labour immigration from the 1970s, or they have come as refugees and asylum seekers from the late 1980s onwards. An estimate built on figures from 2008 indicated that at that time more than 160,000 Norwegian residents were Muslims by cultural background (Daugstad and Østby 2009). With additional immigration during the last few years, this means that Muslims (counted by cultural background) constitute perhaps 3.5% out of a total population of 5 million.

The estimated figure (in 2012) of at least 180,000 ‘cultural Muslims’ should be compared with the more exact number of registered Muslims in Norway. In 2012, 112,000 (about 60% of those with a Muslim background) had signed up for membership of a Muslim religious organization. Approximately half of these are resident in Oslo, which means that at least 8% of Oslo’s population (total population: 590,000) are now members of a Muslim organization. The percentage of Oslo residents with a Muslim background is obviously much bigger. A survey among youth in Oslo, conducted in 2006 among 15–17 year old school pupils, showed that 17.6% stated Islam as their religion; up from 13.2% in 1996 (Vestel and Øia 2007:162f). Concentration in certain urban areas implies that certain districts of Oslo have a majority of Muslim pupils in primary schools.

But how should Muslims be counted? Underlying the different types of figures cited above (Muslims by background or membership) one might find different perceptions of what constitutes a religious identity: Is it (as in traditional societies) a matter of cultural belonging, or (as in modern societies) of organizational affiliation and of personal choice?

All these dimensions of religion—as cultural heritage, as faith community, as personal conviction—should be borne in mind when discussing the social role of a particular religion and its adherents in a given context. In what follows, the main emphasis will be on organized expressions of Islam in Norwegian society, although cultural and individualized aspects of religion will also be considered.

Among Muslims who first came as labour immigrants and have later enjoyed family reunion and had children in Norway, by far the most numerous group are those with a Pakistani background numbering 32,700 in 2012. In the same year, Turks made up 16,700 and Moroccans 8600 of the immigrant population. Among those who have come as refugees and asylum seekers, the Somalis (29,400) and the Iraqis (28,900) were the most numerous groups, followed by Iranians (17,900), Bosnians (16,300), Kosovo-Albanians (13,700) and Afghans (13,200).<sup>2</sup>

The combined effect of the variety of Islamic immigrants and organizational impetuses from Norwegian society (including the possibility of financial grants; see below) give a high degree of intra-Muslim pluralism. Along with organizational pluralism, one may also observe the competing patterns of folk Islam versus different articulations of normative Islam. Whereas representatives of folk Islam have often tried to retain the totality of their inherited cultural conventions and religious convictions, the second generation has felt the need to redefine the relation between culture and religion. Many of them take pains to distinguish between ‘culture’ and ‘religion’, in order to articulate an Islamic identity which is both universal and amenable to re-contextualization. As we

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<sup>2</sup> Numbers from Statistics Norway, <http://www.ssb.no/emner/02/01/10/innvbef/tab-2012-04-26-04.html>

shall see in the following, some striking examples can be cited of the younger generation of Muslim leaders in Norway identifying central ‘Norwegian’ values as ‘Islamic’.

The growth in Muslim organizational life has largely taken place from the late 1980s and onwards. Whereas in 1980 no more than 10% of those with a Muslim background had actually organized themselves as Muslims in Norway, the relative numbers rose to 50% in 1990 and (as we have seen) perhaps 60% in 2012.

Muslim congregations can now be found in all Norwegian counties, with the largest concentration around Oslo. Among the 40 or so Muslim prayer rooms in Oslo, most of which are located in converted flats, factories or office premises, four mosques are purpose-built—all of them by Norwegian-Pakistani organizations. This implies the Oslo is home to more purpose-built mosques than any other Nordic city.

Most Muslim organizations in Norway are still ethnically based, but this is slowly changing. From the mid-1990s, separate youth and students’ organizations have been formed, fully independent of the national background of the young Muslims’ parents (Jacobsen 2002). Separate women’s organizations have also been established, and in 1993 the Islamic Council of Norway was formed as a national umbrella organization now comprising the majority of Sunni Muslim congregations in Norway. The political authorities have gradually established a regular communication with the Islamic Council, and from 2007 the Council also receives a financial grant from the government.

In terms of religious practice, there is still a lack of reliable sociological data. However in 2006, 27% of the Muslim respondents said in a Gallup opinion poll that they attended ‘religious ceremonies together with others’ on a monthly basis or more frequently.<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>3</sup> ‘TV2: Holdninger til integrasjon og internasjonale konflikter blant muslimer i Norge og den norske befolkningen generelt’, TNS Gallup, Politikk & Samfunn, April 2006 ([http://pub.tv2.no/multimedia/TV2/archive/00248/TNS\\_Gallup\\_-\\_muslim\\_248757a.pdf](http://pub.tv2.no/multimedia/TV2/archive/00248/TNS_Gallup_-_muslim_248757a.pdf)).

opposite figure of 31% stating that they never took part in such activities indicates a high degree of polarization among cultural Muslims when it comes to mosque affiliation and religious practice. In a different survey of immigrants' living conditions from 2005-6, in which different groups were asked to state the importance of religion in their lives (Tronstad 2008), the Pakistani and Somali group are found at the higher end, followed by the Turks, with Bosnians and Iranians at the other end of the spectrum and Iraqis somewhere in the middle. When asked how often they took part in religious meetings organized by faith communities, Pakistanis, Somalis and Turks again placed themselves at the top with Bosnians and Iranians at the bottom end.

As regards methodological approaches to Muslim attitudes and practices, the basic question is of course whether Muslim pluralism can really be captured by means of organizational mappings or survey questions about collective practices. Jacques Waardenburg notes that in post-modern societies, religious identities have become increasingly personalized and plural in nature:

Leaving apart the influence of political and economic power, already the complexity of modern societies means that people now participate in several identities which are often juxtaposed to each other rather than being put in an hierarchical order (Waardenburg 2000: 159).

Immigrated Muslims participate in the post-modern, Western reality of plural identities. Whereas some scholars tend to focus on the problems that young Muslims in Norway face when torn between seemingly irreconcilable expectations, Sissel Østberg has focused on young Muslim believers' well developed competence to handle what she terms 'an integrated plural identity' (Østberg 2003). Plural identity implies the simple fact that irrespective of religious belonging, people share (or are divided by) such factors as gender, cultural affiliations, musical preferences, a passion for football, or more importantly, political convictions that run right across cultural and religious divides.



### **Political responses and legal rights**

In terms of political responses to the growing Muslim presence in Norway, until the late 1990s government representatives were reluctant to relate directly to Muslim organizations—giving priority instead to ethnic organizations. A more direct politics of recognition towards the Muslim faith communities was introduced by the Christian Democrat-led government, symbolized by the first visit by a Prime Minister to a Norwegian mosque in August 1999. It was this politics of recognition that was followed up by the Social Democrat-led government during the Danish cartoon crisis in 2006 and in the aftermath of the 22 July 2011 terror attack and massacre, symbolized by a number of formal visits to mosques by the Prime Minister and the Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Thus the relationship between the Muslims and larger society has increasingly become a matter of *public* concern, realized as such also by the political authorities. Predictably, the authorities have been criticized by feminists, neoconservatives and some self-designated ‘secular Muslims’ for privileging the established Muslim leadership in these conversations –strengthening their position as (not necessarily elected) spokespersons.

In terms of legal arrangements, a multiculturalist recognition of the interests of religious communities is symbolized by a clause in the Law about Equality of Sexes (from 1978), which until recently made exemptions for ‘internal affairs in the faith communities’. An amendment from 2010 implies that the faith communities will have to argue from case to case why it is deemed necessary to treat women and men differently in relation to specific religious functions.

Since 2000, there has been a growing consensus between religious leaders and mainstream politicians around the slogan ‘an actively supportive politics of religion’ which reflects a positive recognition of the faith communities’ contribution to larger society and a rather strong affirmation of their autonomy. However, a more value-based politics of religion has also been called for by some left-wing politicians, in particular feminists who in the question of gender equality have opted to put some more pressure

on the faith communities—by tightening the conditions for receiving financial grants from public budgets (Leirvik 2009).

In financial terms, the survival of the state church system implies that the Lutheran Church of Norway (which in 2012 comprised 77% of the population) is almost fully financed by public budgets. Paradoxically, this system is beneficial for the other faith communities as well. By virtue of compensatory measures that were introduced in 1969, every faith and (from 1981) life stance community that registers itself is entitled to exactly the same amount per member in state and municipal support as the Church of Norway receives.

The logic of the system is that as long as state church budgets are financed by the general income tax, taxpayers need to be reimbursed in some way or another in order to avoid discrimination. The uniqueness of the system lies in the fact that the reimbursement goes to the faith communities and not to individual taxpayers. This means that in financial terms, not just Lutheran Christianity but also other Christian churches, other religions and the Humanist Association may be referred to as ‘established faiths’ with state support in Norway. Muslims in Norway have often made the point that this rather unique system has enabled them to enjoy a relatively high degree of freedom vis-à-vis Muslim interest groups abroad. The system gives also, of course, a rather strong incentive for the mosques to have Muslims signing up for membership.

Whereas Sweden introduced ‘changed relations’ between state and church in 2000, Norway, Denmark and Iceland retain some sort of a state church system. In 2008, the Parliament took an important step towards disestablishment, through a consensus which resulted in constitutional amendments in May 2012. The consensus includes a provision that all faith communities will continue to be financially supported by the state (although the size of this support—to the Church of Norway and hence to other faith communities—will probably become a matter of annual budget discussions).

In current debates over the state church system, the Muslims in Norway have generally taken a less radical view than the Humanist Association and the non-Lutheran Protestant churches which have both argued full disestablishment. Muslim leaders have in the main opted for more moderate reforms. Their arguments have varied between a concern for morality supported by public religion, fears of mounting secularization and the financial benefits of the current system. In tune with a favourite argument among the Social Democrats, Muslim politicians of such leanings have also expressed the view that the state should exercise ‘some control’ of religious practices.<sup>4</sup>

### **Political inclinations and endorsement of social democratic values**

At the level of political representation, most parties now have a number of relatively well-known representatives of Muslim background. Since 2001, three young Muslim women and two men have been elected as (regular or deputy) Members of Parliament, representing different parties and contributing symbolically to a more religiously pluralist image of political life in Norway. Even the Christian Democrats have boasted of Muslim voters who sympathize with their traditional ‘family values’ and their restrictive policy regarding distribution of alcohol, as well as their understanding attitude towards making religious claims in the public sphere.

As indicated by recent polls, however, the vast majority of Muslim or non-Western immigrant voters seem to support the social democrat and socialist parties. In the 2006 survey of attitudes referred to above, 83% of the Muslim respondents (against 45% of the control group representing the general population) said that they had given their vote either to the Labour Party (the Social Democrats) or to the Socialist Party in the latest parliamentary elections. Corresponding figures from a survey in 2007, in which 82% of non-Western immigrants revealed the same preferences,<sup>5</sup> indicate that socialist preferences may reflect immigrant interests in general rather than Muslim sensibilities specifically. It is interesting to note, however, that some Muslim leaders in Norway

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<sup>4</sup> ‘...mens muslimene vil ha statlig kontroll’, *Klassekampen*, 6 January 2006.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Innvandrere til AP og SV’, *Aftenposten* 30 August 2007.

have referred to the Norwegian welfare state (which is generally associated with social democracy) as coming very close to Islamic ideals. For instance, in 2005 Shoaib Sultan (who became later the General Secretary of the Islamic Council) stated that

Many Muslims see today's welfare state in Norway as closer to the Muslim ideal state than many countries in the Muslim world, and Norwegian Muslims want to keep the Norwegian state as it is (Sultan 2005:90, my translation).

Similar attitudes were expressed by a selection of Norwegian-Pakistani respondents who were interviewed in 2010 in connection with a qualitative research project on religious commitment and social integration, by utterances such as 'The Norwegian welfare state is Islam in practice' and 'Norway is more Islamic than Pakistan' (Døving et al. 2011: 19).

A quantitative survey among pupils in upper secondary school in Oslo in 2009 yielded similar results. The survey showed that Muslim youth were more inclined than their Christian or non-religious peers to give strong support to welfare state values such as income leveling (51% of the Muslims against 30% of the Christians and the non-religious) and efforts towards social equality in general (68% of the Muslims against 45% the Christians and the non-religious; Botvar and Wyller 2009).

The cited tendency among Norwegian Muslims to associate values of social equality and the welfare state with Islamic values could be interpreted in at least three different ways. (1) It could be taken as an expression of enlightened self-interest among immigrant groups who have benefited from welfare state arrangements in the process of integration. (2) It may reflect dominant discourses in Norwegian society and the fact that welfare state values (although increasingly contested) are seen almost as a source of national pride, across cultural and political divides. (3) It could also be seen as a reflection of a more general tendency among Muslim reformers to associate the Scandinavian welfare systems with Islamic values. An example can be found in the book *Islam—the Misunderstood Religion* which was published in Arabic in 1964 by

Muhammad Qutb, a prominent member of the Muslim Brotherhood. In view of the Islamic ideal of social justice, Qutb says, ‘the Scandinavian states have in this connection come closer than any other state in the world—to a realisation of some aspects of Islam’ (Qutb 2000: 77, cf. Gardell 2005: 120f. who claims that with Muhammad Qutb, a social democratic interpretation of political Islam was made explicit). The cited interpretations are not mutually exclusive and the endorsement of welfare state values demonstrates how Muslim spokespersons express their commitment to Islamic values in terms of perceived common (even emblematic) values in Norwegian society such as social equality and—as we shall see below—equality between the sexes.

### **The centrality of women’s issues**

In the Scandinavian context, the aim of gender equality has traditionally been a central part of social democratic policies and welfare state arrangements, resulting in a kind of ‘state feminism’ which corresponds with high cultural awareness about gender (in)equality in Norwegian society. The question of gender equality has also become the focus of immigration-related controversies. Stereotypes between Muslims, Christians and secular citizens in the West are often related to the perceived status of women—as objectified victims of either a ‘permissive’ or a ‘patriarchal’ culture (Grung 2004). Critical voices of either liberal or neoconservative leanings regularly attack Muslim cultures and Islam as a religion which is inherently oppressive of women. From the mid-1990s, most media discussions on Islam in Norway have been focused on women-related issues such as arranged or forced marriages, the question of whether a Muslim woman may marry a non-Muslim man, female genital mutilation, and the headscarf (which is constantly debated but not banned, except in a few private enterprises and in the police).

On the other hand, Muslims seem also to be influenced in a more affirmative manner by gender models in Norwegian society. Several young women of Muslim background have become publicly known for their vociferous protest against cultural practices

associated by them with the religion of 'Islam'. They are addressing women's issues not from the outside, but from within the Muslim communities.

A striking example of the way in which young Muslim leaders may identify Scandinavian gender equality values with Muslim convictions can be found in a newspaper article from 2009 entitled 'Muslims in the process of change' by the then leader of the Muslim Student Association in Oslo, Bushra Ishaq. Here she stated:

The Muslim Nora<sup>6</sup> raised in Norwegian schools is now breaking free from traditional attitudes. We raise a struggle to realize ourselves as independent individuals, as Norwegian girls who have been taught to fight for gender equality. Were it not for the fundamental influence of Norwegian culture and the values of the welfare state, the emerging Muslim feminism would not be a fact (Ishaq 2009, my translation).

Some young women representing an 'emerging Muslim feminism' in Norway have experienced dramatic conflicts with their families and been engaged by feminist activists and the media to record statements from Muslim leaders by the use of hidden microphone or camera. The most dramatic episode occurred in the autumn of 2000 when a young woman of Somali background, equipped with hidden camera by a commercial TV station, revealed that a number of male African Muslim leaders either supported female circumcision or did not (as it seemed) clearly oppose it. As an immediate result, the then president of the Islamic Council—a highly respected Muslim of Gambian background who has also a long record in Christian-Muslim dialogue—chose to resign.<sup>7</sup>

It was against this background that Lena Larsen—a female convert to Islam and also a dialogue- and human rights activist—was elected as the new president of the Islamic

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<sup>6</sup> A reference to the character Nora in Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House*.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. the retrospective analysis by Inger Anne Olsen in *Aftenposten* 9 November 2002 ('Var rikets tilstand sånn som vi trodde?').

Council, an event of almost historic dimensions. In 2002, the central mosque in Oslo elected a young female student, Amber Khan, as their new spokesperson to the public. In addition, female activists have long played central roles in Muslim youth organizations. As indicated above, the majority of Muslim Members of Parliament in Norway have also been young women.

However, the cited examples of female leadership in Muslim organizations are still episodes and the overwhelming majority of board members in Muslim organizations remain male. A survey in 2010 revealed that less than 3% of the mosques' board members and public spokespersons were women.<sup>8</sup> The cited examples still illustrate how Islam is being inculturated in a Nordic environment marked by strong values of gender equality.

Although feminist impetuses may be unusually strong in Norway, it is also clear that female activists in Norwegian Islam embody a much wider tendency of Islamic-style feminism in Europe which Anne-Sofie Roald has documented and analysed in her book *Women in Islam. The Western Experience* (Roald 2001). It is hard to prophesy, however, which tendency will have the upper hand in the years to come. When Mohammad Hamdan (an immigrant of Arab background) was elected as the new president of the Islamic Council after Lena Larsen's term in office was terminated in 2003, he asserted that Islam supports the rights of women to equal participation in society (in this respect, they can learn from their Norwegian sisters) but reiterated also the traditional claim that Western women have something to learn from the priority that Muslim women will always give to family values.<sup>9</sup>

In sum, the above developments imply that the question of women in Islam is not really a debate between the Muslims and Norwegian society in general. It is just as much an intra-Muslim debate, in which young Muslim women—inspired both by 'normative Islam' and Scandinavian values—increasingly set the agenda.

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<sup>8</sup> '126 moskéer – én kvinnelig leder', *Vårt Land* 20 January 2010.

<sup>9</sup> 'Norske kvinner kan lære av muslimene', *Dagsavisen*, 7 March 2003.

### **Relational perspectives: popular debates and interreligious dialogue**

The question of Norwegian Muslims' value orientation and the delicate balance between (confrontational or defensive) identity politics and open-ended dialogue can only be meaningfully described and analysed in a relational perspective. In the general public, inclusive attitudes have long competed with mounting anxiety towards Islam and Muslims. According to the survey underlying the so-called 'Integration barometer' (IMDi 2009), 84% of the respondents thought that the authorities should not further facilitate Muslim religious practices in Norwegian society. The fact that 72% expressed a sceptical attitude towards religious organizations in general indicates that these figures might have just as much to do with secularism as with Islamophobia. In the same survey half of the respondents opposed the building of mosques in Norway, and a clear majority also opposed the wearing of headscarves in public.

In the 2008 report by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, Norway was for the first time urged to take action against mounting Islamophobia. The report

strongly recommends that the Norwegian authorities monitor the situation as concerns Islamophobia in Norway and take swift action to counter any such manifestations as necessary. It encourages the Norwegian authorities to cooperate with representatives of the Muslim communities of Norway in order to find solutions to specific issues of their concern.<sup>10</sup>

The attitude of Christian leaders has (as a rule) been markedly different from the cited Islamophobic tendencies in the general public. Interreligious dialogue is commonly regarded as rather well established in Norway and was institutionalized earlier than in the other Nordic countries.<sup>11</sup> Three regular forums deserve special mention: the bilateral

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<sup>10</sup> ECRI Report on Norway, 2008 (published 2009), paragraphs 91–92, <http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Norway/NOR-CbC-IV-2009-004-ENG.pdf>, accessed 2 May 2010.

<sup>11</sup> For a general presentation of interfaith dialogue in Norway, see Leirvik 2001 and 2003.



Contact Group for the Church of Norway and the Islamic Council (established 1993),<sup>12</sup> the multilateral Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities (established 1996)<sup>13</sup> and the Council's international wing known as the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief.<sup>14</sup> Whereas the Contact Group came about as the result of an invitation from the majority church (the Lutheran Church of Norway), the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities grew out of minority protest against the new and compulsory subject of religious and ethical education in public schools which—when announced in 1995—was felt by Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and the Humanist Association to be strongly dominated by Christian majority interest.

The Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities coordinates the faith communities' interest vis-à-vis the authorities, works for mutual respect between different faiths and life stances, and addresses social and ethical issues of common concern. It is important to note that the Humanist Association has been a member of the interfaith council from the beginning and has also taken actively part in other multilateral dialogue projects. This has challenged both religious and non-religious dialogue partners to seek a faith-transcending language for one's commitment (cf. Habermas' reflections on the requirement to translate religious concerns into a generally accessible language, as discussed in the introductory chapter of this issue). The titles of two formative interfaith dialogue projects in the 1990s are indicative of the search for a common ethical, human-rights oriented language which has also put its mark on Muslim discourses in Norway: 'Communal Ethics in a Multicultural Norway' (Eidsvåg and Leirvik 1993) and 'Religion, Life Stances and Human Rights in Norway' (Eidsvåg and Larsen 1997).

Although the mentioned projects received some support from the authorities, they were initiated by interfaith activists. It should be noted that none of the regular dialogue forums listed above have come about because of government initiatives but they are

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<sup>12</sup> <http://folk.uio.no/leirvik/Kontaktgruppa.htm>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.trooglivssyn.no/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.oslocoalition.org/>

fully the result of civil society activism. State support for such activities is actually a relatively recent phenomenon in Norway (unlike for instance Great Britain and Germany, where the authorities have sought more actively to establish ‘partnership’ and ‘dialogue’ with Muslim faith communities in particular).

As for the bilateral Christian-Muslim Contact Group, the group’s early agenda was much focused on Muslim minority concerns in Norway—for instance as regards religion in school and anti-Islamic tendencies in public debates. But over the years, the precarious situation of Christians in some Muslim countries has become an equal concern—as expressed in joint statements such as ‘Stop the violence against Christians in Pakistan’ (2009).<sup>15</sup> In recent years, the group has also shown a growing concern for *individuals* under pressure—as expressed in a milestone statement in 2007 on the inviolable right to conversion (which also caught international attention)<sup>16</sup> and another statement in 2009 against violence in close relationships.<sup>17</sup>

From the scene of Christian-Muslim dialogue in Norway, several remarkable expressions of inter-religious understanding and solidarity could be cited—in concrete opposition to more confrontational tendencies. In cultural and political debates about Christianity and Islam, church leaders have in general defended Muslim minority rights and protected their integrity against populist assaults. On the confrontational side, the influential right-wing populist party *Fremskrittspartiet* (‘The Progress Party’) has increasingly singled out ‘Islam’ as an enemy to Norwegian society and to Christianity. In recent years, the Progress Party has attracted more than 20% of the voters, in elections and polls. Their support dropped to 11.5% in the 2011 local elections but rose to 16.3% in the parliamentary elections in 2013, after which *Fremskrittspartiet* was invited to form a new government together with the larger Conservative Party (*Høyre*).

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<sup>15</sup> ‘Stopp volden mot kristne i Pakistan’, kirken.no 13 August 2009, <http://www.kirken.no/?event=showNews&FamID=93378>

<sup>16</sup> Joint Declaration on the Freedom of Religion and the Right to Conversion, kirken.no 22.08.2007, <http://www.kirken.no/english/news.cfm?artid=149142>

<sup>17</sup> ‘Norwegian Muslims and Christians say no to domestic violence’, kirken.no 09.11.2009, <http://kirken.no/english/news.cfm?artid=265872>.

Since the end of the 1980s, the Progress Party has repeatedly warned against ‘Islamization’ during their electoral campaigns, most recently in 2009 when the party suggested that new and covert forms of Islamization (*snikislamisering*—‘creeping Islamization’) could be identified in Norway. Similar Islam-critical stands have been voiced by groups associated with the New Christian Right, although their warnings against Islamization have regularly been countered by mainstream Christian leaders (Leirvik 2011).

Although the anti-Islamic rhetoric of Anders Behring Breivik, the Norwegian 22 July terrorist, shares a family resemblance with populist warnings against ‘Islamic occupation’ of Europe, his brutal violence is of course of a singular character. It should be noted, however, that the 2012 report of the Norwegian Police Security Service (PST) warned against the potentially violent consequences of the enemy images produced by anti-Islamic agents who formally dissociate themselves from acts of violence.<sup>18</sup>

In 1997, Christian leaders of all confessions and quite different theological tendencies joined hands with the Muslim communities and warned publicly against the hostile images of Islam produced by populist politicians.<sup>19</sup> A similar ecumenical alliance ‘against Islamophobia and the defamation of Muslims’ was mobilized in 2004, when Charismatic leaders joined the mainstream churches in a protest against a speech that Carl I. Hagen (the then chairman of the Progress Party) gave in New Christian Right-oriented congregation in the city of Bergen. In this speech, which was widely publicized, he launched a harsh attack on the Prophet Muhammad as a warlord, implying that Islam is an inherently violent religion. His view of Muhammad and Islam was later corroborated in his autobiography, in which he characterizes Muhammad as ‘the warlord, assailant and abuser of women ... who murdered and accepted rape as a means of conquest’ (Hagen 2007: 539, my translation).

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<sup>18</sup> ‘Åpen trusselvurdering 2012’, Politiets sikkerhetstjeneste 2012.

<sup>19</sup> ‘Kristenledere mot økt muslimfrykt’, Christian Council of Norway press release 29 August 1997, <http://folk.uio.no/leirvik/tekster/Hyrdebrev1997.doc>

The tension between confrontational tendencies—as headed by the Progress Party, certain Charismatic groups and neoconservative activists—and dialogical trust-building was strikingly demonstrated during the cartoon crisis in 2006. Whereas in Denmark the liberal-conservative government simply refused to speak to Muslim organizations during the crisis (insisting that religion is a private matter), in Norway the social democrat-led government leaned on established structures for Christian-Muslim dialogue and engaged the Islamic Council as a partner in crisis management.

In Denmark, it was the mainstream newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* that commissioned and published the cartoons. In contrast, in Norway the cartoons were republished by a relatively small magazine of the New Christian Right, *Magazinet*, who was also known for its sympathies with the Progress Party (Leirvik 2011). In its framing of the republication, the magazine also reproduced the usual stereotypes of Islam as a religion prone to violence. Straight after the republication, Christian and Muslim leaders came together and issued a joint statement in which they affirmed freedom of expression as a fundamental right but warned also against deliberate provocation against religious feelings.<sup>20</sup> By mediation of Christian Democrat politicians, an official event of reconciliation was staged between *Magazinet*'s editor Selbekk and the Islamic Council, which publicly forgave him and promised to protect him against threats that he had received to his life. In political recognition of this lightly forced effort at Christian-Muslim reconciliation, the event was presided over by representatives of the government. And with financial backing from the government, the Islamic Council arranged delegation trips together with Christian leaders to the Middle East and Pakistan, in order to explain the Norwegian culture of dialogue (Leirvik 2011).

Although the cartoon crisis thus ended in a series of 'dialogical' events, what took place between religious leaders and the government might not be representative of public sentiments. In the wake of the cartoon crisis and its relatively peaceful solution in

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<sup>20</sup> 'Religious leaders in Norway denounce the publication of caricatures', kirken.no 03.02.06, <http://www.kirken.no/english/news.cfm?artid=75655>

Norway, media debates have increasingly taken a critical approach to the notion of dialogue, implying that interreligious dialogue implies a harmonizing approach that conceals real differences and corroborates established power structures in the religions.

Interfaith activists, on the other hand, would point to the fact that the Contact Group between the Church of Norway and the Islamic Council has increasingly addressed highly sensitive issues such as the position of women in the religious communities, the issue of homosexuality, and the question of conversion. Concerning the issues of conversion and violence in close relationships, a shared commitment has developed regarding the need to protect vulnerable individuals against religiously or culturally legitimized abuse, as can be seen from the aforementioned joint declarations from 2007 and 2009.

### **Radical Islam?**<sup>21</sup>

As for political Islam, more or less Islamist movements in Pakistan (Jamaat-i islami), Turkey (Milli Görüs) and the Arab world (the Muslim Brotherhood) have long been represented in Norway, by affiliated organizations or followers. Although each of these organizations has its own agenda, their European profiles may differ considerably from that of their mother organizations. It is also a fact that organizations and mosques representative of ‘moderate Islamism’ are often more active in interfaith enterprises than their more traditionalist counterparts (cf. Vongraven Eriksen & Mårtensson, in the present issue).

Until recently, radical Islamist movements such as Hizb al-Tahrir (active in Denmark) have not been able to seize an organizational foothold in Norway. This does not mean

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<sup>21</sup> This paragraph (‘Radical Islam’) deals with Salafist and militant Islamist tendencies among Muslims in Norway. After the present article was finalized in December 2012, one book and several articles have been published about the mentioned developments, with particular reference to the organizations Islam Net and The Prophet’s Ummah. See Lars Akerhaug: *Norsk jihad. Muslimske ekstremister blant oss* (Oslo: Kagge 2013); Marius Linge: ‘Den konservative vekkelsen. Om IslamNet, Profetens Umma og salafismens fremvekst i Norge’ (*Samtiden* 4: 2013, pp. 38-53); Sindre Bangstad and Marius Linge: ‘IslamNet - puritansk salafisme i Norge’ (*Kirke og Kultur* 4: 2013, pp. 254-272) and Ulrika Mårtensson’s article (‘*Harakî* Salafism in Norway: ‘The Saved Sect’ Hugs the Infidels’) in the present issue.

that radical or extremist positions are not represented among Norwegian Muslims. For instance, accusations were put forward in 2002 that Mullah Krekar, a leader of the radical Islamist movement Ansar al-Islam in Iraqi Kurdistan, had maintained his militant activities with Norway as a safe haven. However, in 1997 his group of radical followers had been asked to leave the main Arab mosque in Oslo (Rabita, a mosque of Muslim Brotherhood inspiration). And in May 2003, when it was announced that Norwegian institutions abroad were put on the list of potential targets for al-Qa'ida, it was clear from the immediate reaction of the Muslim leaders who were interviewed that they instinctively identified themselves as Norwegians and felt threatened on a par with their Christian or secular humanist co-citizens.<sup>22</sup>

However, individual examples of more confrontational attitudes can also be cited. In 2002, the convicted criminal Arfan Bhatti was quoted in an interview that after a born-again experience in the prison, 'I now live for Islam, and hate Norwegian values ... I have so much sympathy for my Muslim brethren. We Muslims have been and still are suppressed by Jews, Hindus and Americans.'<sup>23</sup> In 2008, the same person was accused of having instigated gunshots against the synagogue in Oslo and for planning terrorism (he was acquitted of the latter charge). Two years later, Arfan Bhatti turned up as the co-planner of a demonstration against another caricature of Muhammad, re-published by the liberal newspaper *Dagbladet*. It was in this demonstration that 'radical Islam' got an identifiable face for the general public, when one of the appellants (Mohyeldeen Mohammad) warned against terrorist attacks against Norway unless the country gave up its 'crusade' against Islam (expressed by Norway's warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq and by an alleged alliance with the media aimed at defamation of Muslims). Interestingly, the appellant also accused the Islamic Council of having accepted a deplorable attitude of 'compromise' with the authorities (Larsen 2010). Both in 2006 and 2010, the Islamic Council advised against demonstrations against the caricatures, displaying thus a more

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<sup>22</sup> See interviews with Muslim leaders in *Verdens Gang* ('Vil angi muslimske terrorister – imamene vil verge Norge') and *Dagbladet* ('Vi føler oss også truet'), 22 and 24 May 2003.

<sup>23</sup> 'Jeg lever for islam, og hater norske verdier', *Dagbladet* 26 August 2002.

negotiation-oriented approach to inter-group conflicts. The fact that large numbers of independent (mostly young) Muslims nevertheless took to the streets in more radical acts of protest seems to indicate that for the Islamic Council the price of political recognition has been intra-Muslim discord—although by a radical minority.

Then in the autumn of 2012, the more radical minority went public as the newly founded organization ‘The Prophet’s Ummah’ which in September staged a demonstration against the film *Innocence of Muslims*, invoking Osama bin Laden as a hero of Islamic resistance and rallying some 100 participants outside the US Embassy (against 6000 in a peaceful meeting held simultaneously in Oslo by the Islamic Council). The militant demonstrators included the previously mentioned Arfan Bhatti and Mohyeldeen Mohammad, joined by a newcomer to the radical scene, Ubaydallah Hussain, who later in the autumn was detained for having threatened named journalists and the Jewish community.<sup>24</sup>

Among Muslim youth, the fastest growing organization over the last years has been Islam Net, a markedly value-conservative organization with Salafist inspiration and apologetic orientation, which also seeks to reform traditional Muslim practices which are considered to be un-Islamic (including forced marriages). Unlike The Prophet’s Ummah, Islam Net does not have a militant profile. The organization regularly stages large conferences which attract a considerable number of Muslim teenagers and young adults. International guests include renowned preachers such as Abdur-Raheem Green, Hussein Yee and Yusuf Chambers.<sup>25</sup> Although Islam Net’s gatherings are called ‘peace conferences’ (probably inspired by Zakir Naik’s ‘Peace TV’), representatives of the organization take a confrontational attitude against ‘others’ and markedly counter-cultural stands in issues such as gender relations, homosexuality and the death penalty.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> ‘De er norske militante islamister’, *Morgenbladet* 16 November 2012 and ‘Islamistisk samling’, *Aftenposten* 15 December 2012.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.islamnet.no/>

<sup>26</sup> ‘Mener Islam Net-sjef er ‘uegnet som leder’ etter dødsstraff-uttalelser’, *VG* 04.09.11.

The radical-militant and conservative-apologetic profiles of the Prophet's Ummah and Islam Net respectively are markedly different from that of 'Young Muslim', another influential Muslim youth organization which (confluent with majority values?) seeks to 'contribute to the development of competent and well-integrated youth who is just as confident in their Muslim and Norwegian identity'.<sup>27</sup>

At the everyday level, success stories of integration expressed through Muslim identification with mainstream Norwegian values compete with anti-Western sentiments and sexist/racist attitudes against white women—as expressed both by frustrated newcomers and traditionalist members of the first generation of immigrated Muslims.

In Norway as elsewhere, it is hard to decide what kinds of tendencies prevail in Muslim identity discourses that are less public. Whereas after 9/11 individual school teachers reported that some of their pupils (in particular, young boys) had expressed their secret admiration of Osama bin Laden, others pointed to the fact that Muslim students seemed to face an identity crisis when confronted with terrorist acts perpetrated in the name of 'Islam', denying altogether that such acts could possibly have anything to do with Islam as they know it (cf. Leirvik 2004). An interview-based investigation from 2010 demonstrates that the mounting discourse about 'radical Islam' and 'radicalization' in Norwegian and other European media contributes more than anything else to further alienation of Muslim youth who seek a delicate balance between identification with mainstream Norwegian values, perceived tenets of Islam, and a sense of international solidarity with other Muslims under pressure (Kristensen 2010).

### **Between identity politics and dialogue**

In conclusion, the image of the Muslim population in Norway is becoming more and more complex. A wide array of cultural identities competes on the one hand with a growing sense of Norwegianness (in tune with mainstream value discourses in society) and on the other with Islamic identities which function as a form of 'symbolic ethnicity'

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<sup>27</sup> [www.ungmuslim.no](http://www.ungmuslim.no)



across national identities (Kastoryano 2004:1250ff). Minority discourses with a defensive touch among ordinary Muslims compete with a relatively strong commitment to interreligious dialogue among Muslim leaders, and the emerging Muslim establishment seems already to have fostered a more radical opposition.

As for the prospects of inter-group dialogue, one important arena deserves special mention, namely public schools and the subject of religious education that have been introduced at both primary and secondary levels. As mentioned above, Muslims have in general been quite supportive of the egalitarian ‘one school for all’ system in Norway. However, the subject of religious education, which was made compulsory in 1996 for pupils in primary and lower secondary school, has created some tension. Muslims, other religious minorities as well as the secular humanists have criticized the subject for being too much dominated by Christian majority interest. Minority complaints were backed by the UN Human Rights Commission in 2004 and by the European Court of Human Rights in 2007, forcing Norway to revise the name of the subject (it is now called Religion, Life Stances, and Ethics), its curriculum (which is now less dominated by Christianity) and the objects clause for the school system in general (which was reformulated in 2008 in slightly more inclusive ways with regard to religion). Although there is still some discontent with the subject, there are many indications that it has now become more acceptable to the minorities—so that it may function according to the intention of providing an arena for interreligious learning and dialogue training.

The example of religious education in school as a possible arena for dialogue indicates once more that the issue of future Muslim developments is a *relational* question, in which majority and minority interest will have to strike a delicate balance. As I have tried to demonstrate, however, ‘minority’ is not necessarily a category that all Muslims would like to use as their prime self-identification. The cited examples of how leading Muslims identify ‘Islam’ with dominant values in Norwegian society, along with a desire to contribute constructively to a solidarity-based society, testify more to a Norwegian contextualization of Islam than to minority discourses and transnational identity politics. ‘Public Islam’ (cf. the introductory chapter in this volume) in the

Norwegian context seems thus to be largely confluent with emblematic values in larger society, although what is expressed in public, by more or less established spokespersons, is certainly not the entire truth about value politics among Muslims. As indicated, the tendency towards a dialogue-oriented ‘Norwegian Islam’ is not the only one to be observed. Dialogue initiatives have developed in competition with confrontational identity politics in both the Muslim minority and the Christian-Humanist majority population.

Which tendency will have the upper hand in the future depends both on structural questions of social cohesion (which include the integrating function of welfare society values) and of the agency of dialogue activists who are committed to making a difference by doing what does not come by itself.

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## Muslim Society Trondheim: A Local History

Ulrika Mårtensson & Eli-Anne Vongraven Eriksen

### *Abstract*

*The article describes and analyzes the founding and development of Muslim Society Trondheim (MST), a jâmi ‘mosque and Islamic organization in Norway’s third largest city, Trondheim. The aim is to explore the significance for integration policy on ‘active citizenship’ and two-way accommodation between majority and minority of MST’s dialogues with the church and public institutions, with reference to Casanova’s concept ‘de-privatized public religion’ and Roy’s ‘churchification of Islam’. Main findings are that the dialogue with the church was the one which achieved the best results in terms of two-way accommodation; that MST’s dialogues have contributed towards the city’s Muslims claiming their civil and human rights; and that because this does represent a ‘churchification’ of Islam, it does not make MST a case of ‘de-privatized public Islam’ in Casanova’s sense.*

One has to face one’s own prejudices sometimes. One thinks that a politician is only concerned with this and that, or someone who works in *that* place [*has to be like this*]; so all this about direct contact [between Islamic organizations and public authorities] and getting things more regularly organized is very important and challenging, but [the challenge] must be taken. For it can give huge rewards both for our community, the Muslims, and also for the municipality and the state institutions because the trust that a mosque has as a point of connection for all these cultures and all the different people is very significant. So then it is important to be a bit careful and not abuse it, and use it wisely. (member of Muslim Society Trondheim, February 2010).

Trondheim is Norway's third largest city with a population of 171, 000, located in the middle of the country on a wide, beautiful fjord. The city was founded in 997. Between 1030 and 1217 it was the royal capital and played a significant role in the foundation of Norway as a Christian nation, hosting the national sanctuary, the Nidaros Cathedral. According to medieval lore, the cathedral was erected on the burial site of the national saint, Olav the Holy, hailed as the first king to introduce Christianity to pagan Norway. Olav was duly martyred in the Battle of Stiklestad on 29 July 1030. Since around 1300, the Nidaros Cathedral has been a pilgrimage destination. Today Trondheim celebrates St Olav's martyrdom annually on 28 and 29 July. A theatrical re-enactment of the battle is staged at the historical battlefield, not unlike the Shiite *ta'ziya* performance of Imam Husayn's martyrdom in the Battle of Karbala in 680. While the Norwegian actors do not let their own blood, as Shiite penitents do, they sing a hymn about King Olav's blood and its redeeming power. Trondheim thus hosts the founding myths and memories related to Norway's national identity.

Today all faith communities participate in the city's annual celebration of St Olav. In line with the arguments developed in the Introduction to this special issue, their participation symbolizes how Norway's traditional Christian identity is changing into a multi-religious and simultaneously more secular national identity. Yet the Church of Norway continues to play an important role as the midwife of this new national identity, for instance, by assisting Muslims in their dealings with 'public Norway'. Trondheim's first mosque organization, Muslim Society Trondheim (MST), was established in 1987 by Muslim students at what is today The Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). This article describes how MST, through interactions with the Church and with public institutions, has become the public representative of Trondheim's Muslims, and analyses to what extent MST's public activities correspond to the concepts of 'de-privatized public religion' (Casanova 1994) and 'churchification of Islam' (Roy 2004; 2009).

### **Civic Integration: Dialogue or Monologue?**

As mentioned in the Introduction to this volume, EU integration policy proposes intercultural dialogue as the way to achieve two-way accommodation between ‘majority’ and ‘minority’, within the normative civic framework of human rights and liberal democratic values and procedures. Recent studies highlight that this normative framework risks turning dialogue into more of a one-way communication from majority to minority than a real dialogue. Exploring Germany’s official forum for intercultural dialogue with Islam, Schirin Amir-Moazami finds that power-relations in the German context are heavily skewed since the non-Muslims—including the evangelical church—identify with and represent the state’s integration objective in the dialogue. Muslims are thus forced to address pre-selected issues and it is taken for granted that Muslims are more in need of guidance than the majority representatives (Amir-Moazami 2010; 2011; Dornhof 2012).<sup>1</sup> Similarly in a Swedish Christian-Muslim dialogue group initiated by the Church of Sweden, one of the Muslim participants remarked that the dialogue themes reflected Christian ‘majority’ interests and beliefs and reduced the specificity of Islam by insisting on Christian categories. The Muslim ban on alcohol or belief in paradise and hell were not possible to discuss, since the dialogue focused on what the Church of Sweden considered to be ‘issues of common concern’, i.e. human rights, peace efforts relative to international conflicts, gender, etc. (Roald 2002:91–2).

Anne Hege Grung has participated in Muslim-Christian dialogue in Norway since the 1990s. Reflecting on Amir-Moazami (2010; 2011) and Roald (2002) Grung identifies the approach adopted by dialogue practitioner Oddbjørn Leirvik as a way to raise awareness of the risks that pertain to discrepancies in power. All religions need to be continuously reinterpreted, even contemporary ‘official Christianity’, and all religions contain multiple and sometimes conflicting interpretations. In dialogue settings the meeting with ‘the other’ shall be what generates new ‘internal’ interpretations, for both

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<sup>1</sup> See Verkaaik (2010) for analysis of how Dutch citizenship rituals express the notion that the ‘ethnic’ Dutch represent the civic value of democracy which immigrants *and their children* are assumed to learn through the new naturalization programme.

parties. Leirvik also follows a method adopted by a UK dialogue group, Scriptural Reasoning, where participants read and interpret each other's scriptures, a method that can level the religions at least within the dialogue group and brings out what is specific to each one of them. Leirvik too sees human rights as a key issue for interpretations because they challenge all religions and grant minorities rights in relation to the majority. The purpose of interfaith dialogue should thus be to arrive at a platform for joint action that criticizes inequalities in power with reference to human rights (Grung 2011:31; cf. Leirvik 2007; Leirvik 2011a:346–8;).

European and Nordic churches are involved in the integration of Muslims not only through interfaith dialogue but also through organizational matters. Olivier Roy's concept of the 'churchification' of Islam signifies that states press for Muslims to organize in ways that differ from Muslim majority countries but resemble the ways in which churches and religions are traditionally organized in Europe. In addition imams are increasingly required to perform public services corresponding to the churches' chaplaincy institution (Roy 2009: 189–90). However, requirements come not only from the top (the state), but also from below (the members of mosque organizations). Many European Muslims are immigrants. Since many frequent the mosques to meet with fellow countrymen and co-religionists, mosque leaders need to address numerous matters that face new immigrants and concern public authorities and services. This circumstance substantially widens the range of issues that an imam, for instance, has to deal with in Europe compared with majority Muslim countries (Roy 2004: 210–11; cf. Cesari 2004: 127–31; Vogt 2008: 84–9, 96–9).

In this article the broader question that this special issue raises, concerning the nature of 'public Islam' in Nordic contexts, is here referred to in terms of both Roy's 'churchification' and Casanova's 'de-privatized public religion'. According to Casanova, 'de-privatized public Islam' would refer to Muslims struggling to



define and set the modern boundaries between the private and public spheres, between system and life-world, between legality and morality, between individual and society, between family, civil society, and state, between nations, states, civilizations, and the world system. (Casanova 1994:6).

‘Churchification’ on the other hand implies that Nordic Muslims work within the boundaries set by the Nordic model for organizing religion in civil society and with reference to all the demands that ‘integration’ places on Muslim religious leaders and laymen. The specific aim in this article is thus to explore the significance for ‘active citizenship’ and two-way accommodation between majority and minority of MST’s dialogues with the church and public institutions, with reference to Casanova’s ‘de-privatized public religion’ and Roy’s ‘churchification of Islam’.

### **Norwegian National Dialogue**

The largest national Islamic ‘umbrella organization’ is the Islamic Council of Norway (Islamsk Råd Norge/IRN) which represents 41 of the approximately 130 Norwegian Muslim organizations, in total some 60,000 members. IRN’s objectives are highly integration oriented, focusing on the formation of a Norwegian-Muslim identity and teaching Islam to Norwegian Muslims in a way that enables them both to practise Islam and to be active citizens; promotion of Muslims’ rights through dialogue; problem solving between Muslims and the general public; and explaining Islam to the public so that Muslims are valued as an important resource for Norway (IRN 2010). One of the most ‘civically active’ of IRN’s member organizations in Oslo is al-Rabita, a mosque affiliated with the Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe (FIOE) and the Muslim Brotherhood (see Introduction to this special issue).

IRN represents Islam in the Contact Group, the interfaith dialogue between Islam and the Church of Norway that Oddbjørn Leirvik initiated in 1993 (IRN 2010; Leirvik in this volume). In 1996 the Contact Group was integrated into a new national framework for dialogue between all religions and ‘life stance communities’ in Norway (including the secular Humanists), the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities (STL).

STL has local branch organizations in the major cities, including Trondheim (STL 2010).

While the Contact Group includes doctrine, scripture and interpretation in its work, the issues of human rights, gender and conflict resolution have occupied a central place, as described by Grung (2011) and Leirvik (2011a; 2007). The Contact Group's public statements 'Declaration of Freedom of Religion' (Freedom 2007) and 'Joint Statement on Violence in the Family and Close Relationships' (Violence 2009) are significant both because of their content (see Leirvik, this volume) and their form. Their language emphasizes that freedom of religion and violence in close relations concerns Christians as much as Muslims. The approach contrasts sharply with Norwegian political debates which usually cast Muslims as *the* religious group that has a problem with gender-related issues and human rights generally, and it signifies that the Church recognizes Muslims as religious equals. Thus, while the Church of Norway dominates in the sense that it insists on dialogue about such integration-related concerns as human rights and gender, it does not publicly act as if only Muslims are challenged by these issues, which appears to contrast with the findings from Germany (Amir-Moazami 2010; 2011). Another example is Norway's cartoon crises. In 2006 a right-wing Christian publisher decided to reprint the Danish cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad. In Norway, both the Church and the state under a Labour Party-led government publicly supported Muslims' right to peaceful protest against the offence caused by the cartoons (Leirvik 2011b). Neither the Church nor the state cast the majority as defending freedom of expression against restriction-minded Muslims, but emphasized the responsibility of all citizens to reflect on the ethical limits of freedoms and rights, and arranged for the publisher of the cartoons to apologize publicly to Norway's Muslims for offending their religious dignity (Mårtensson 2013). As we shall see, the approach where the Church backs Muslims in using civil and human rights to argue their cases in relation to the public prevails in Trondheim's interfaith dialogue as well.

### **Trondheim's Islamic Organizations**

Trondheim's Muslim population is mainly first-generation immigrants, represented by four Muslim organizations. Established in 1987 by students at Trondheim's technical university and with 1500 members (2011), Muslim Society Trondheim (MST) is the oldest and largest. The second largest is Trondheim Mevlana Cultural Organization, founded in 2003 and with 1062 members (2011) of Turkish and Kurdish origins who left MST to cultivate their specifically Turkish Islam. The third organization is Ahl O'Bait Centre. It was registered in 2002 and has 203 members (2011) who are Twelver Shiites from Iraq and Afghanistan. The fourth organization, Dar El Eman, was founded in 2011 and consists of former members of MST who formed a group around one of MST's imams who is of Somali background and has special expertise in *hadith*.

MST's members are from around 30 countries: Somalis, Arabs, Afghans and Indonesians are currently the largest groups. This multinational constitution makes MST unique in Norway:

In Oslo, as in most West-European capitals, mosques and Islamic centers are usually established on the basis of ethnicity, language and cultural backgrounds, nationality and religious affiliation. Mosques and Islamic centers organized on a pan-Islamic paradigm, for example the Muslim Society in the city of Trondheim, are the exception. The latter model reflects, according to its members, the concepts of *tawhid* and *umma* and expresses the diversity of Islam within its unity. (Naguib 2001:30–1).

MST is Trondheim's central *jami'*, housed in a riverside warehouse building in the city centre. It is the only one of Trondheim's Islamic organizations that is a member of IRN. While individual members of the other Islamic organizations have contacts with public institutions and participate in the national interfaith dialogue (STL), only MST is engaged in official dialogue with the Church and negotiates with public institutions on behalf of Muslims' religious interests, an authority to which members of the other

Islamic communities have said in conversations that they have no objections because of MST's ecumenical identity and status as the central *jami*'.

This study of MST is based primarily on semi-structured interviews. From MST we interviewed three men and one woman with a long history in the organization and who have had leadership positions but who represent different positions regarding the organization's purpose and management. Given the limited scope of this study, these persons were selected because within MST they have the most experience of dialogue with the Church and other public institutions. The main limitation with this selection is that we could not study 'ordinary' members' views of the leaders' dialogue work. This will have to be explored in further studies. We have also had several other meetings with members of MST, including a public evaluation of the Church-MST dialogue (2003–11) on 2 April 2011. Finally, we have used official reports which document aspects of MST's institutional interactions.<sup>1</sup> From the Church of Norway we interviewed one priest, a man who has been involved in the dialogue with MST since 2003. From the police we interviewed one man and one woman who have worked closely with MST. From the childcare authorities and the integration authority we interviewed one woman representative of each, and they were the ones who have actively collaborated with MST. We are indebted to all our interviewees for the time and thought they have given to our study.

### **Muslim Society Trondheim: The Organization**

In Norway all religious organizations, including the Church, receive public funding on the basis of membership records. This overlaps with the Nordic civil society model

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<sup>1</sup> These documents are: *Det Muslimske Samfunnet i Trondheim (MST). Årsappport 2009* (Muslim Society Trondheim, Annual Report 2009); *Forum for muslimsk-kristen dialog, Trondheim. Perspektiver fra samtalen 2005-2009* (Muslim-Christian Dialogue Forum, Trondheim. Perspectives from the conversation 2005–2009); *Fra samtalen 2003-2005. Dialog mellom kristne og muslimer i Trondheim* (From the conversation 2003–2005. Dialogue between Christians and Muslims in Trondheim); *Felles erklæring om trosfrihet 2007* (Declaration of Freedom of Religion 2007).

where citizens represent their group interests to public authorities through publicly funded associations. In 2010 MST's income was around 1.1 million NOK, around 80% of which is public funding. The organization is built around the general assembly; the Shura committee; the steering committee; and the imam office, reflecting a democratic division between judicial, legislative and executive functions, with the imam office serving as experts on Islam with responsibility for the Friday sermons and the correct teachings of Islam.

With regard to teachings, MST's bylaws contain an interesting paragraph, no. 2.1:

MST's aim shall be to serve the interests of Islam and the Muslim community in Trøndelag in such a way that the members are able to *practise Islam as a perfect way of life*. In all of its activities MST shall respect and abide by the country's laws, *in so far as the latter do not conflict with Islam's spiritual principles*. (MST Bylaws 2010; italics added).

In comparison, IRN, of which MST is member, does not mention potential conflicts between Norwegian laws and Islamic principles:

IRN shall be a voluntary, religious, democratic, and politically independent organization whose activities abide by Norway's laws. (IRN Bylaws 2006).

MST as an organization does not identify with any particular Islamic doctrine or agenda. Yet, MST's emphasis on active civic engagement stands out compared with the other local Islamic organizations and is of the same spirit as that evinced by the Muslim Brotherhood in Oslo (cf. Leirvik in this volume). MST's more ambitious objectives include:

[to c]onduct seminars on different subject-matters and courses in Islamic and Norwegian history, society and tradition, in Norwegian, English and Arabic, as well as provide mother-tongue teaching, for the sake of assisting MST's members

to integrate in Norwegian society and be law-abiding citizens with supreme values and a high moral standing. (MST Bylaws 2010, par. 2.9).

The organization has been through a sequence of challenges related to generational and demographic changes among its members. In the beginning university students dominated, many of Pakistani and Turkish-Kurdish background. Some had high levels of education and wide networks. By 2010 the largest groups of members were of Somali and Arab backgrounds. Many were new immigrants and were not highly educated. The demographic change has involved a contestation of leadership, between academics, often with knowledge of Arabic and the Islamic scriptures, and members without academic degrees and often not Arabic speaking. The struggle involves contestation of both the meaning of Islamic principles and access to leadership functions. One member describes the situation through a personal interpretation of the Prophet:

We need everyone, from builders to craftsmen to academics, so, there was perhaps a bit of a tendency before that maybe there was a bit of an intellectual elite, who, in a way, wanted to be in charge, and there were many who reacted against that, because that is not from *sunna* and the Prophet (PBUH) who was himself a commoner, not a learned man, but a very wise man. So we must use that example in the best possible way, so that there won't be an intellectual elite of some sort, so that there will be many ways in which one can be a resource. (interview MST February 2010).

Tensions escalated into conflict. During 2009, MST went through three successive steering committees as members struggled to solve the dispute. The above-mentioned paragraph 2.1 of the bylaws was also drawn into the conflict, concerning the issue of marriage. Some members argued that the paragraph was introduced by members with good intentions but incomplete understanding of Islam and that members who now have higher Islamic education know that Islam obliges Muslims to abide by the law of the land. They can seek to change a law by democratic means but as long as it is in force they must abide by it, in line with Shaykh al-Azhar's *fatwa* concerning the French law

against *hijab* in public schools, and the approach taken by the European Council of Fatwa and Research (interview MST November 2010). Concerning marriage, these members hold that MST's imams should not bless any marriage which is not registered in Norwegian civil law, which rules out polygamy, among other things. Other members believe that since Sharia is the sacred guidance for Muslims it must have priority *on principle*; hence, polygamy cannot be illegal although Sharia conditions for it are such that no one can actually fulfil them (interview MST November 2010).

Eventually the conflict over power and over Islamic principles grew so heated that MST members contacted the police and IRN to mediate, with good results (interview MST March 2010). In 2010 new bylaws were passed which stipulate that out of fifteen members in the Shura committee, there can be at most four from each nation (par. 7.2), and out of members members of the steering committee, there can be at most two from each nation (par. 8.2.2). These rules, which although contested were crucial for achieving unity between the different positions in the conflict, maintain MST's 'pan-Islamic' character and prevent national groups from dominating the organization. Paragraph 2.1 remains in force while the imam office ensures that MST's activities (including marriages) are in line with Norwegian law (interview MST November 2010).

### **Interfaith and Intercultural Dialogues**

The conflict was not so bad that MST was unable to maintain dialogues initiated long before with the Church of Norway; Trondheim municipality; the childcare authorities; the integration authorities (IMDi); and the police. These will now be described in some detail. The significance of the selected dialogues to those involved should be understood also with reference to issues raised in the Introduction to this special issue but not treated specifically here, i.e. the negative attitudes towards Islam and Muslims that are communicated in the national mass media along with documented discrimination in the labour and housing markets (IMDi 2009), as well as varying degrees of non-acceptance of Muslim values and practices in schools, a public institution with which children and parents interact on a daily basis (Holm 2011; IMDi 2008; ISF 2009).

*Forum for Muslim-Christian Dialogue*

The Forum for Muslim-Christian dialogue in Trondheim is a local branch of the national Contact Group. Officially established on 8 May 2003, it was initiated by the bishop of Nidaros in response to 9/11 and security concerns over radicalized Muslim communities and public anti-Muslim sentiment. From 2003 to the present, six representatives from each religion have met six times per year. With minor changes, it has been the same group throughout (interview Church March 2010; dialogue meeting April 2011).

The aim of the dialogue is not to reach agreement but to understand ‘the other’ and ‘the self’ as it relates to ‘the other’. The method consists in seven steps: to listen, take notes, reflect, check with the others, give and receive response, document and conclude, and it is applied in dialogue over themes which are mutually agreed upon (dialogue meeting April 2011; *Samtalen* 2003–2005; *Forum* 2010). The notorious cartoon crisis motivated three dialogue themes: ‘Living together with respect for difference’, ‘Freedom of speech and blasphemy’, and ‘Apology and forgiveness’. MST’s initial reaction to the cartoons was to prosecute for blasphemy, but after deliberations in the Forum they decided to align themselves with the national Contact Group’s strategy to obtain a public apology from the publisher. In 2008 a local Trondheim cartoonist published a provocative cartoon, and members of MST felt sufficiently confident to use the same ‘civic’ procedure as with the 2006 cartoons to ask for a meeting with the publisher and convey their views (interviews, the Church and MST March 2010).

Trondheim’s Forum has also addressed issues beyond the formal dialogue themes. The Muslim participants and many of MST’s members had serious concerns with the municipal childcare authorities, especially regarding custody of children. In these cases the authorities placed Muslim children in non-Muslim foster homes at great distance from Trondheim. MST’s members wanted Muslim foster families so that children in custody would be raised as Muslims; and that foster families should live nearby so that the family did not lose contact with their child. In 2005 the Forum, in cooperation with Trondheim municipality and the Ombudsman for children, initiated a conference on



immigrants' experiences of the childcare authorities, since non-Muslim groups also experienced problems in communication with this particular authority. Contacts were thus established between the childcare authorities and MST, and a number of Muslim foster families have since been approved by the authorities and have received foster children. Relations suffered a setback, however, when the authorities placed a Muslim child with a lesbian non-Muslim couple. The Forum then responded collectively, expressing disappointment with the municipality's apparent renegeing on its intention to accommodate minorities' values (interviews, the Church and MST March 2010).

At the national level, the childcare authorities are campaigning against female genital mutilation (FGM), which concerns Somali families in particular. In connection with the Forum's dialogue theme 'Respect for nature and preservation of the work of creation', Imam Abdinur Mohamed, who is of Somali background, wrote a treatise using classical *fiqh* and arguing that FGM is against Sharia because it lacks support in the Qur'an and in sound Prophetic *hadiths*, and because it destroys the work of creation. In 2008 the Norwegian Directorate of Health arranged a national conference on FGM in Trondheim and the Ministry of Culture has funded the translation of Abdinur Mohamed's treatise from Arabic to Norwegian as part of the national campaign against FGM (interview the Church March 2010). The Forum has thus supported efforts to apply *fiqh* in support of a cultural reform.

Both Muslims and Christians find the Forum very successful. They have reached a progressively deeper understanding of each other's religion, as the participants have become more confident to share and discuss matters. The Forum has also been represented in other dialogue groups. One of MST's members represents Norway in a European Muslim-Christian dialogue; and in 2009 the Forum went to Copenhagen to visit a dialogue group and a project with 'hospital imams' (interview MST March 2010).

When asked about the discrepancy in power between the Church and MST, MST's participants emphasize that precisely because the Church is so well established the

dialogue has raised MST to the level of equal partner with the Church of Norway, which they see as an important sign of recognition of Islam (interview MST March 2010; dialogue meeting April 2011). One Church representative pointed out that while the Church commands the dialogue agenda through its proximity to state and public authorities, and not least proficiency in the Norwegian language, the Muslim colleagues are becoming more and more confident to contribute with their perspectives and to ensure that they are understood correctly (personal communication September 2011). MST representatives also stress that the dialogue has allayed worries among some of their members that Christian Norwegians might be hostile to Muslims (dialogue meeting April 2011). They feel that they have contributed substantially to their Christian colleagues' knowledge of Islam, and they see the willingness of Christians and Muslims to cooperate on general and specific matters that is expressed in the dialogue as a sign of increasing religious tolerance (interview MST March 2010).

The fact that the dialogue addressed issues related to the childcare authorities and the cartoon crisis is *very* important for MST's representatives, as it shows that the Church wants to improve Muslims' everyday life by addressing issues which are not among the state's and the public authorities' priorities (such as FGM or 'integration'). By opening doors to public institutions, the Forum has furthered MST's members' understanding of the principles which guide these institutions. MST's representatives emphasize that Islamic organizations in Oslo have not succeeded in opening a dialogue with the childcare authorities, and that it is the Church's involvement that makes the difference. They also think that Trondheim's Forum is producing better results than the European counterparts they have been in touch with. They also stress that the dialogue has provided a useful democratic method, for dialogue with the public and for managing deliberations within MST after the conflict was resolved. This has enabled new members to participate in MST's leadership, which is important progress in internal democracy (interview MST March 2010).

Another progressive measure is that one of MST's members has been employed in a two-year project as 'cultural executive' at the office for hospital chaplains at

Trondheim's St Olav's Hospital; a similar model is tried at Ullevål University Hospital in Oslo. The project is led by the state Health Department but facilitated by the national Contact Group and the Forum, inspired by the 'hospital imams' they visited in Copenhagen. MST's member sees this as yet another sign that the Church is elevating Muslims to collegial status, not only as dialogue partners but also as professionals (interview MST November 2010).

The Church representative is very pleased that the Forum has consisted of more or less the same participants since 2003, although he remarks that MST has been unable to find women participants. It was the trust engendered by this well-established framework that ensured that the dialogue partners could find a common strategy during the cartoon crises (interview Church March 2010).

Reflecting on the dialogue's branching out from the selected themes to such concrete matters as the childcare authorities' policy, the Church representative thinks it would have been egoistic of the Church to ignore the many challenges their Muslim colleagues face in relation to public institutions. Understanding MST's members' concerns has made the Church see new and challenging sides of Norwegian society which has motivated the Church to include in its concept of pastoral care the guidance of new religions and immigrants, since the Church has long experience and much practical knowledge to convey. In the context of multicultural Norway, the Sermon on the Mount implies recognizing 'the religious other' as a brother and equal (interview Church March 2010). Against this background it is significant that, among other public authorities, the State Department for Integration and Diversity (IMDi) has responded very positively to the Forum and invited the group to its local Trondheim office (interview Church March 2010).

The Church representative has also become more aware of the inconsistencies of Norwegian immigration politics. Norwegians were happy to import labourers from Pakistan and Morocco but perceive their religion as a challenge. The Church representative thus feels it is high time to manifest that Islam is here to stay and that

society has changed irrevocably. Building mosques is one way of manifesting the change. Another is to change the established institutions from within. For example, today Norwegian prisons and hospitals host Muslim inmates and patients who often do not have access to spiritual care. In order for imams to take on these tasks practical training needs to be provided (interview Church March 2010). The project for employment of two ‘hospital imams’ in Trondheim and Oslo is a pilot study to chart what kind of training is needed.

Concerning Islam as a religion, the Church representative is fascinated by the difference in Islamic and Christian approaches to scripture. He finds that his Muslim colleagues are much more bound to the scriptures and to applying their principles than the dominant Christian approach to scripture as an ethical guide rather than a set of norms. For example, he and his Christian colleagues were astonished that their Muslim colleagues hold Prophetic traditions that command stoning for homosexuality to be valid commands, but that as long as there are no witnesses to the sexual act, no crime has been committed and homosexual individuals can be tolerated. This is very different from the rights-based approach which the Church follows, according to which homosexuality is detached from scripture and perceived as a personal sexual identity with a corresponding lifestyle (interview March 2010). The example illustrates that becoming acquainted with each other’s scriptures and interpretations is a fruitful way to define and understand differences between Christianity and Islam, which does not reduce Islam to Christian categories and concerns (Grung 2011; Leirvik 2011).

On the whole the Church representative thinks the dialogue has achieved more than he ever imagined. The fact that the Forum members have become real friends is also very important to him, as he had no Muslim friends prior to the dialogue.

#### *The childcare authorities*

MST’s dialogue with the childcare authority is a result of the conference in 2005. According to our interviewees from MST, many of MST’s members are new immigrants and do not understand the principles informing Norwegian child welfare

services, i.e. that they protect children's *rights* to care and safety (see Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion 2010). Some parents perceive the concept of 'children's rights' as an assault on parents' unquestionable right to care for their children. An early attempt by the childcare authorities to come to MST and inform their members of Norwegian childcare policy had not been at all successful (personal communication 2010). At the conference in 2005 the childcare authorities received harsh criticism but they saw it as an opportunity to establish dialogue with MST and to establish Muslim foster homes, among other things. The authorities have also invited MST to lectures about FGM and about what the authorities consider deficient parental care. They also encourage new employees to contact religious organizations and use them as resources (interview childcare authority June 2010).

According to the childcare representative, many of the cases when the authorities intervene in Muslim families have to do with conflicts emerging out of different approaches to upbringing between the majority and the minority. She uses a binary anthropological model of 'Norwegian' and 'Muslim' childcare to describe the conflicts. According to this model, 'Norwegian' parents strictly control small children but as the child gets older it gains progressively more freedom. In the 'Muslim' model small children have a lot of freedom but are progressively restricted as they grow older. Conflicts between the two models can occur at puberty when non-Muslim teenagers gain more freedom while Muslim teenagers (especially girls) lose theirs. Sometimes the tension between these two value systems causes conflicts between parents and children in Muslim families and the childcare authorities intervene (interview June 2010). According to the same model there are also different views of who is responsible for a child. In the 'Muslim' model the extended family often participates in child rearing, whereas the 'Norwegian' model is individual-oriented. When parents cannot provide secure surroundings for their children, the childcare authorities assume responsibility and they do not automatically consider members of the extended family to have any special role (Child Welfare Service 2010).

We have not conducted our own research of actual conflicts leading to intervention by the authorities and of whether the concerned Muslim families find the childcare authority's model illustrative of their problems. However, it is clear that with regard to adolescent children the model constructs a binary opposition between 'Norwegian freedom' and 'Muslim control' which is also applied in public schools in the context of national campaigns against forced marriages (hearing on forced marriages Trondheim November 2011). Recent research in public schools has found that public discourse about Muslim parents as 'control-driven' is perceived as problematic by both parents and children, and that schools need to reflect on how to achieve more constructive communication with parents (ISF 2009).

Against this background it is promising that the childcare representative finds the dialogue with MST very useful for identifying mutually acceptable solutions. Sometimes the authorities have asked MST members to help supervise Muslim families; and sometimes members of MST have asked their leaders for help in contacts with the childcare authorities. MST's members think that Muslims have learned a lot about the guidelines for the childcare authorities' work, which greatly helps their everyday life. They also feel that their knowledge as Muslims has become a valuable asset to the authority, which is among their organization's objectives. The real failure in MST's view is the case with the Muslim child who was placed with a lesbian non-Muslim couple *after* MST and the authorities had a mutual understanding (interview MST March 2010). The childcare representative said that her department was not involved in this case. While she can see the reasons behind the decision, she also thinks it has been destructive for the trust that the childcare authorities are trying to build with the Muslim community and she would not herself have made that decision (interview childcare authorities June 2010). Both MST and the childcare representative stress that more dialogue is needed on a regular basis since new immigrants continue to arrive in Trondheim.

*The State Directorate of Integration and Diversity (IMDi)*

IMDi was established in 2006 with the objective 'to contribute to equality in living conditions and diversity through employment, integration and participation' (IMDi 2010). IMDi Trondheim seeks to cooperate with minorities' organizations to inform about their translation services; experience concerning long-term unemployment and further education; and general elections. Because participation in religious organizations is often higher than in other kinds of minority organizations, IMDi is gathering information about Trondheim's religious communities in order to improve their services and has invited the Islamic organizations to information meetings. So far only MST has responded (interview IMDi February 2010).

On one occasion MST and IMDi co-organized an event in the mosque before the general elections in 2009. MST invited a panel of local politicians and IMDi informed the audience about the importance of participating in general elections and how elections shape Norwegian society. The politicians presented their party programmes and answered questions from the audience concerning teaching of mother tongue language, freedom of speech, religious education in school, and the childcare authorities. The MST member who took the initiative to organize the political panel thinks IMDi's contributions improved MST's members' interest in the general election. Because many members are immigrants, she thinks they would benefit generally from more cooperation with IMDi (interview MST February 2010).

IMDi would like to interact more regularly and praises the political panel. To encourage further initiatives, IMDi is planning to hold annual information meetings which they hope that MST and other organizations will attend (interview IMDi February 2010).

*The municipality*

MST and Trondheim municipality had two meetings during 2009. MST was represented by two women members and the municipality by the mayor and her political advisor. MST's aim was to establish a contact for future cooperation and to explain Islamic principles, in the first instance concerning the need for a proper Muslim graveyard and

for women-only sessions in municipal swimming pools. The municipality was most forthcoming (interview MST February 2010). Since then arrangements have been made for a special Muslim graveyard at Kolstad with facilities for ritual washing of the dead, ready for use in 2011 (interview MST November 2010). However, gender-segregated sessions in the city's swimming pools remain to be realized.

### *The police*

The Trondheim police have had regular contacts with MST since 2003, as a result of the police authority's strategy to establish contacts with minorities and of initiatives from MST. In 2003 some Somali members of MST felt very uneasy about the way media was stigmatizing Somalis as criminals and they contacted the police, who helped them make sense of the statistics. It showed that while some immigrant groups are overrepresented in certain types of criminal activities, immigrants and Somalis are not on average more criminal than other citizens. This was felt as a great relief for the concerned MST members (interview Police March 2010).

The police initially contacted MST and other Islamic organizations as part of their strategy to recruit staff of minority backgrounds and to combat racism within the police force (interview Police March 2010). In 2008 a Norwegian of Somali background was murdered in a suburb of Trondheim by a man known for his racist views (TV 2 Nyhetene 2009), which caused a lot of fear in the community. The police arranged several meetings in MST's mosque, informing members about the case and criminal proceedings in Norway.

In the same year (2008) a series of robberies were committed by youths whose parents were affiliated with MST. The police, MST, and the parents met to discuss crime prevention and correction. The public approach to correction is to support the individual so that s/he can readjust to society as quickly as possible, while the Muslim parents in this case favoured punishment, convinced that leniency would encourage further criminal behaviour. However, the parties found ways ahead that were satisfying to all



parties; the number of robberies was reduced by 50% (interviews Police and MST March 2010).

In 2009 MST contacted the police to mediate in their internal conflict, as mentioned above. The parties met with the police on several occasions, and the police were asked to participate as observers in two general assemblies when new constitutions were drafted and a new steering committee elected. Commenting on this process, the police representative interviewed reflected on paragraph 2.1 of the bylaws that requires MST to abide by Norwegian law unless it violates Islam's sacred principles:

One could say that, to return briefly to the conflict about the bylaws, it is an interesting problem area: what has first priority? MST's bylaws or Norwegian law? (...) There were several different suggestions in the air, and it was very clear to me what comes first, and it was self-evident to many MST members as well, that Norwegian law comes first. But far from all agreed. So if you read the bylaws today, there is a paragraph that makes you doubt (laughs apologizingly, referring to paragraph 2.1). But there we are. My job was not to produce the new bylaws, I had to be clear about that, it was to defuse the conflict and the escalation that was about to take off, and help them create a working organization. (...) And so one has to see, there is development with time (interview Police March 2010).

The police officer also thinks reflection on similar issues is called for among the general public:

We may have a lot to learn you know, for society is getting more multinational, and then we might have to have a look at the Norwegian law, I mean, the Norwegian law obviously comes first, but there is something about the Norwegian system, we should probably have a look at it. As we are becoming more and more multinational (interview Police March 2010).

One of MST's members initially had reservations against involving the police, because many members have bad experiences of the police in their countries of origin. However,

in the end all our interviewees agreed that the police's mediation had increased trust in the police among the members, which is important for their integration into Norwegian society (interview MST February and March 2010).

The police found the mediation both challenging and educational. It was difficult to get an overview of the conflict because there were so many people involved; some of the issues at stake were not explicitly stated; and people often shifted position. Yet, the outcomes were very satisfying: MST is a functioning organization again; the police have realized that they have much to learn from immigrants regarding solving and preventing crime; their new knowledge has challenged their established views of the law; and they have got a much more nuanced picture of Islam and Muslims. The police mediator is particularly impressed that MST manages to keep together so many different nationalities, cultures and languages (interview Police March 2010). He attributes the success to the openness and interest in others' views that he finds among MST's members, a democratic spirit he finds lacking in many other civil society organizations (dialogue meeting April 2011). These experiences have made the police realize how damaging media reporting about Muslims is. Local media covered the conflict within MST in a way that generated a lot of public suspicion, even though smaller and more homogeneous Norwegian organizations regularly have much more serious conflicts than MST but without attracting any media attention (interview Police March 2010).

### **Concluding analysis**

This very limited study of interactions between MST, the Church and the other public institutions finds that dialogue within the normative framework of civic integration can result in two-way accommodation between 'majority' and 'minority'. This became possible in cases where the Church and the public authorities were prepared to subject their beliefs, values and policies to scrutiny by MST's Muslim members. Through the dialogues MST's members gained an enhanced understanding of the policies of public institutions which enabled them to negotiate their interests in relation to these same institutions. In accommodating MST's interests the public institutions have retained

their principles at the same time as they accommodated Muslim values and concerns. For example, selecting Muslim foster families for Muslim children has not changed the quality criteria for approving foster families, only expanded the range of qualified families by introducing the religious category 'Muslim' in the selection. Similarly, when the police accommodated the Muslim parents' views on how to correct young delinquents they did so within the limits of national correction policy. It appears that the Church and the dialogue Forum have contributed significantly to this development. For MST's members, practising dialogue as a method to define and explain different standpoints has provided them with a democratic tool that has been very useful in contacts with the public as well as for deliberations within the organization. In particular, relations with the childcare authority were very strained prior to the Forum-initiated conference and the subsequent dialogue between MST and the authority. Moreover, the fact that the Church of Norway treats Muslims as equal partners in dialogue and increasingly also as professional partners, and publicly supports Muslims' rights to promote their interests in relation to public institutions, is perceived by MST's representatives as highly significant for their feeling of recognition as Muslim Norwegian citizens.

The significance of a 'Muslim citizenship ethics' for these developments might be important as well. MST is a member of IRN and has been more active in dialogue with public institutions than the other Islamic organizations in Trondheim. While the other organizations' members are of course just as good citizens as MST members, MST's official emphasis on 'active citizenship' aligns the organization with IRN and is also reminiscent of the Muslim Brotherhood's concept of European Muslim citizenship. Although MST as an organization cannot be identified with the Muslim Brotherhood since its members are truly diverse, its imams and leaders consult the ECFR where the FIOE's concept of European Muslim citizenship is actualized through *fatwas*. Furthermore, MST's 'pan-Islamic' identity makes it more suitable as public representative for all Trondheim's Muslims than the specifically Turkish Mevlana and

the Twelver Shiite Ahl O'Bait (the fourth organization, Dar El Eman, is too recent to have any record of activities).

The question is then to what extent MST's public activities make it a 'de-privatized public Islam' in Casanova's sense. This limited study indicates that MST does not engage in a struggle to define modern boundaries. Rather, MST encourages its members to enter into dialogue with the Church and public authorities in order to actualize their civil and human rights. In other words they are working within the system, not challenging it. The results of their dialogues are thus not challenging the various institutional systems but ensuring that the systems accommodate the interests of Muslim citizens. For example, MST does not question homosexual couples' right to adoption but asks that Muslim children should be placed in Muslim foster families; the former would be to challenge the system based on religious values while the latter works within the system but seeks to protect the right of Muslim parents to confer their religion to their child (which is a human right).

When we apply Roy's concept 'churchification of Islam' to MST, a second pattern emerges. MST's leaders are assuming traditional chaplain tasks, such as spiritual care for the sick and for criminals. Planned future training programmes for Muslim leaders and imams will be modelled on training for priests and chaplains. This is to be expected given that the two religions are working within the same public institutions and thus have to relate to the same public requirements. MST's membership in IRN as the national Islamic umbrella organization has also been decisive for the Church's selection of MST as dialogue partner, and this status continues to contribute to the process of shaping national Islamic interlocutors for both the Church and the state. This means that MST as an organization is gaining more contacts with public institutions, which could be seen as a de-privatization of Islam because MST's members are seeking to make public authorities consider religious interests. On the other hand, since the Church has always worked with a range of public institutions and authorities, MST does not shift any established boundaries by following suit.

However, ‘churchification’ in terms of organization and engagement with public institutions does not mean that Islam loses its distinctiveness as religion. The case of Imam Abdinur’s treatise demonstrating that FGM lacks support in Islamic scriptures illustrates this point well. The treatise is an exercise in classical *fiqh* addressing an issue of concern for the national health and childcare authorities, and in collaboration with the same authorities. The process leading to its translation and national distribution shows two things: that the Church and Norwegian public authorities perceive Muslim scholars and Islamic scholarship as valuable resources for society; and that real two-way dialogue is necessary to raise public awareness of this fact. Trondheim, the epicentre of Norwegian national identity, and its Forum for Muslim-Christian dialogue, presents some examples of how these resources can be used wisely—which in this case means: to the satisfaction of all the involved parties, not just one side.

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## ***Harakât Salafism in Norway: ‘The Saved Sect’ Hugs the Infidels***

Ulrika Mårtensson

### ***Abstract***

*The article is a study of the Norwegian Salafî organization Islam Net, which aims at defining Islam Net in terms of recent research on European Salafism and assessing its capacity for public civic engagement. With reference to de Certeau’s concept of discourse, and Habermas’ concepts of democratic legitimacy and religion in the public sphere, it is found that Islam Net’s capacity for civic engagement is severely restricted by its non-acceptance of human rights-based values, since this non-acceptance justifies for public institutions to deny the organization presence and refuse dialogue with Islam Net. From Habermas’ viewpoint this is a potential democratic deficiency, since it may weaken the legitimacy of democracy among Islam Net’s members.*

From the arrival of Muslims in Norway in the early 1970s until recently, the Norwegian Islamic scene has been dominated by the Pakistani Deobandi and Barelwi schools; Turkish Diyanet-affiliated mosques; Twelver Shiites; Bosnian organizations; Somali organizations; and so on. The ‘pan-Islamic’ discourse was represented primarily by mosques loosely affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood (see articles by Leirvik and Vongraven Eriksen & Mårtensson in this special issue), and by individuals and mosques related to Jama‘at-i Islami and the Deobandi-related Tabligh-i Jama‘at (Linge 2013). Beneath these mosques and organizations there is another mosaic, namely the traditional schools of law. The Turkish Diyanet and the Pakistani Barelwi and Deobandi follow the Hanafite *madhhab*, while the Somalis are Shafiites; Maliki *fiqh* is practised

by the Moroccans. It took until 2008 before the fourth *madhhab*, the Hanbalite, was established, completing the Norwegian Islamic pallet.

The form that Hanbalism has taken in Norway is that of the Salafi organization Islam Net.<sup>1</sup> Its founder and leader is the Norwegian-Pakistani engineering student Fahad Qureshi, whose father was affiliated with Tabligh-i Jama'at (Linge 2013). As of 2013 Islam Net has around 2000 registered members and is represented by student associations at Tromsø University and Bodø University College. Islam Net regularly invites preachers to Norway. They lecture both in members-only arrangements, and at Islam Net's public annual three-day long Peace Conferences. The lectures and conferences constitute meetings between the foreign preachers and *shaykhs* who refer to Salafi teachings and authorities, and a Norwegian audience which in the public conferences includes some non-Muslims. At the meetings I attended the central message was that Muslims should engage with the general public in every possible way, and befriend – even hug! – non-Muslims. This message is not common within Salafism. Consequently, the aim here is to define Islam Net with reference to the latest research on Salafism, and define to what extent it is capable of civic engagement. The analytical framework is provided by Michel de Certeau's concept of discourse and Jürgen Habermas' concept of 'post-secular society'. The data is drawn from my participation in a three-day Peace Conference in Oslo in April 2012; a half-day lecture in Trondheim in June 2012; and observation and participation in October 2012 and March 2013 in two failed attempts by Islam Net to engage with public institutions.

### **State of the Art**

The majority of Islam Net's members are so-called second- and third-generation immigrants in Norway. In this respect they can be seen as representative of the young European Muslims whose constructions of Islam the French sociologist Olivier Roy has

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<sup>1</sup> See Islam Net's bylaws for the organization's identification with the teachings of all the founders of the four law schools, and the Salafi scholars Ibn Baz and al-Albani: <http://www.islamnet.no/om-oss/om-oss/2061>; accessed 7 October 2013.

termed neo-fundamentalism (Roy 2004). Since Roy includes Salafism under the term neo-fundamentalism, together with Tabligh-i Jama‘at and Hizb al-Tahrir, and even such liberal preachers as Tariq Ramadan, it is worth examining the term’s relevance for Islam Net.

Neo-fundamentalism signifies a view of Islam as an all-encompassing system of faith and practice, which in its pure form is found in the scriptures, and which is believed to differ in essence from the cultures of Muslim majority countries. While this definition of Islam may appear highly traditional in that it defines Islam in terms of the Qur’an and the *hadith*, this scriptural Islam nevertheless expresses the circumstance that young western Muslims define Islam in the context of their everyday lives in the West. Specifically, Roy defines neo-fundamentalism as a strategy of simultaneous *deculturalization* and *acculturation*, i.e. it strips Islam of the cultures of the Middle East and North Africa at the same time as it accommodates Islam with everyday life in the West. Since this accommodation involves a new and stronger commitment to the notion of pure scriptural Islam, including wearing Islamic dress and other ostensible signs such as full beard and avoidance of sinful things and people, it is also a process of ‘re-Islamization’ of western Muslim youth:

Re-Islamisation means that Muslim identity, self-evident as long as it belonged to an inherited cultural legacy, has to express itself explicitly in a non-Muslim or Western context. The construction of a ‘deculturalised’ Islam is a means of experiencing a religious identity that is not linked to a given culture and can therefore fit with every culture, or, more precisely, could be defined beyond the very notion of culture (Roy 2004:23–24; cf. 19–22, 117–47).

From Roy’s viewpoint, the fact that re-Islamization involves deculturalizing Islam means that it can be seen as a strategy of shaping western Islam, even though it may mean defining Islam in conscious opposition to what are perceived as western values. Roy emphasizes that such construction of a deculturalized Islam is a public activity, both because it takes place in the media, and because non-Muslims as well as other

Muslims outside the own group serve as simultaneously reference points and stakeholders in the constructions of Islam:

The issue is one not only of recasting an Islamic identity, but also of formulating it in explicit terms. Resorting to an explicit formulation is important, because it obliges one to make choices and to disentangle the different and often contradictory levels of practices and discourses where a religion is embedded in a given culture. Especially in times of political crisis (such as 9/11:), ordinary Muslims feel compelled (or are explicitly asked: to explain what it means to be a Muslim (by an opinion poll, a neighbor, a news anchorman or spontaneously, because Muslims anticipate the question:). The Western press publishes many opinion pieces and other articles, written by ‘moderate’ or ‘liberal’ Muslims, stating what Islam is or is not (usually what it is not: radical, violent, fanatical, and so on:). (Roy 2004:24).<sup>2</sup>

Following Eickelman and Piscatori’s theory that the ‘objectified’ Islam that is the fruit of modern public culture and mass education is largely independent of traditional religious authorities (Eickelman & Piscatori 1996; Roy 2004: 21), Roy argues that these public reconstructions of Islam have become the task of ordinary Muslims, not of learned authorities: ‘This task falls on the shoulders of every Muslim, rather than on legitimate religious authorities, simply because, as we shall see, there are so few or no established Muslim authorities in the West’ (Roy 2004: 24). The fact that neo-fundamentalist definitions of Islam are independent of traditional authorities, both in terms of defining and enforcing religion, makes them more similar to western Christianity and western new religious movements than to traditional Islam (Roy 2004:26–29, ch. 4–5).

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<sup>2</sup> For the same observation developed in the context of a life-story study of two Moroccan-Dutch young women Salafis, see de Koning (2009:); cf. Adraoui (2009: in the context of young French Salafis.

Bernard Haykel has criticized Roy for his indiscriminate grouping of Salafism together with movements and individuals who, in Haykel's view, represent completely different concepts of Islam. Unlike the other movements and individuals, Haykel argues, Salafism is not a modern phenomenon. In fact, Salafism's self-identity as representing the 'pure Islam' of the Prophet's *sunna* and the first generations of Companions and Successors has roots as far back in Islamic history as Ahmad b. Hanbal (d. 855) and the theological school *Ahl al-hadith*, with its continuation in the Hanbali school and the famous theologians Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), Ibn al-Qayyim al-Jawziyya (d. 1350) and 'Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792) (Haykel 2009).

According to Haykel three factors define Salafism: theology, law, and criteria for political action. Theology provides the boundary between Salafis and other Muslims. All Salafis agree on a creed ('*aqida*) of absolute *tawhid* ('affirmation of God's Oneness') and belief in the uncreated nature of God's eternal attributes (*sifat*), including the Qur'an as His eternal speech. On the basis of their creed they reject other Sunni and Shiite doctrines, and the idea that man-made laws could substitute for God's *shari'a*. Legal issues, however, are not significant as markers of identity. Salafis affirm that competent legal scholars should practice *ijtihad* (independent interpretation by applying reason to the Qur'an and *hadith*) and in doing so consult all the law schools, rather than only one, and that non-jurists should follow (*ittaba'a*) the rulings of Salafi scholars. Thus Salafis do not allow non-scholars to make their own interpretations in the way Roy says is typical of neo-fundamentalism.

If the creed defines Salafism towards the exterior, political action divides it internally: whether it is allowed, for what reasons, and by which means (Haykel 2009: 47–51; cf. Wiktorowicz 2006). Using Salafi terminology, Haykel distinguishes between three positions: *jihadi* Salafism, which seeks by violent means to establish God's rule on earth through a legitimate caliphate; *haraki* ('movement') Salafism which is often influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood ideology, as it advocates applying *tawhid* through non-violent politics in order to change and Islamize society

and government; and *‘ilmi* (‘scholarly’) Salafism which denounces political activism unless commanded by the ruler, and focuses on purification of Muslims’ knowledge and practice of Islam (Haykel 2009:48–51).

Haykel’s categories correspond to Quintan Wiktorowicz’s terms ‘jihadist’, ‘politico’ and ‘purist’ (Wiktorowicz 2006). However, Haykel’s categories are more flexible, since the distinction between *‘ilmi* and *haraki* does not rule out political engagement on the part of the scholars, which Wiktorowicz’s distinction between ‘purist’ and ‘politico’ does. The following studies of various forms of Salafi politics illustrate this point, showing how Salafi political activism depends on the national institutional context. Bjørn Olav Utvik has studied *haraki* Salafis and their parliamentary politics in Kuwait, finding that within Kuwait’s dynamic parliamentary frame they collaborate with other politicians and develop policies on issues beyond traditional *haraki* frames, while maintaining that their politics are truly Islamic (Utvik 2010). Thus, even in a Muslim majority country such as Kuwait, *haraki* Salafi parliamentarians do not necessarily challenge the existing political system.

Naturally, in European contexts Salafi politics are also shaped by each country’s institutional order. Regarding French Madkhali Salafis of the *‘ilmi* category, Adraoui (2009: shows how they withdraw from the French political system and ‘citizenship-integration’ programmes such as that represented by Tariq Ramadan and the national umbrella organizations which are in dialogue with the state, and instead develop their own Salafi networks, especially with the Gulf States, where individual entrepreneurship and commerce are what count. Piety leading to individual personal development, prosperity and happiness is the heart of this Salafi political economy, which bypasses the French public institutional system politically, economically and culturally. Hence, even this politically quietist form of Salafism expresses itself as highly socio-economically entrepreneurial, offering networks which enable personal gains which these individuals apparently perceived they could not gain within the French system.

De Koning (2012) shows with reference to Dutch Salafis that Wiktorovicz's distinction between 'purists' and 'politicos' needs to be revised. Dutch Madkhali Salafis, who would fall into Wiktorovicz's category of 'purists', are involved in civic political engagement which differs not only from his concept of 'purism' but also from his definition of the 'politico' agenda. The Dutch case shows Madkhali Salafi politics being about asserting the right of Muslims to practise true Islam within Dutch society, which pushes them to engage actively with the non-Muslim public as well as with non-Salafi Muslims. De Koning's analysis of the Dutch Salafis' public engagement shows them to correspond closely to Roy's concept of neo-fundamentalism as the product of constant negotiations between its propagators, other Muslims and the general non-Muslim public, and as a form of Islam which is shaped according to the particular western context; it also corresponds with what could be called European *haraiḳī* Salafism.

De Koning's results can be applied equally to the Norwegian Islam Net: it draws on teachings and rulings by Saudi scholarly Salafis,<sup>3</sup> yet engages in civic activities and socializes with non-Muslims on recommendation by European *haraiḳī* Salafi scholars and in ways which differ radically from Saudi Salafi norms.<sup>4</sup> In the first academic study of Islam Net, Marius Linge follows de Koning's approach, focusing mainly on the significance of Norwegian public Islamophobia since the 1980s in creating a need for a Salafi discourse on Muslim identity which has the capacity to address public stereotypes about Islam and Muslims. Linge contextualizes Islam Net with reference to the Pakistani-Norwegian milieus of its founder Fahad Qureshi, where

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<sup>3</sup> On Islam Net's website under 'Fatwas' there are numerous *fatwas* from the former Saudi Chief Mufti Ibn Baz; see Islam Net 2013a.

<sup>4</sup> See the videos posted on Islam Net's website from the UK-based Shaykh Haitham al-Haddad's lectures on Muslims in the West and Social participation; Islam Net 2013b. On al-Haddad as a Hanbali and Salafi, see Sunniforum 2013. Regarding Islam Net's political activities, see Bangstad and Linge 2013, although these authors do not use the term *haraiḳī*, only 'purist', and they are less interested in the accommodating dimensions of Islam Net.

international preachers who take on Christian or western criticism of Islam, such as the South African Ahmed Deedat and his disciple the Indian televangelist Zakir Naik, blended with Tabligh-i zeal for *da'wa*. Through Zakir Naik, there is also a connection to Pakistani Salafism, in the form of *Ahl-e hadith* (Linge 2013).

This article also contextualizes Islam Net with reference to its members' family backgrounds and their assumed need for Islamic guidance which allows them to challenge certain cultural practices associated with Islam. Thus, the process of deculturalization and acculturation that Roy describes needs to be considered with reference to everyday life situations. This perspective can shed light on why criticism of Sufism resonates with members of Islam Net, beyond the intellectual pleasures of theological polemics: Sufism is closely connected with the Islamic discourses associated with their families' values, and which some young Muslims may find troublesome. While I have not conducted extensive interviews to verify this, I find support for the approach in the observations I have made. Before proceeding to describe the observations, the significance of different institutional contexts for Islam Net will be theorized.

### **Conceptual Framework**

#### *Discourse as institutionalized knowledge and practices*

Michel de Certeau (d. 1986) was a French historian who, in line with French sociology of knowledge as represented by Michel Foucault (d. 1984) and Pierre Bourdieu (d. 2002), integrated into his own historical analysis reflections on the problem of institutionalized knowledge production, or discourse. According to de Certeau (1975/1988), discourse is an institutionalized 'mode of intelligibility' with corresponding practices concerning a particular subject-matter. Discourse can be visualized as an interaction between three factors: institution (here: the university); discipline (Islamic studies); and subject (Salafism/Islam Net). Subject refers to the relationship that is formed between the author and his or her subject-matter when s/he defines the specific problem area, theory and method. This relationship is in turn shaped by the specific discipline(s) and institution(s) with which the author is affiliated. Hence,



Salafism/Islam Net as a subject matter is shaped by the author's institutional, disciplinary and subjective knowledge and practices.

In epistemological terms, this concept of discourse does not imply that there is no objective knowledge about a subject-matter: it means that discourse may obstruct us from gaining accurate knowledge about a subject-matter. De Certeau thus encourages a kind of 'resistance' which is simultaneously within and against a discourse. What enables resistance is the subject level. The individual author's subject is always different from the other subject-positions that make up the discourse, which implies that the subject can take a critical distance from discourse even as s/he is part of it. This is why a discourse is continuously changing.

The same approach is reflected also in de Certeau's sociologically oriented work (1980/1984). While individuals necessarily live their lives within social institutions, they do not passively absorb institutionalized knowledge and practices but employ them creatively to express their subjective desires. Thus, the individual's knowledge and actions are simultaneously institutionalized and subjective, and the subjective dimension always has the capacity to take institutionalized knowledge and practices in a new direction.

Applied to Islam Net, de Certeau's concepts imply that it *necessarily* reflects several institutional discourses. Islam Net's members are part of their families' discourses, which include knowledge and practice of Islam; of other Islamic discourses that they encounter; and the discourse associated with Islam Net. Furthermore, the same members have in most cases grown up in Norway within its public institutional system of immigration authorities, schools, universities, health care and welfare authorities, and the public and private labour market. Islam Net's individual members thus simultaneously participate in and resist Islamic as well as several other discourses, and through their subject positions gradually modify all of them.

At the general level de Certeau's concept of discourse implies that Salafism is necessarily something else in the West than in the institutional context of Muslim majority countries, and it is something specific in Norway compared with other European countries. However, it is also necessary to break Salafism down into its different political discourses, as defined by Haykel (2009). Given that Islam Net encourages its members to engage in civic activities, it must be defined as *haraki* Salafism, and one which is shaped by the Norwegian institutional order and public sphere, as well as its members' family backgrounds and daily lives.

*Discourse as democratic legitimacy*

Concerning Islam Net's capacity for civic engagement, Jürgen Habermas provides the theoretical perspective. Habermas claims that liberal democracy depends for its legitimacy on the ability of public discourse to include as many citizen groups as possible in deliberations about the common good. His concept of public discourse has a normative foundation in his commitment to the liberal democratic and secular social contract, and an epistemological grounding in his dialectical materialist position regarding the forces that drive social and individual development (Habermas 1979). Habermas defines the modern public sphere as the forum where the ethical and political evolution of individuals and society is driven by deliberation and its dialectics between public and private interest (Habermas 1962/1989). The specific problem occupying Habermas is how public and private interests can be deliberated so as to maintain the legitimacy of liberal democracy. By legitimacy he means 'that there are good arguments for a political order's claim to be recognized as right and just; a legitimate order deserves recognition. *Legitimacy means a political order's worthiness to be recognized.*' (Habermas 1979:178; italics in the original). A legitimation problem arises when the political order's claim to be recognized as right and just is contested by significant groups. Liberal democratic legitimacy is created and contested in the public sphere through rational public discourse, defined as 'a process that ensures the inclusion of all those affected and the equal consideration of all the interests at play' (Habermas

1999/2003:105). The implication is that even arguments that challenge the political order's claim to recognition must be included in public discourse.

Religion's public re-emergence in the form of private interest groups and as contested subject matter in public debates illustrates the legitimacy problem (Habermas 2002, 2005a, 2005b, 2008). Religious citizens are not included in public discourse on the same terms as other citizens due to the exclusive nature of their arguments and concepts and the equally exclusive approach towards religion manifested by increasingly vociferous ideological secularists. This exclusion of religious citizens from public deliberation over the common good poses a new challenge to democratic legitimacy. Given that Habermas sees the problem as one of public understanding ('intelligibility', with de Certeau), his proposed solution is a translation process where religious citizens translate religious concepts into secular counterparts and vice versa, so that a civic vocabulary is created which enables religious citizens to communicate to the public the implications of religious arguments for the common good (Habermas 2007:16–19).

Habermas' envisioned translation process is connected with his concept of 'post-secular society', by which he means a society where government and law, and science and public education, are institutionally autonomous from religion but hyper-conscious of religion's significance. If public debates during most of the twentieth century were largely oblivious of religion, post-secular consciousness is aware that modernity has not led to the disappearance of religion and that it plays an important role in global conflicts. There is public awareness, too, that the religious actors who claim authority to interpret relations between religion and society belong to the immigrant communities that embody the challenges that European countries face as they seek to balance cultural diversity and social cohesion (Habermas 2008:19–20). To overcome tensions, both religious and non-religious citizens must be able to see religion as a resource for the common good, hence the need for translation.

*Synthesis*

Applying de Certeau's and Habermas' concepts to Islam Net implies that young Norwegian Muslims find something in Islam Net's discourse which enables them to 'resist' and creatively employ family, Islamic and public institutional discourses in order to express their subjects. Their ability to do so is both an individual freedom and a democratic capacity. Public awareness about Salafism as a global religious phenomenon associated with jihad and with serious international conflicts is now part of the public discourse on Islam in Norway, which sets boundaries for individuals who identify with Islam Net. Norwegian public discourse denies all forms of Islam the possibility of *contributing* anything positive to the common good (IMDi 2009), and this is particularly true for Islam Net. Thus, if the public discourse on Islam signifies a general democracy deficit for Muslims, Islam Net's members are even more disadvantaged in that they are identified with what is perceived as an exclusively problematic form of Islam.

*Norwegian dialogue discourse and Islam Net*

In public discourse, however, Norway strongly identifies with a Habermasian ideal of public dialogue and inclusive deliberation as the source of democratic legitimacy. In his address to the nation the day after Anders Behring Breivik's terrorist attack and mass murder of Labour Party youth in Oslo and on Utøya on 22 July 2011, Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg promised the people 'more openness' and more democracy (Vårt Land 2012). So far, this has meant that anti-immigrant and anti-Islam sentiment is tolerated even more openly than before the terrorist deed.<sup>5</sup>

Yet under the radar of public anti-Islam discourse, Norway during the 1990s institutionalized dialogue with Muslims. In 1993 the Contact Group for dialogue between the Church of Norway and the Islamic Council of Norway (IRN) was established, on the Church's initiative. The Church of Norway is still a Lutheran state

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<sup>5</sup> See IMDi 2009 for a survey documenting strong anti-Muslim tendencies in Norwegian media and among the general public in the years before 2011; see Ismail 2013 regarding Muslims' experiences of media debates about Islam post-2011.

church, and IRN is a national Islamic umbrella organization. In 1996 the national Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities (STL) was established as a grassroots dialogue initiative by Muslims, Jews, Buddhists and the secular Humanist Association. Today STL includes nearly all faith groups in the country. It has an international wing, the Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief, which is part of a wider national discourse about Norway as upholder and exporter of human rights (Regjeringen 2013). The Muslim-Christian Contact Group shares the national commitment to human rights; for example, it has committed both the Church and IRN to freedom of religion and the freedom to *leave* religion, as expressed in a joint declaration in 2007 (Den Norske Kirke 2007; Leirvik 2012).

When Islam Net was founded in 2008 it set itself apart from the Norwegian system of institutionalized religion in two ways, firstly regarding funding. In Norway all faith- or worldview-based communities are entitled to public funding, provided they register as organizations with membership records. Hence, the IRN consists of a wide range of mosque organizations, all of which receive an annual sum per member. In this funding system a person can only be a registered member of one organization at a time. Islam Net has opted out of this system and chose instead to organize as a voluntary association with an annual membership fee of 100 NOK.<sup>6</sup> In 2013 Islam Net had around 2000 registered members and student associations at Tromsø University and Bodø University College. Its board consists of four members, one of whom is a woman (Islam Net 2013c; 2013d). Remaining outside the public religious funding system also allows Islam Net greater flexibility in recruiting members. It can invite members of the other organizations to join Islam Net because Islam Net does not receive public funding as a faith-based organization (Islam Net 2013d). In this way Islam Net maximizes the reach of its *da'wa*.

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<sup>6</sup> Although Islam Net receives funding from Landsforeningen for Norges Barne- og Ungdomsorganisasjoner (LNU; The National Association for Norway's Child- and Youth Organizations; according to Bangstad and Linge (2013), 280,000 NOK in 2012.

Secondly, Islam Net is not part of the institutionalized national dialogues, neither the Muslim-Christian nor the multi-faith one. This is not because Islam Net rejects dialogue with non-Muslims: it stresses the commitment to dialogue as part of its duty to conduct *da'wa*, 'invitation' to Islam. But at the same time Islam Net self-identifies as representing pure Islam based on the scriptures, and it is correspondingly reluctant to subject Islam to principles such as human rights, which provide the frame for the interfaith dialogues. Remaining outside the national public discourse on human rights even further limits Islam Net's already strongly circumscribed capacity to deliberate over the common good, since the latter is so closely identified with liberal democratic values and human rights. The following sections will illustrate this dilemma.

#### *Islam Net's Aim and Discourse*

Islam Net was, as mentioned, founded in 2008 by Fahad Qureshi (b. 1988), a university engineering student of Norwegian-Pakistani background. Like Qureshi, the majority of Islam Net's around 2000 members are young people from Muslim families, many of whom are of Somali and Pakistani origins. There are also a handful of converts, as Islam Net is highly missionary and its members invite people to Islam (*da'wa*) in as many contexts as possible: at conferences, on the web, through street stands, and through personal contacts and friendships.

For the same reason (*da'wa*) Islam Net is a highly public organization. It runs a public website with discussion board, letters from members, and Q&A section. The website [www.islamnet.no](http://www.islamnet.no) declares that Islam Net's aim is to clarify misunderstandings about Islam:

Islam is the most misunderstood religion in the world. Because of the actions of certain individuals the world is under the impression that Islam advocates terrorism. Due to insufficient knowledge and dialogue many still believe that Islam is a religion that oppresses women.

By clarifying these and other misunderstandings about Islam it will be easier to build bridges between Muslims and all other communities, and that is the aim with this website.

We concentrate on explaining the most common misunderstandings among Muslims and non-Muslims. The articles are very detailed and explain several different views on each issue, and we encourage everyone to read them.

The Qur'an verses used in our articles have been translated (to Norwegian; UM: by Islam Net. They have been compared with English translations by, among others, Yusuf Ali and Pickthall, and in addition the two Norwegian [translations; UM] which are available as per today. The verses have been reviewed and approved by persons knowledgeable in Arabic.

Our articles are based on the Qur'an and Hadith. The bulk of them have been written in English by authoritative people, among others Dr. Zakir Naik. The translation is done by us in Islam Net... If you find any incorrect information in our articles we are open for corrections, as long as you can support your claim with authentic sources. We define as authentic sources the Qur'an, Sahih Hadith, scientific facts or rational logic.

And God knows best.

Thus, Islam Net is not primarily an organization for scholars but for Muslims devoted to 'clarifying misunderstandings of Islam' (cf. Linge 2013). Since no other self-declared identity is to be found in its vision statement on the website, it is reasonable to conclude that the aim sums up Islam Net's identity: 'those who clarify misunderstandings of Islam' (through *da'wa*). This aim gives the organization a highly public character, since it seeks to reach the general public, including other Muslims. The related sub-aim 'building bridges with all other communities' places Islam Net within the discourse of *haraki* Salafism, i.e. those who participate in politics and socialize outside of the purified community (see also Islam Net 2013b).

Islam Net's board members are not scholars. Instead they consult and publish what they consider to be scholarly works. Dr Zakir Naik, their main authority regarding misunderstandings of Islam, is a famous Indian preacher and former medical doctor who hosts a TV show called Peace TV, dedicated to clarifying misunderstandings about Islam, often with reference to other religions, especially Hinduism and Christianity. Naik is immensely popular among students at Pakistani Salafi *Ahl-e hadith madrasas* who appreciate his type of individual scholarship and critique of *taqlid* or 'unthinking reliance on a law school' (Abou Zahab 2009:141). Like the Pakistani *Ahl-e hadith madrasas* (Abou Zahab 2009:132–3), Naik takes a very positive (if sometimes eclectic) view of science and rationality, which explains why Islam Net ranks science and rational logic as authoritative sources after the Qur'an and *hadith*.

There are direct connections between Saudi Arabia's famous university in Medina, with which leading scholarly Salafis such as Ibn Baz (d. 1999), al-'Uthaymin (d. 2001), al-Fawzan, and al-Madkhali are affiliated, and some of the Pakistani *Ahl-e hadith madrasas* (Abou Zahab 2009:132–3). However, Zakir Naik himself is vehemently criticized by European scholarly Madkhali Salafis, for wearing western clothing like a shirt and tie; for falsifying the Islamic creed by comparing Allah with deities of other religions, notably the Hindu Brahma; and for being closer to Indian organizations such as Jama'at-i Islami than to Salafism (Salafitalk 2007).<sup>7</sup> The fact that Naik is still the role model for Islam Net provides further support for the definition of Islam Net as *haraki* Salafism, as distinct from the scholarly Madkhalis.

Zakir Naik is also the model for Islam Net's Peace Conferences (cf. Linge 2013). In 2007 Naik held the first of his annual ten-day Peace Conferences in Mumbai, to which he invites both foreign preachers and Indian scholars, mainly those affiliated with Jama'at-i Islami (Times of India 2011). Since 2010 Islam Net has organized annual three-day Peace Conferences in Oslo. These have the same aim as Naik's conferences:

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<sup>7</sup> Concerning Zakir Naik, see also his participation in a debate about religious tolerance arranged by the Oxford Union (The Guardian 2011; YouTube 2011).



to inform about Islam and clarify misunderstandings. The invited preachers are sometimes the same as those invited by Zakir Naik, for example, the converts Abdur Raheem Green (UK) and Khalid Yasin (USA), the former also denounced by Madkhali Salafis as an ignorant fraudster lacking even knowledge of Arabic (Green; Salafitalk 2003), and the latter as a dangerous Qutb-inspired revolutionary and dissenter (*hizbi*: who tries to deceive through his knowledge of Arabic and studies at the University of Medina (Yasin; Salafitalk 2002).

However, at the Peace Conference I attended in April 2012, Green repeatedly referred to the Saudi scholarly *shaykh* al-‘Uthaymin. Thus it appears that while Zakir Naik covers the dimension of clarifying misunderstandings about Islam, for matters concerning the creed, legal matters and guidelines for social interactions with other Muslims and non-Muslims, Islam Net relies on a combination of Saudi scholarly Salafis and European *haraki* Salafis, and the latter deliver quite new interpretations. For example, in December 2012 and March 2013 Islam Net invited the British Salafi scholar Haitham al-Haddad to hold a series of workshops on how to practise Islam and interpret Sharia in the West, and on participation in western society and politics (Islam Net 2013e; 2013f). When Islam Net announced the workshop a politician from the Left declared that al-Haddad’s views on marriage, homosexuality and apostasy are barbaric, and he asked Islam Net to cancel the workshop, which they did not do (Aftenposten 2013a). Al-Haddad himself argues that while Sharia is the same as Islam and therefore incumbent upon Muslims, they must obey the law of the land – which is not a deviation from Islam since the laws of western countries are in the essential matters in line with Sharia (Islam Net 2013a; see also 2013e; 2013f). However, on issues stated unequivocally in the scriptures, such as the unlawfulness of homosexuality and of leaving Islam, al-Haddad and other scholars invited by Islam Net are firm: it is not permitted by Islam. This does not mean that they advocate breaking the national law by punishing homosexuality and atheism or conversion from Islam among Muslims, but they insist on teaching that these practices are unlawful.

### **Peace Conference 2012**

In April 2012 I attended Islam Net's three-day Peace Conference in Oslo. This was the third such conference in Islam Net's history but the first one after Anders Behring Breivik's terrorist attack and mass murder in Oslo in July 2011, which claimed 77 lives. According to Breivik's testimony, he committed the crimes to punish the governing Labour Party for its 'Marxist policy of multiculturalism' without which Muslims would never have been allowed to enter Norway and threaten its national culture (BBC 2012). Needless to say, it has been extremely difficult for Norwegian Muslims to deal with Breivik's propaganda that the deed was perpetrated to protect the nation against those who show solidarity with Muslims. Fahad Qureshi opened the conference by reminding the audience of this, and he declared that Norwegian Muslims have a duty to explain and practise Islam in such a way that the public understands that Muslims are good people who contribute positively to society. Islam Net's *da'wa* and Peace Conferences are conduits to this end of explaining what true Islam is, and non-Muslims are invited so that they too can learn and have their misunderstandings clarified.

The invited preachers in 2012 were Yusuf Chambers and Abdur-Raheem Green, both British converts and preachers rather than scholars; Shaykh Riad Ouarzazi, a scholar of Moroccan origins and Canadian citizen, working for the al-Maghrib Institute;<sup>8</sup> Ali Mohammed Salah, a scholar of Somali origins and resident of Malaysia; Shaykh Hussain Yee, convert and scholar of Chinese background and citizen of Malaysia; Muhammad Abdul Jabbar, born and raised in the UK and still pursuing his scholarly studies; and Boonaa Mohammed, Canadian lyrical writer and performance artist.

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<sup>8</sup> For the al-Maghrib Institute's BA curriculum, see <http://almaghrib.org/about/curriculum> (accessed 6 October 2013); it contains the typical Salafi teachings but taught in a way that attracts young western Muslims: 'We started up in 2002 with a simple question—how could we teach you Islam in a way that was fun, social, spiritual, and oh yeah, academic? We asked around, and it turned out people wanted teachers who knew their stuff, but didn't turn learning Islam into a snoozefest, and they didn't want endless weeks of lectures'; <http://almaghrib.org/about> (accessed 6 October 2013).

It was clear from the lecture topics, and confirmed in a conversation with Hussain Yee, that the lecturers prepare together with the organizers before the conference, so that they know what the concerns of the mostly young audience are and can present the appropriate teachings, including jokes showing that the preachers are familiar with the Norwegian Muslim community. Some of the young people in the audience had brought their parents along too.

The venue was an indoor sports arena in a nice villa suburb of Oslo. On the tram to the conference on the third and last day we met three young women dressed up in *niqab* (the full face veil) for the occasion. It was clearly the first time they had worn such a garment, and they had to struggle a bit with it, which made them giggly and up-beat – a sentiment enhanced by disapproving glares from the other tram passengers.

The conference was gender segregated. Men and women entered through separate entrances and sat at different ends of the conference hall, men at the front and women at the back, but without separating walls. The majority of the young women wore *hijab*, only a few *niqab*. There were also those who did not wear Islamic dress at all. On the second day a news team from Norwegian television was at the women's entrance interviewing conference participants about the gender segregated arrangement. Both the young and the older women they asked said that they prefer gender separate seating and entrances, since they do not feel comfortable queuing or sitting next to unknown men.

In common for all the preachers was the message that any problems facing Muslims as individuals and as a group are due to incorrect understanding of Islam. Consequently, to follow the Prophet's true Islam is the solution to all problems. Riad Ouarzazi preached about love and devotion to the Prophet, bringing the female audience to tears. He emphasized that the Prophet never lost his temper and never avenged himself on his opponents, not even on his enemies. Instead the Prophet taught his Companions to lead by example, i.e. rather than punish enemies they should convince them of the truth of Islam by their own righteous behaviour. Ouarzazi used examples from *hadith* and mixed in reference to issues familiar to the audience, such as the cartoons of the Prophet which

were published in Norway, and relations between Muslims and Jews. The cartoons should not be avenged but resisted by manifesting Muslims' respect towards other faiths and people. This message of not paying back to detractors is powerful in Norway, where media coverage of Islam is intense and exclusively negative: by describing the Prophet's suffering from prejudice and hostility and his dignified response Ouarzazi made it easy for the audience to identify with him, and to feel proud about finding peaceful coping strategies.<sup>9</sup> The issue of Muslims and Jews is significant given that many members of Islam Net believe in conspiracy theories about Zionist world dominance and have derogatory views of Jews. The Prophet, Ouarzazi emphasized, treated his Jewish neighbours with the utmost respect and care, as he did with all people. Ouarzazi's approach to these topics also signifies total rejection of the ethos associated with a new militant Norwegian group called The Prophet's Umma. While the group 'came out' in public in September 2012, its leading members are known criminals and some have previous records of threats towards Norwegian Jews. They have also demonstrated against cartoons and films, calling for militant responses. Given that some members have joined al-Qaeda-affiliated fighters in Syria, it cannot be excluded that they have adopted al-Qaeda's view that violence against Norwegian society is in principle lawful.<sup>10</sup>

Theology in the proper sense was dealt with by Abdur-Raheem Green. Referring to al-'Uthaymin, he explained that Islam is only true when it is anchored in the believer's purified heart, which is where knowledge about God is located. The heart's knowledge

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<sup>9</sup> On representations of Islam and Muslims in Norwegian media and indications of discrimination against Muslims, see IMDi (2009).

<sup>10</sup> On The Prophet's Umma, see Morgenbladet 2012; Aftenposten 2013a; on earlier threats against Norwegian Jews by a member of The Prophet's Umma, see Aftenposten 2008; on members of the Prophet's Umma fighting with al-Qaeda in Syria (rather than with other fighters; see Morgenbladet 2013 (interview with defence researcher Thomas Hegghammer); on different kinds of Salafism with reference to use of violence against western societies, see Hegghammer 2009. Haitham al-Haddad has also given a *fatwa* against joining jihad in Syria; see Islam Net 2013g.

about God is the source of inner peace, tranquility and equanimity, which is required if the believer is to resist temptations and sin. While Green was highly critical of traditional Sufism (‘those who go Allahooohohoooo’: for its worship of Sufi *shaykhs* as intermediaries between men and God, it is worth noting that al-‘Uthaymin’s theology of the heart itself is probably inspired by ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani’s ascetic Sufism to which al-‘Uthaymin’s main source of inspiration, the great Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), belonged.

Another important Salafi topic which Green addressed was *al-walā’ wa’l-barā’*, ‘loyalty and disavowal’, which derives from the Qur’an 5:51: ‘O believers, take not Jews and Christians as friends; they are friends of each other. Whoso of you makes them his friend is one of them’ (Arberry’s translation). Here Green again referred to al-‘Uthaymin, even though it appears that he constructed a highly independent argument.<sup>11</sup> According to Green (and correctly), the Arabic root *wala* does not signify ‘friendship’ as it is mistakenly translated, but ‘political loyalty’. Hence, the verse 5:51 does not refer to or forbid friendship between Muslims and non-Muslims, it merely says that Muslims in that context should not give political loyalty to Jews and Christians over Muslims. However, in the west Muslims should be loyal to non-Muslim states, unless the state forces Muslims to act against Islam. Green’s interpretation was directed against both the *jihadi*-Salafi position, which rejects Muslim political loyalty to any but the righteous Muslim ruler, and the conservative Saudi scholarly position which admonishes against friendship with non-Muslims (Wagemakers 2012). Regarding Jews, Green pointed out with reference to Breivik’s Crusader symbolism, that the historical crusaders massacred both Jews and Muslims, and that the best way to combat crusader ideology today is for Muslims and Jews to show solidarity with each other. The point about friendship with non-Muslims was picked up also by Riad Ouarzazi, who orchestrated group hugs in the audience, commanding especially those Muslims and non-Muslims who sat next to each other to hug. The significance of this performance becomes clear if compared with the

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<sup>11</sup> For a thorough study of different Salafi definitions of *al-walā’ wa’l-barā’*, including al-‘Uthaymīn, see Wagemakers (2012).

scholarly Salafi approach of keeping distance to non-Muslims on the one hand, and on the other with the expression of solidarity from Muslims to non-Muslims that Fahad Qureshi voiced in the opening of the conference: distances must be bridged.

Green also came out strongly against rap and gangster culture and the Muslim attitude found in such circles, that God is the only Judge and that other Muslims should not castigate them but rather show inter-Muslim solidarity and help defend them against non-Muslim law. Referring to the typical Salafi emphasis on the Islamic principle ‘commanding the good and combatting the reprehensible’, Green explained why it is each believer’s duty to uphold the law and denounce crime, whether committed by Muslims or any other person. The same message was also developed by Mohammed Abdul Jabbar. It has particular significance among young Muslims in Oslo, where Norwegian-Pakistanis have formed competing criminal gangs which often figure in the media, and which are part of and pose threats to the life-worlds of some members of the audience (iOslo.no 2006).

Another important conference theme was family law and married life, which touches on a persistent topic in Norwegian media debates about Islam: forced marriage. The government has institutionalized a campaign against the practice, involving schools, social workers, and monitoring bodies at Norwegian embassies in the countries from which some Norwegian Muslim families select marriage partners for their children. Hussain Yee dealt with the legal sides of marriage. He came out strongly against forced marriage, arguing that unless a marriage is voluntary it is not Islamic. He also emphasized that Islam is against all forms of tribalism and nationalism, and that therefore the only relevant criterion for selecting a marriage partner is if the person is a good Muslim. ‘Why have you left Pakistan if you continue to bring marriage partners for your children from your home village?’ Yee asked rhetorically, ‘If you cannot let your children find partners among Norwegian Muslims, why do you live in Norway? Move back to Pakistan!’ Yee was careful to point out that children must always pay respect to their parents and as far as possible comply with their wishes, but that if the parents contradict true Islam the children have the right to stand up for those principles,

notably by choosing their preferred marriage partner (who should be Muslim). Concerning the minimum legal age for marriage, Yee follows Norwegian law: 16 years of age. Forced marriage, sometimes involving being left behind in the parents' country of origin with an unwanted partner, is a serious problem for some young Norwegian Muslims of both sexes. Between 2008 and 2012, 298 young people, the majority of whom are Muslim girls from Pakistan, Iraq, Somalia and Afghanistan, were forced to marry against their will, according to government records (excluding non-reported cases). In 2012 the figure was 85 individuals (IMDi 2012a).

Regarding married life, Riad Ouarzazi gave a fantastically humorous performance on the importance of expressing emotion within the family, which involved 'marrying' a member of the male audience. His message was a powerful antidote to traditional gender roles where especially men are taught to restrain expressions of affection, even within the family. Using *hadith*, Ouarzazi showed how the Prophet openly displayed affection for his wives, and how he and Aisha used to joke and laugh a lot, and compete and race together, and that the Prophet never objected when she beat him in running. Instead he fed her so much meat that she became all dull and slow, and he could win. Ouarzazi's message that husbands and wives should play and have fun and express affection for each other resonates with young Norwegian Muslims' views on the good atmosphere in the family. Those who had their parents in the audience were commanded to hug them, to practise overcoming embarrassment about displaying affection in public.

The general atmosphere at the conference was friendly and humorous. There were condemnations, however. Mohammed Abdul Jabbar gave a Doomsday sermon in which he condemned to hell those who claim to know when the end-times are and who invent their own signs of the end, as opposed to the correct approach which is to follow sound *hadith* on the matter and accept that only God knows when it is, even though it is certain to be near. The principal culprit was Mirza Ghulam Ahmad (d. 1908), founder of the Ahmadiyya which has quite a large community in Oslo. Ahmadiyya believes that while the Prophet Muhammad was the last prophet, his message was restored by the

harbinger of the end times, Mirza Ghulam Ahmad, who is thus a messianic figure, the awaited Mahdi. Harun Yahya, the famous Turkish conspiracy theorist and Creationist author, was also condemned on the same grounds. The Shiites were condemned for rejecting unity with the Sunnis, but in less severe terms than those who claim eschatological knowledge. Some ire was also spared for ‘liberal Muslims’ in Oslo, who regularly condemn Islam Net in the media.

In spite of Islam Net’s efforts the conference did not make a good impression on members of the public. Ellen Reiss, the only public intellectual who attended, wrote critically about the conference, describing it as brainwashing, forcing young people into an intolerant and fundamentalist type of Islam, and as one-way missionary communication, not two-way dialogue.<sup>12</sup> This is true in the sense that there were no members of other faith communities or from the general public there who sought to open a discussion in the Q&A sessions. Thus it is not clear what the responses would have been.<sup>13</sup>

### **Da‘wa Comes to Trondheim**

Islam Net is based in Oslo, where the Peace Conferences are held, and it has student associations in Tromsø and Bodø in northern Norway. Trondheim in mid-Norway is the third largest city in the country. Those who carry on Islam Net’s *da‘wa* here are members of the central *jami‘* and the Somali and Indonesian (Shafi‘i) mosque Dar El-Iman, where they arrange study circles of the Qur’an and *hadith* for women. The other mosques in town are affiliated with Twelver Shia and the Turkish Diyanet and are not

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<sup>12</sup> See the debate between Ellen Reiss, Ulrika Mårtensson and Marius Linge (PluRel 2012).

<sup>13</sup> It seems it is only the Norwegian Heathen Society (Hedningssamfunnet) which has ever, as another worldview-based group, visited Islam Net’s Peace Conference, in 2011. Their leader finds that compared with other Muslims he has met, Islam Net’s members are unusually eager to discuss and free of prejudice in their approach, even though he finds their religiosity dangerous because of their firm belief in heaven for the saved and hell for the damned—like American Evangelicals. In spite of their certainty of being the good ones, he finds Fahad Qureshi and his female ‘crew’ highly sympathetic as persons and surprisingly open-minded (Eckhoff 2011).



involved with Islam Net, although the women's study circle has invited the woman imam from the Turkish mosque to visit their group. Except for one exceptional case, the study group's relations with the Shiite community have been mutually respectful and friendly.

In June 2012 Islam Net, on the initiative of the women's study group, arranged an afternoon lecture in Trondheim, with the Australian-Palestinian Shaykh Shady Alsuleiman. Shady Alsuleiman had also visited Trondheim's central mosque and two of the mosque's imams attended his lecture, which was held at the university campus. There were no participants from the general public, only this author and her colleague Eli-Anne Vongraven Eriksen. Women and men voluntarily sat in different parts of the lecture hall and mingled in different groups, although within full sight of each other.

The lecture's topic was how to practise Islam in a western society under non-Muslim law. Like Haitham al-Haddad, Alsuleiman emphasized the obligation on Muslims to obey the law of the country and interpret Sharia accordingly. Those who want to live under a full system of Islamic law should not campaign to change Norway's laws but must move to a suitable Muslim country. In Norway, however, they should engage actively in society and within the Norwegian legal system to enable Muslims to practise Islam. Thus Alsuleiman encouraged Muslim men and women to be active citizens and members of society, within the framework of *halal*, or permitted activities. Another central message was that Muslims must show tolerance and cooperate with one another, and not get drawn into sectarian animosities and exclusive attitudes.

### **Failed Attempts at Public Activities**

During 2012 Islam Net stepped up its civic activities, in line with the advice from Shady Alsuleiman and Haitham al-Haddad. As mentioned, the Norwegian government conducts a campaign against forced marriages, and each year a number of civil society organizations receive public funding for activities aimed at combatting forced marriages. In October 2012 Islam Net was granted 100,000 NOK from the state Integration department (IMDi) for a workshop on Islam and forced marriage (IMDi

2012), in line with the legal advice on marriage given by Hussain Yee at the Peace Conference 2012. However, IMDi imposed a condition that Islam Net's workshop must not be gender segregated with separate seating for men and women. There was considerable attention in the media to this funding initiative, and many were critical of the decision to grant funding to Islam Net even with the condition of no gender segregation (NRK 2012b). Fahad Qureshi accepted the condition since it was state funding ear-marked for a specific activity, but his members did not accept 'selling out Islam'. Qureshi sought advice from Hussain Yee who recommended they return the money, since disunity within the organization was too high a price to pay and it was not acceptable to sign a contract which required setting aside Islamic principles, i.e. gender segregation (NRK 2012c). Thus, gender segregation is a principle which the majority of Islam Net's members consider constitutive of Islam and which they are not prepared to negotiate, even though their leader was prepared to do so. Rather, gender segregation is something they are prepared to struggle *for* in relation to public authorities and institutions.

In the winter of 2012 Islam Net applied to Oslo University to establish a student association there, similar to those the organization then had in Oslo-Akershus, Tromsø and Bodø. In March 2013 the University Chancellor rejected the application on the grounds that Oslo University identifies with the values of tolerance, inclusion and equality, and therefore it cannot be associated with Islam Net's views on homosexuality, freedom of religion and gender (NRK 2013; Universitas 2013a). Fahad Qureshi responded that if the Chancellor were prepared to have a dialogue, he could explain that Islam Net does not in fact contradict the University's values. The Chancellor declined any dialogue with Islam Net, and in May 2013 the University Board rejected a complaint by Islam Net against the initial decision (Universitas 2013b). It is worth noting that in the rejection document the University highlights gender segregated seating, which it equates with gender discrimination and portrays as enforced, in spite of the fact that I have never experienced that members of Islam Net are forced into gender segregation at public events. On the contrary, it is something they

appreciate and as we have seen, it was the members who forced the leader to back down on allowing gender mixing on a government-funded event. The University's decision should thus be understood as a refusal to accept gender segregation as practice, regardless of its meaning to its practitioners. Islam Net's non-identification with liberal anti-discrimination values has so far shut it out from further discussion with Oslo University Board, which insists that it is not discriminating against Islam Net, only upholding the University's values. Since May 2013, Oslo-Akershus College has refused to renew Islam Net's status as a student association, following the lead of Oslo University.

### **Concluding Analysis**

The article aimed at defining Islam Net with reference to Salafism, and to its capacity for civic engagement. Regarding the first aim, it is found that at the meta-analytical level Islam Net corresponds to Roy's concept of neo-fundamentalism, since it (1) constructs Islam with reference to the scriptures, and in doing so (2) simultaneously deculturalizes Islam from Muslim majority countries and acculturates Islam in the Norwegian context, and (3) negotiates its construction of Islam with reference to public debates and other Muslims. At the level of Salafi internal discourses, Islam Net corresponds to European *haraiḳī* Salafism. It emphasizes social and political participation and harmonizes Sharia as far as possible with national law, which is recognized as the law that Muslims must comply with, even though they will not (yet: recognize homosexuality as an *Islamically* acceptable sexual practice or the right to leave Islam. This 'resistance' has to do with the fact that commands and prohibitions explicitly stated in the Qur'an are seen as non-negotiable; regarding *hadith* there is more flexibility because there are so many to choose from.

With reference to de Certeau's concept of discourse, Islam Net can be understood as offering a discourse that enables its individual members to express their subjects as Muslims by creatively 'resisting' other discourses associated with their families, other Islamic institutions, and a range of public institutions. While Islam Net is strongly criticized by more liberal Muslims, it cannot be ruled out that, from the viewpoint of its

members, liberal versions of Islam *as religious discourses* are more condoning than Islam Net of gang criminality and the patriarchal cultures associated with tribal honour, forced marriage and related everyday threats. More fieldwork and interviews are required to investigate this possibility.

Regarding Islam Net's capacity for civic engagement, its preachers and scholars advocate engagement with society. However, the organization's capacity is severely limited by its construction of true Islam. With Habermas' terms, Islam Net's clarifications of Islam have not convinced its public institutional interlocutors that they have anything to contribute to the common good, as long as they maintain gender segregation. The fact that the public institutions equate gender segregation with something enforced and discriminatory, and reject members' attempts to explain that they prefer it this way, implies that the communication is actually one-way: the public institutions are not prepared to see Islam Net's view on this issue. While one could argue that 2000 individuals is such a small number that it does not matter whether they are able to explain their view in public debate, the Habermasian perspective implies the opposite: their non-participation on this issue is a democracy deficit on the part of the public institutions. Whatever the outcome of deliberations, representatives from these institutions should ideally accept an invitation to public dialogue, so that both parties can clarify their arguments publicly and 'translate' between the secular and the religious languages. If there remain principal disagreements after such a public discussion and the public institutions stand by their decisions, then at least the process of decision making is democratically legitimate in the eyes of those who lost the debate.

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## **Active Citizenship among Muslims in Sweden: From Minority Politics to Political Candidacy**

Johan Cato & Jonas Otterbeck

### ***Abstract***

*Islam and Muslims are hot topics in politics. Muslims engaged in politics are accused of wanting to turn Sweden into an Islamic state; others try to find parallels between the Christian groups of political parties and Muslim interests. The article discusses the development in recent decades when individuals and organizations with an Islamic agenda have become politically active citizens. It looks at the different stages of initial organization and lobbying, and later, cooperation with established political actors. Finally, it discusses the individual candidacies in the 2010 election of some individuals who emphasized their Muslim identity.*

Some improvement in political life can be observed, more Muslims have been entrusted with political positions on both local and national level, and we hope to have even more on the national level in the next national elections... We [have] learned more about Swedish society and about how political organizations are structured and how they work; we have gained useful knowledge about Sweden and democracy. We strive to be Swedish Muslims. (blog of Muslim activist Mahmoud Aldebe, 2009)

In Sweden, Muslims have been engaged in active citizenship (as defined below) for decades, but on the periphery. Recently, however, politically active Muslims have caused debate and headlines. During the last election campaign in 2010, a couple of parliamentary candidates motivated their political commitment through their Islamic

faith and their Muslim identity. Their suitability as politicians was called into question. This raises important questions about the conditions for political and active citizenship for Muslims in the Swedish context.<sup>1</sup>

While formal citizenship refers to membership in a political community, active citizenship is something that must be learned over time, according to Voet (1998). Its ideal form—full citizenship—implies that individuals are ready to take joint responsibility for policy decisions and have a willingness to accept political office, becoming capable, active citizens, not subordinate ones. Active citizenship can also be exercised outside national and municipal politics conducted through political parties, within civil society associations (Casanova 2001; Stoltz 2002).

People who perceive themselves as peripheral in society, which is common among immigrants and the children of immigrants, rarely engage in the national political parties. More often, they involve themselves in civil society associations (Stoltz 2002). It is therefore relevant to investigate how immigrants and their children engage themselves politically through civil society organizations and to see how these organizations relate to different levels of public governance (Odmalm 2007). A decade ago, José Casanova (2001) noted that religion had returned as an important civil society actor in several political arenas. The Nordic countries are considered among the most secular, but even there some researchers claim that change is taking place (cf. Martikainen in this volume). It is thus relevant to pay attention to religious lobbying groups and organizations active in civil society when describing active citizenship.

Our purpose in this article is to discuss the conditions and opportunities for those who seek to exercise active citizenship in their capacity as Muslims. We have concentrated on the active citizenship that has sprung from national umbrella organizations, being aware that much, if not most, Islamic active citizenship is performed locally (Otterbeck

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<sup>1</sup> The conditions for active citizenship are an expanding problem area in Islam-in-Europe research (Otterbeck 2010; Silvestri 2007; Statham et al. 2005;).

2010). First, we will describe some important starting points for religious political participation in Sweden, then we look at Muslim political, civil society organizations. In addition, we will discuss their cooperation with established political parties and how these parties relate to Muslims. Finally, we will focus on a few cases in which Muslims seek positions in national politics. The aim is to illustrate empirically the conditions for active citizenship on a national level when performed from an Islamic, religious starting point. Further, we problematize the political interpretation of this active citizenship and show how both positive and negative attitudes are based on an understanding of Muslims as ‘the excluded other’.

Fetzer and Soper (2005) argue that a country’s political opportunity structures and political ideology make up the framework for active citizenship. A society’s religio-political history, especially its church-state relations, tends to shape institutional structures and laws, but also the main ideology of the state. Political opportunity structures refer, for example, to the possibility of obtaining formal citizenship, principles of election participation, and the political distribution of power within the state. That it is possible to obtain Swedish citizenship after only five years’ residence (and be an active citizen without citizenship) is of importance to Muslims since many are immigrants. Further, the changing role of the Swedish Church over time and the secularization of the Swedish state have had profound institutional and legal consequences. For example, the religious freedom law (1952), the recognition of the ‘free churches’ (Christian churches other than the Swedish Church) as qualified for state grants (1971), and the anti-discrimination laws that have gradually included religious affiliation as a recognized cause of discrimination (1976–2008), have shaped opportunities for Muslims’ active citizenship.

The discussions of multiculturalism in Sweden took off in the early 1970s and led to the policy change often referred to as the minority policy decision (*det minoritetpolitiska beslutet*) from 1975 on equality, freedom and cultural cooperation between the majority, old minorities and new immigrant groups (Proposition 1975:26). The political idea behind the policy was that the right to cultural diversity would lead to understanding,

cooperation and integration (mostly understood as assimilation), not to enclavism and cultural separateness. The policy decision implied an important ideological change. As part of this multicultural policy, the state and political parties sought partners among the Muslim population.

Allievi (2003) notes that, regardless of different strategies, political parties tend to assume that 'Muslim' is a relevant categorization of voters. It is common for Muslims to be ethnified in the public discourse, i.e. group characteristics such as cultural features are attributed to the Muslim population, even though it consists of individuals relating to diverse groups with different cultural, theological, national, linguistic and socio-economic traditions and conditions (Roy 2004; in a Swedish context, see Otterbeck & Bevelander 2006). In contrast, Silvestri (2007) suggests that the analysis of Muslim attitudes to active citizenship and Muslim patterns of mobilization in the public sphere should assume that Muslims are no different from other individuals. It is analytically unproductive to assume that all Muslims belong to a particular socio-political category.

### **Sweden and Religion**

The Swedish state has far-reaching ambitions to organize social life. It is common for civil society agents to have an economic—sometimes an organizational—cooperation with the state, the county administrative board, or municipality. Local projects, like dialogue groups or anti-racist initiatives, are often sponsored by one of these three levels of public governance, instead of being dependent on contributions from religious organizations, foundations or businesses, as they would be in many other countries (Berggren & Trägårdh 2006). Civil society engagement is frequently channelled through social clubs linked to the labour movement or religious organizations that in turn often collaborate with the state. A large proportion of Swedes are members of a club. For example, 96% of people in the age group 25–64 belonged to a club in the year 2000; half of them claimed to be active (Lindgren 2008). Further, in 2008, more than 7.5 million people were members or active in a religious community that had a financial or organizational relationship with the state (the Swedish Church 2010; SST 2010). Either you are a member of the Swedish Church (approx. 6.7 million) or in a

community financially supported by the state (see below about SST). Besides religious communities, there are several other associations motivated by a religious identity or ethos, like sub-groups of political parties, women's shelters, or temperance movements.

One main political structure for religious communities (not for the Swedish Church) is the financial assistance they can receive by organizing themselves according to the Swedish bureaucratic tradition of associations having annual meetings, statutes, a president, treasurer and membership records. In the 1960s, the state offered the 'free churches' the opportunity to get government subsidies, like other associations. After an intense debate marked by a historically grounded suspicion towards the Swedish Church and the state, representatives of the 'free churches' accepted the offer. The Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities (Samarbetsnämnden för statsbidrag till trossamfund: SST) was founded in 1971 (Ekström 2006).<sup>2</sup> The commission operates under the Ministry of Culture. Catholic and Jewish communities were soon included as eligible, and in the mid-1970s Orthodox Christians and Muslims were offered support. These developments resulted in the policy decision on multiculturalism from 1975, mentioned above.

SST requires congregations to cooperate in national bodies. These have the task of allocating economic support calculated on the basis of the number served<sup>3</sup> in congregational activities. Usually, financial support helps with paying the rent for premises, or fees for a religious expert, or salary for an administrator. SST offers courses in how to run an association according to Swedish administrative regulations and law (SST 2009).

### **The Communities of Swedish Muslims**

There are six recognized Muslim national bodies eligible for support by the SST. The oldest is the United Islamic Communities in Sweden (Förenade Islamiska Församlingar

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<sup>2</sup> The commission changed its name in 2008 to 'Nämnden för statligt stöd till trossamfund' (still abbreviated SST). The English translation remains the same.

<sup>3</sup> Numbers include both paying members and those who use services offered by the congregations.

i Sverige: FIFS) founded in 1974 to fill the need for a national umbrella organization for existing local congregations and to meet the requirements of SST to be eligible for state support. Consequently, FIFS coordinated congregations of different religious, ethnic, national and linguistic profiles. SST recognized FIFS in 1975. Other organizations have arisen as a result of disagreements, or when an ethnic or religious group has become large enough to become independent.

Sweden's Muslim Association (Sveriges Muslimska Förbund: SMF) was founded in 1982 and became eligible in 1983. The Union of Islamic Cultural Centres (Islamiska kulturcenterunionen: IKUS) was formed in 1984 and was recognized in 1987. Swedish Islamic Parishes (Svenska Islamiska Församlingar: SIF) was established in 2002 and was recognized immediately. Islamic Shia Communities in Sweden (Islamiska Shiasamfundet i Sverige: ISS) was founded in 1992 but first became eligible in 2008. The Bosnian Islamic Community (Bosniakiska islamiska samfundet: BIS) was founded in 1995 and was recognized in 2009.

FIFS, SMF and IKUS formed the Islamic Cooperation Council (IslamiskaSamarbetsrådet: IS) in 1988. The Council's role was to coordinate the national bodies and collaborate with SST. Today, all six national bodies are members of the IS.

In 2007, there were about 400,000 Muslims, with various backgrounds, in Sweden (Larsson & Sander 2007). In 2012, it is likely to be 450,000. Through the IS the religious activities of some 110,000 Muslims are supported financially (SST 2010). SST estimates that it serves about 75% of all Muslim congregations (Otterbeck 2004). One effect of SST's support is that Swedish administrative traditions have spread among organized Muslims. The majority of the activities that the national bodies coordinate are ritual practices and courses teaching Islam (Otterbeck 1999). However, from a reading of FIFS's reporting on its activities, the organization, at least in part, may also be described as a channel for active citizenship on a national level:

- FIFS cooperates with all recognized religious communities in Sweden through the framework of the SST as well as with individual religious communities [in] issues where they have common interests.
- FIFS is involved in religious dialogue, and particularly and preferably in peace issues.
- FIFS has a representative in the government's council for contacts with faith communities, led by the Minister of Culture. The Council addresses issues of diversity and integration.
- FIFS collaborates with the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (Myndigheten för samhällsberedskap och säkerhet). This has replaced the Swedish emergency management agency (Krisberedskapsmyndigheten) with which FIFS had extensive cooperation through the Religious Communities Emergency Management Agency (Trossamfundens krisberedskapsråd).
- FIFS collaborates with the legal, financial and administrative services agency (Kammarkollegiet) on issues related to the right to issue marriage certificates (vigselrätt). FIFS is open to projects and cooperation with the whole voluntary sector. (FIFS 2010, arranged in bullets by authors)

Thus, FIFS, like other national Islamic bodies, participates actively in society as a representative of Muslims in Sweden, sometimes sanctioned by the political system. The bodies are important platforms for individual Muslims' active citizenship.

### **Political Communities of Muslims**

SST is an important structure for Muslim political communities. Contacts have been made between Muslim organization leaders from various traditions, the leaders have established an economic basis enabling them to engage on a different level from that on which activists can normally, and, not least, they have made contacts with other, non-Muslim, leaders and with political parties. Some have served as Muslim representatives in government councils and agencies.

Already in the 1970s the Muslim associations became aware of the importance and the



possibility of acting politically. The first actions taken were to attempt to spread information about Islam orally and in writing (Otterbeck 2000) and to try to lobby politically to achieve specific minority rights, for the benefit of, for example, school children (halal food). In 1990, FIFS and SMF founded the Muslim Council of Sweden (Sveriges Muslimska Råd: SMR). It was assigned the task of representing the organizations before the authorities, disseminating information, participating in public debate, and setting up mosques and Islamic schools (Otterbeck 2000). Initially, SMR was led by Mahmoud Aldebe, who has become, over time, one of the few nationally known Muslims (see below). Today, SMR is described as a non-profit religious organization. It is not a member-based organization; rather, it consists of a union of organizations that includes, other than the founders, groups like Islamic Relief, a humanitarian organization.<sup>4</sup>

Initially, the strategy of the national bodies and SMR was to address particular questions related to Muslim minority issues, and to continue to work on lobbying. In a second phase, beginning in the mid-1990s, both SMR and the national bodies began to cultivate more lasting political contacts, and for example a long-standing partnership with the Christian, Social Democratic Brotherhood Movement (Broderskapsrörelsen) was launched (see below). A joint report from the Brotherhood Movement and SMR (1999) describes collaborative projects that, among other things, resulted in the Islamic Political Coalition (Politisk Islamisk Samling: PIS), formed to be a Muslim equivalent of the Brotherhood Movement. However, PIS never become a platform for political engagement. Instead, the Brotherhood Movement has moved towards an inclusive multi-faith policy.

A new, third phase in active citizenship began recently. Politically active Muslims are now seeking to be recognized as candidates within the established political parties (see below).

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<sup>4</sup> At the annual meeting in 2010, SMF was excluded from SMR for repeated violations of SMR's constitution (SMR 2010).

### **Political Parties and the Understanding of Muslims**

We will now look into how the political activities of Muslim organizations are dealt with by the political elite, something that is of crucial importance, shaping the conditions of Muslim active citizenship. In addition to the political opportunities that were created for Muslims by SST, the Swedish authorities and political parties have used SST's network to find Muslims with which to cooperate. At the local level, SST's structures might not be as important, but in this article we concentrate on national politics.

Sweden's Christian Social Democrats, better known under the name 'the Brotherhood Movement', was founded in 1929 and is a self-governing organization within the Social Democratic Workers' Party (Lundberg 1988).

Cooperation between the Brotherhood Movement and SMR began in 1994 when SMR approached various parliamentary parties in an attempt to create opportunities for Muslims to engage politically. The SMR leadership argued that more Muslims ought to get involved in the established parties, instead of in organizations only focusing on 'Muslim issues'. The Social Democrats were in favour of substantial cooperation on a collective basis with Swedish Muslims, which may partly be explained by the fact that the party has a tradition of supporting various group interests. Responsibility for cooperation was delegated to the Brotherhood Movement. Other parties had a more cautious attitude, stressing that individual Muslims were welcome to get involved, but that more collective forms of collaboration were problematic as this could be perceived as Muslims being set aside from other members of the respective parties (Lagerlöf Nilsson & Pauli 2005).

This collaboration has, for example, resulted in seminars on Islam and democracy and in leadership training courses for Muslim women held with the specific aim of creating a Muslim Social Democratic subsection (Johansson 2006). The Brotherhood Movement has collaborated with SMR (and the Jewish Council of Sweden) in trying to create a change in attitudes to religious slaughter, which remains forbidden in Sweden if

performed without prior stunning, through an open letter to the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries (Yttrande till Jordbruksdepartementet 2005).

At the organization's congress in 2007, it was unanimously decided that networks for people of other religious beliefs than the Christian should be created, which opened up opportunities for political cooperation with, and membership of, Muslim sympathizers (Sandström 2007). At the Congress in 2009, the Election Committee decided that a goal of the next Congress was to broaden the board by including Muslim representatives (Högfeldt 2009). The Socialist election defeat in 2010 has meant further changes. At the congress in 2011, the Brotherhood Movement changed its name to Social Democrats for Faith and Solidarity (Socialdemokrater för Tro och Solidaritet). They also redefined the organization from being solely Christian to including members from various religions, including Muslims and Jews, with believers in Ásatrú also welcomed (*Svenska Dagbladet* 2010; Broderskapsrörelsen, press release 2011).

### **Reasons for Cooperation**

The Brotherhood Movement justifies cooperation with SMR by stressing the importance of dialogue. A recurring argument is that Muslim communities face a similar problem to that which the Christian Social Democrats faced before their organization was founded, namely that of finding a satisfactory way of joining their faith with other forms of societal commitments. A further argument is that dialogue may counter social exclusion (Weiderud 2006). It is seen as taking a risk not to engage in dialogue with Muslim organizations because of ideological differences, lest both Islamic extremism and Islamophobia gain a foothold instead (Weiderud 2009).

The Brotherhood Movement's collaboration with SMR has been criticized, for example, in a television programme specializing in investigative journalism on national TV (SVT: Uppdrag granskning 2006). Critics have wondered who SMR really represents, and have criticized the Council's ideological positions (Bergsten 2006). Representatives of the Brotherhood Movement have repeatedly argued that there are some 100,000 active Muslims in Sweden and that SMR represents 75,000 of them, figures clearly

taken from statistics of the SST. According to this logic, SMR has a strong mandate. Further, representatives from the Brotherhood Movement claim to be collaborating with several different Muslim organizations, but a review of the members' magazine *Brotherhood* (1994–2004) shows that 80% of the articles on Islamic bodies are about the SMR (Bergsten 2006).

SMR's ideology has been rightly described as moderate Islamist, influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood<sup>5</sup> (Carlbom 2006; Roald 2002). Using Mandaville's (2007) categorization of socio-political trends among Europe's Muslims, SMR can be described as 'communitarianist'. These tend to be politically pragmatic, while still having religious ideals as normative standards for their political work. They usually have a strong commitment to issues relating to (minority) rights of Muslims, and they tend to seek cooperation with and support from parties in the political mainstream.

The Brotherhood Movement claims that it does not accept extremism, but sees it as its task to bridge gaps between different religious communities. They believe that the necessary political dialogue with advocates of political Islam has been neglected. The reason is a fear of the religion itself, which has evolved into a fear of being associated with political Islam. Only through serious dialogue will it be possible to understand the wide range of positions within political Islam (Weiderud 2005).

The Brotherhood Movement's attitude can be interpreted as an attempt to help create a European version of Islam that will fit into existing structures. A tendency among political parties in the middle or to the left is to try to reshape Islam to make the religion fit their own political ideologies (Zemni 2002). Muslims are expected to accept and make use of existing structures in order to get access to social and political influence (cf. Fetzer & Soper 2005; Silvestri 2007). According to Silvestri (2007), it is common

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<sup>5</sup> The Muslim Brotherhood was founded in 1928 in Egypt, and is currently active in several countries with different orientations. The Brotherhood developed in the mid-1900s to a political, anti-imperialist movement in the Muslim world. Islam is perceived as a complete way of life, which includes a political commitment, see Eickelman & Piscatori 1996.

among European politicians to try to create national Muslim councils, set up to be the official representatives of Muslims. The state supports so-called moderate forms of Islam, which are considered to be in the interest of Muslims (Silvestri 2010). Bonnefoy (2003) argues that there is a demand among political parties and governments to distinguish between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Islam. Good Islam is defined as moderate and the opposite of political Islam, the bad form. The official political discourse endeavours to delegitimize forms of Islam not viewed as accommodating. By doing so politicians and public institutions take it upon themselves to define what should be acceptable interpretations of Islam. According to Bonnefoy, this understanding is based on essentialist conceptions where religion exists decoupled from its adherents’ often very different social practices.

In line with the above, the Brotherhood Movement states that its cooperation with Muslim groups will counter radicalization, thus promoting good Islam. In connection with the national election of 1998, representatives of the Brotherhood Movement wrote an article in the Islamic journal *Salaam* together with Muslims from SMR (Sahlberg et al. 1998). The collaboration was presented as an attempt to create ‘political integration’ through education about politics and democracy, and specific courses on social democratic party politics. We discern two main reasons: firstly, to educate ‘Muslims’ who are interested in politics, secondly, to attract new voters and school them into the Social Democratic Party. The writers mention issues they find to be of special importance to Muslims, and write ‘in Muslim culture, religion is not just a cultural affiliation but accommodates a wide range of traditions and beliefs that affect all aspects of life’ (Sahlberg et al. 1998:31, our translation). For example, Islam is considered to govern Muslims’ views on the role of families and the relationships between men and women. The claim that religion (or Muslim culture) governs all aspects of the lives of Muslims is a recurring stereotype (also among the revivalist Muslim writers in *Salaam*, see Otterbeck 2000). Terms such as ‘Islam’ or ‘Muslim culture’ are notoriously vague. Which Muslims are referred to? Whose interpretation? Actual Muslim diversity is not addressed. Instead, the writers argue that today’s society is highly individualized, while

for Muslims it is ‘important what the group does, and what the Imam (the Muslim leader) says’ (Sahlberg et al. 1998:31, our translation).

The depictions of Muslims by the Brotherhood Movement often return to the idea that Muslims can be described as a group with certain needs that must be met, precisely on the grounds that they are Muslims (cf. Allievi 2003; Maussen 2007). It is assumed that active citizenship is intimately linked with the religious identity, and that it is through an emphasis on that identity that Muslims can articulate and defend their interests.

### **Muslim Social Democrats in Search of a Voice**

Before the 2010 Swedish general election the Brotherhood Movement intensified its efforts to win Muslim votes. Part of this effort was to produce the magazine *Islam and Politics* (Islam och Politik), whose first edition was released during the month of Ramadan in 50,000 copies. Behind the magazine was the Brotherhood’s Network for Progressive Muslims. The point of departure, according to the publisher, was that

there is a need for a progressive Muslim magazine in Sweden. There is still no channel for debate on Islam and politics, no daily or weekly newspaper, radio or television channel that concerns the daily lives of Swedish Muslims, or raises Islamic issues in a respectful manner and that can promote this perspective. (Vänster 2010, our translation)

The magazine mixes opinion-oriented material with columns and interviews. In the first issue, the editorial stresses that discussions about Muslims in Sweden too often address peripheral questions like the handshake debate,<sup>6</sup> Lars Vilks’ cartoons<sup>7</sup> and the potential

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<sup>6</sup> This debate revolved around a Muslim man who refused to shake the hand of a female employer, when he was applying for a job as a trainee at a factory. The employment office decided to suspend the man from the work programme he was involved in due to this. He was later awarded damages due to unlawful discrimination.

<sup>7</sup> Lars Vilks is an artist and art theoretician specializing in post-modern provocations against the taken for granted understanding of art. In 2007 he drew sketches of Muhammad combining the body of a dog with a turbaned head in a setting reminding Swedes of a spontaneous folk art expression at the time: the

banning of the wearing of the *burqa/niqab*. These issues may have some significance, but the editorial stresses that there is a danger in that Muslims only get to voice views on marginal issues.

In the editorial, the Social Democratic Muslims present themselves as a mainstream option. The editorial states that only extremist forces profit from the addressing of peripheral issues; both Islamic extremists and those who want to increase fear and Islamophobia and limit Muslims' rights are referred to as extremists (Habib et al. 2010). The magazine features a manifesto for Muslim Social Democrats. Muslim identity is defined in an inclusive manner and it stresses that identity is based on the understanding that 'faith, practice and culture are expressed in many forms and different people attach different meaning to why they call themselves Muslims' (Habib et al. 2010, our translation). The preference for Social Democracy, it is explained, is due to the party's ideas of a common social structure, which goes hand in hand with Islam's passion for fairness. A commitment to the Social Democratic Party is the best way to translate the Koran's message from words into action. The manifesto's demands include: the right to build mosques, *halal* food in schools, time off for Friday prayers and religious ceremonies, as well as the right for Muslim women to be treated well regardless of whether they wear the *hijab* or not.

The manifesto never mentions socialism as a fundamental ideology of the Social Democratic Party. Further, the manifesto differs from the Brotherhood Movement's own ideological programme. The Brotherhood Movement's programme stresses that the goal for equality includes a society free from superiority and subordination, and that inequalities based on class differences, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexual orientation cannot be tolerated ('Manifest för Kristen Vänster' 2010). In the Muslim manifesto the part about gender and sexual orientation is left out ('Manifest för Muslimska

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roundabout dogs, often bright coloured wooden sculptures in the form of animals placed in roundabouts for the fun of it. Some perceived the drawings as mere provocations and others saw them as a test of the freedom of expression. Vilks has been threatened and attacked because of the sketches.

Socialdemokrater' 2010). The chairman of the Brotherhood Movement explained the difference between the two manifestos by stating that different cultures are at different stages when it comes to issues like this (Weiderud 2010).

### **Muslim Candidates in Political Parties**

A new phenomenon (a third phase of active citizenship) is that some people who primarily present themselves as Muslims have the ambition of actively engaging in established political parties. This may indicate a pronounced individual desire for political integration in society or possibly a collective integration strategy. Candidates with immigrant backgrounds always run the risk of becoming representatives or spokespersons for parts of the population perceived as the ethnic 'others'. They often become responsible for finding political solutions to potentially controversial issues. It is also common that they seek this role (Dahlstedt 2005). Politicians with a Muslim family background are often torn between their roles as individual politician, group representative, and expert on Muslims. One example is Mehmet Kaplan, a former leader of Sweden's Young Muslims (Sveriges Unga Muslimer), who is spokesperson of the Green Party on integration issues and an active believer. Still, Kaplan does not invoke his faith in his role as a politician. How, then, is the situation for those who engage themselves politically and publicly express that they are motivated by an Islamic sense of justice and by their Muslimness?

The issue of Muslim candidates running for parliament generated debates long before the parliamentary election in September 2010. There was one common denominator in mass media coverage and political criticism: accusations of Islamism. Islamism is presented as a single phenomenon that is completely inappropriate in Swedish politics, if not downright sinister (Cato 2012). This happens all over Europe (Glynn 2009). As we have shown above, Mahmoud Aldebe, the former head of SMR, had over the years gained experience from political work collaborating with both the Social Democrats and the Centre Party (Centerpartiet). As a minority rights activist he has penned several open letters since the 1980s calling for specific rights for Muslims. When Aldebe decided to become a candidate for the right-wing Centre Party, it led to immediate



criticism from others in the Centre Party. Elisabeth Thand Ringqvist (2009) writes that Aldebe is a ‘radical Islamist, and allying himself with the most fundamentalist [forces] we have in Sweden. There is no doubt that radical Islamists want to take power by means other than democratic (our translation).’ She gave as an example of Aldebe’s Islamism an open letter he wrote in 2006 in which he pleaded for the introduction of Sharia laws in Sweden.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, she criticized Aldebe because of his claim to represent Muslims in Sweden; Thand Ringqvist believed that his extremism would create suspicion against Muslims. Aldebe subsequently chose to withdraw his candidacy.

Abdirisak Waberi, who was the principal of a Muslim ‘free school’ (state-supported private school) and active in Muslim organizations on a national level, also faced criticism when he decided to become a candidate for the right-wing Moderate Party (Moderaterna). A critical party colleague argued that Waberi was an Islamist and questioned his attitude towards gender equality. Furthermore, she wanted to know which Muslims he really represented (Burda 2009). Waberi’s successful campaign gave him a place in the Swedish parliament, where his credentials concerning democracy, equality between the sexes and his supposed support for Islamism continues to be a matter of debate, now addressed by members of the populist Sweden Democrats party (Sverigedemokraterna). Both Aldebe and Waberi suffered from being public figures before, because over time they had made normative statements about what Islam is and admittedly made conservative statements on family values and the roles of men and women, etc. The possibility of a development of their views or a compartmentalization of their views (common to religious people in secular societies) was not considered.

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<sup>8</sup> Mahmoud Aldebe wrote an open letter asking for, among other things, the right to follow Islamic family law in matters of marriage and divorce. Aldebe had written several similar letters before that never caused any fuss. Admittedly, he never called for Islamic family law as clearly before. The call for collective religious rights was clearly unacceptable in Swedish political discourse. Aldebe swiftly and publicly modified his position (cf. Roald 2009).

The issue of Islam has also attracted attention among the leftist Social Democrats. MP Carina Hägg (2010) claims that the political parties have too little knowledge about extreme Islam, and that everyone has a responsibility to keep extremists away from political influence. The then Chairman of the Social Democratic Women in Sweden (Socialdemokraternas kvinnoförbund), Nalin Pekgul (2010), who is herself a Muslim of Kurdish origins, argued that a group of Islamists is working hard and using all means to win new adherents, which includes the infiltration of political parties. She contrasted her description of the Islamists with the majority of Muslims who do not let religion dominate their daily lives. Schiffauer (2006) notes that politicians often make a distinction between real Islam (religion) and Islamism (ideology). Furthermore, only Muslims who support this distinction (and are on the right side of it) are viewed as acceptable partners in the debate. Muslims who question the distinction are defined as Islamists and are viewed as partisan. This situation is obviously similar to Bonnefoy's distinction between good and bad Islam.

### **Individual and Collective Political Projects**

The conception of tolerance of pluralistic liberal societies not only requires believers to recognize that they must reasonably reckon with the persistence of disagreement in their dealings with non-believers and members of other faiths. The same recognition is also required of unbelievers in their dealings with believers in a liberal political culture. (Habermas 2008:112)

Those who pursue an active citizenship motivated by either an Islamic sense of justice or the conviction that Muslims need representatives are doing so in a defining moment in Sweden's political history. Organizing religious lobbying on school issues or to be able to enjoy benefits already given to other religious groups, seems quite uncontroversial. Over time, Muslim organizations and civil society associations have acquired many partners, not least through the networks of SST, an important political opportunity structure for religious activist at large. In these contexts, Muslims have been able to pursue issues in line with the multiculturalism policy of the society and outside the attention of the media. Their work has led to reasonable, pragmatic solutions

regarding imams in hospitals and prisons, Muslim cemeteries, and collaborations with the temperance movement, etc. (see Otterbeck 2004, 2010).

Over time, some Muslim activists have also become politically experienced. After the initial period of organizing, lobbying for minority rights, another option has opened up. Nowadays, we find Muslims wanting to participate in national (and local) politics within the framework of the established parties, but who, unlike Muslim politicians who do not emphasize their Muslim identity, still use Islamic language and claim to represent the interests of Muslims in Sweden. Some of them, like Mahmud Aldebe, have already cooperated with the established parties for decades. In connection with their ambition to become regular politicians, however, earlier statements and their theological preferences have been brought back to life and used against them. After years at the periphery of public attention seeking to create a space for Muslim minorities, these candidates have often written a lot and made statements that are far more gender-conservative (and Islamically theological) than is normal in Swedish political discourse (Hennel 2009; Olofsson 2006; Otterbeck 2000). Before, statements have been plausible since they have been understood, if read or heard at all, as coming from marginalized voices in a process of integration. When the opinions are re-evaluated today as political manifestos, Muslim candidates are effectively made suspect. They are perceived as disloyal to the Swedish system with reference to their dual identity as Muslims and Swedish, and are frequently accused of being Islamists, a category possible to understand as another word for suspect and blameworthy. Those who have collaborated with them, as the Brotherhood Movement has and does, risk being criticized too.

The Brotherhood Movement's understanding of the cooperation is interesting. By looking at SMR as representative of the ordinary Muslim, the movement can justify the need to talk to SMR even if its agenda is not always in line with the politics of the movement. The Brotherhood Movement has been aware that it has tried to help Muslims by trying to shape and control SMR's engagement in a process. In this context, the Brotherhood Movement has followed a general trend of perceiving the diverse

Muslim population as a social group possible to reach and help through their representatives. This pragmatic policy has legitimated the Muslim organizations not only as religious actors but also political ones. Compared with most other actors, the Brotherhood Movement has been proactive, helping Muslims to take initiatives like organizing themselves or starting a political magazine. Still, even while open to collaboration, the Brotherhood Movement has tried to reshape and channel Islamic active citizenship; after all, it is part of a political party.

When Muslims seek active citizenship, this has to be understood in relation to political opportunity structures in Sweden. Compared with, for example, Fetzer and Soper's (2005) study of Britain, France and Germany, it appears that Muslims in Sweden have had great possibilities for using existing structures for association-based political work (not least through SST) to organize nationally and engage in minority rights issues. However, to engage in the public sphere as a politically active citizen in the context of party politics is complicated if a Muslim motivates his or her political engagement religiously. The political ideology holding that politically engaged religious Muslims are Islamists and as such have nothing to contribute to Swedish society is predominant not only among those who are highly critical of Islam but also among those who chose to cooperate with Muslim organizations and individuals. The latter try to tame the beast, the former to exorcise it. *Public* Muslim active citizenship in Sweden is thus to a certain degree created by Swedish structures but is in the same time rejected as something atypical and problematic, a paradox that has to be addressed and examined in a democratic and multicultural society.

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## **The Discourse of Multiculturalism: An Obstacle to Cultural Change?**

Anne Sofie Roald

### ***Abstract***

*This article discusses how the discourse of multiculturalism affects religious and cultural changes in the Muslim communities in Sweden and Norway, particularly with reference to gender and gender relations. Although the two societies have few multicultural policies, the discourse on multiculturalism has still led to claims for legal pluralism. However, it seems that there is an obvious change of attitudes to such claims between the first-generation Muslim immigrants and their descendants, second-generation Norwegian and Swedish Muslims.*

This article looks at the discourse of multiculturalism and investigates whether this discourse might be an obstacle to certain cultural and religious changes that Swedish and Norwegian public policy seeks to foster, particularly when it comes to gender and gender relations in Muslim communities. The empirical data is gathered in Sweden and Norway through research in Muslim communities in the two countries from the late 1980s onwards.<sup>1</sup>

In the two countries, as elsewhere, from the turn of the twenty-first century public debates on minority women's rights reflect the arguments promoted by Susan Moller Okin in her essay, 'Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?' (1997). This discussion seems

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<sup>1</sup> See Roald 2005; 2009. These two books build on extensive field work in Norway and Sweden from the late 1980s to 2009. The interviews have mainly focused on gender relations in Islam as well as family law issues in Muslim communities in the two countries. The interviewees have been mainly Muslim community leaders, men and women from the first-generation Muslim immigrant community and from the next or second-generation of Muslims, i.e., the first generation of Norwegian and Swedish Muslims.

to have marked a turning point for the common acceptance of multiculturalism as a sought-after social system. This change in attitude can be seen in Sweden in the change in official terminology from ‘multiculturalism’ (*mångkulturalism*) and ‘multicultural society’ (*det mångkulturella samhälle*) at the beginning of the 1990s to ‘diversity’ (*mångfald*) from the late 1990s onwards (Roald 2009:41–2). It is also interesting to note that with the change of concept the Swedish official migrant policy changed focus from the previous emphasis on the guarantee of freedom of choice for members of linguistic minorities domiciled in Sweden between retaining and developing their original cultural identity and assuming a Swedish cultural identity (SOU 1974), to see integration in terms of participation in the labour market (Roald 2009:41).

Researchers and thus most probably policy makers in both Norway and Sweden seem to have been influenced by the writings of Canadian liberal political scientists and philosophers, such as Will Kymlicka (1995a; 1995b) and Charles Taylor (1994) (see for instance Brochman 2003; Roth 1996). Kymlicka and Taylor discussed issues of cultural pluralism in fairly positive terms during the 1990s, promoting majority recognition for minorities and the strengthening of cultural elements in minority communities. Their publications from the 1990s, although presented in general terms, tended however to draw their conclusions on the empirical reality of aboriginal or historically established communities, such as the indigenous Innuits (Kymlicka 1995 a; 1995b) and the French minority in Canada (Taylor 1994).

The Swedish debate in the 1990s reflected the two Canadian philosophers’ liberal approach without discussing the difference between the indigenous Scandinavian Sami population and the ‘new’ immigrant population. The Swedish philosopher Hans-Ingvar Roth, who has been an active participant in the official space, wrote for instance in 1996 about borders for ‘desired’ cultural pluralism and how to deal with intercultural conflicts (Roth 1996:11). His approach in the 1990s was clearly that of a group-rights perspective. One example is his discussion about how teachers should treat pupils with a non-Swedish ethnic background. He promoted a diplomatic approach: ‘The teacher can through an individualized education form avoid objectionable elements’ (Roth

1996:92), a proposal to which teachers often objected.<sup>2</sup> However, Roth was more concerned about women's rights within minority cultures than were Kymlicka and Taylor. Indeed he preceded Okin's discussion of women's rights, probably due to the Swedish emphasis on equal gender opportunities.

Okin's reaction to these liberals' positive evaluations of multiculturalism was built on feminist thought. Okin, although also based in a similar liberal tradition to Kymlicka and Taylor, went further than classical liberalism, taking the step of including the private sphere into the multicultural discourse. Okin questions, for instance, Kymlicka's confidence in liberal values, particularly concerning family issues, having penetrated minority communities even in Western countries. It seems however that the disagreement is built on different presuppositions for their argumentation; Okin speaks in terms of the new immigrant communities (Okin 1997), whereas Kymlicka mainly speaks about ethnic and national minorities (Kymlicka 1995a). The apparent disagreement between the two seems to have been symptomatic of the international debate on pluralism in Western society from the 1990s to the beginning of the twenty-first century.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, Okin's challenge to the debate was to criticize cultural

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<sup>2</sup> During the 1980s and the 1990s, I lectured at various schools in Norway and Sweden. One example is the often discussed topic of sex education classes. Many Muslim parents wanted to take their children out of these classes, whereas teachers in general held the view that 'as we live in Sweden they have to follow the Swedish system'.

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that Kymlicka's 1995 books, *The Rights of Minority Cultures* and *Multicultural Citizenship: A Liberal Theory of Minority Rights*, deal mainly with ethnic and national minorities, indicating historical established groups. His book from 2007, *Multicultural Odysseys. Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity*, includes on the other hand discussion of the 'new' immigrant communities in Western countries. Okin's criticism of Kymlicka is however built on his writings from the mid-1990s. The development particularly in the European discourse of multiculturalism in the beginning of the twenty-first century has mainly been on the 'new' immigrant communities indicating the rapid shift of emphasis in only a decade.

It is however important to draw attention to the fact that, for instance, the Swedish debate has been different, probably partly due to the lack of an extensive public debate on the Sami question, and partly

practices, claiming individual rights for women (and children) in minority communities on an equal footing with women belonging to majority populations in Western countries.<sup>4</sup>

### **‘Multiculturalism’ versus ‘Diversity’**

There is often a confusion of conceptual understanding in discourses on ‘multiculturalism’. Tariq Modood’s observation in 1997 that the term ‘multiculturalism’ as well as multicultural policy in general is understood differently by different states according to their particular socio-political and cultural background is still valid (Modood 1997). Whereas most nation-states today consist of more than one cultural community and can thus be said to be ‘multicultural societies’, very few societies are ‘multiculturalist societies’, in the sense of cherishing and encouraging more than one cultural approach, incorporating more than one cultural approach into the majority system of belief and practice, and respecting the cultural demands of all or more than one of the nation-state’s communities.<sup>5</sup> This is also true for the Scandinavian countries as the above mentioned Swedish example of change in concept from ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘multicultural society’ to ‘diversity’ (*mångfald*) indicates. ‘Diversity’ in the context of the US implies positive experiences from working places with a physically and culturally diverse workforce (see for instance Wood 2004). ‘Diversity’ particularly in

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due to the effort made by David Schwarz who as early as the 1960s wrote about Sweden as a multicultural society (Schwarz 1965).

<sup>4</sup> It is important to draw attention to the fact that some of the criticism Okin met was built on the concept of minorities as deprived of rights in majority society. For instance, Homi K. Bhabha and Bhikhu Parekh’s critical notes to Okin’s article tend to have little validity in the context of Sweden and Norway. Bhabha writes, for instance, of: ‘The deprivation and discrimination that shape their [minorities’] affective lives, often alienated from the comfort of citizenship [in the metropolitan cultures of the West]’ (Bhabha 1999; see also Parekh 1999). In Sweden and Norway immigrants who are granted stay permits would have nearly similar rights as citizens. It is mainly in the right to vote in local and national elections where non-citizens would have ‘less rights’ than citizens. Moreover, most non-citizens after a certain amount of years of residence have the possibility to obtain citizenship.

<sup>5</sup> See Parekh (2000:4–5) for a discussion of the terms ‘multicultural’ and ‘multiculturalism’.

the Swedish context, but even in Norway, indicates labour integration of immigrants. It is also worth noticing that in both Sweden and Norway the legal system is to a great extent based on individual rights, and the issue of introducing religious laws or collective rights to the new immigrant communities has not been on the agenda in a similar fashion to that in Canada, for instance. One exception in Norway is the right for religious associations (*trossamfunn*) to organize their own activities freely with little involvement from the state.<sup>6</sup> This means that the associations might get state funding although they do not have to follow the law of equal gender opportunities or non-discrimination when it comes to homosexuality etc. Another issue which at first sight might seem to be an exception to the individual rights pattern in Sweden and Norway, namely religious associations' legal right to marry couples (*vigselrett/vigselrätt*), might not definitively be regarded as a collective right, as it is the Swedish and the Norwegian states that appoint the particular persons who can perform the marriage ceremony, e.g. the matter is not handled from within the community. Nevertheless the notion that religious associations can obtain the legal right to perform marriage ceremonies might send signals to religious minorities that there might be options for further rights or plural legislation within family law.

Despite the clear lack of the Scandinavian states' commitment to multiculturalist policies, the discourse of multiculturalism or pluralism seems to linger on in both countries, maybe as a result of the international debate on multiculturalism. It is also, as will be shown below, a tendency that some religious leaders consider the state as a multiculturalist state due to this discourse, thus regarding the possibility to follow group norms and laws as an option in a modern Scandinavian society. This happens despite the many indications that the two states mainly deal with their citizens on an individual level when it comes to laws and regulations in society.

It is possible to regard the discourse of multiculturalism as a reason why some minority leaders experience an opening towards legal pluralism. Moreover, there is a certain

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/bld/dok/nouer/2008/nou-2008-1/8.html?id=496398>

tension between collective and individual rights within the political systems in both Norway and Sweden. As for the Swedish state, for example, the authorities tend to deal with groups and particularly with religious associations in a different manner than with individuals. Yasemin Soysal discusses the Swedish society in terms of ‘corporatist society’ (Soysal 1994). She claims that in Sweden, as in Holland, social organizations consisting of among others immigrants, women, professionals, etc., are controlled by the state and social participation is to a great extent organized around corporatist organizations and their functions (Soysal 1994: 37–8). In this type of corporatist society the state is responsible for incorporating immigrants in a standardized protection and service perspective. Soysal sees this pattern as an official incorporation of new citizens with stress on welfare rights. It might appear that the Swedish state has two approaches to its citizens, an individual and a collective. On the one hand is the corporatist system, where citizens through membership in groups might demand group rights, such as economic support for religious and cultural activities, or rights such as time off on religious festivals or at prayer time. On the other hand there is the individual-oriented approach, which Berggren and Trägårdh name ‘state individualism’ (*statsindividualismen*), in which the state relates directly to the individual (Berggren and Trägårdh 2006). This tension between the individual and the collective approach might be understood differently by the authorities and the minority leaders and members. These two approaches might be regarded by the authorities as two sides of the same coin; independent individuals have their freedom to organize themselves in order to obtain a certain degree of influence in public life. The minorities, on the other hand, might understand the tension between collective and individual rights as an opening up for collective rights.

Moreover, on an international level, the International Convention for Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) of 1966, ratified both by Sweden and Norway, indicates collective rights as part of the human rights paradigm. The notion of multiculturalism is probably an implicit outcome of Article 27 of the ICCPR with its stress on community and right to ‘culture’ (Roald 2009, a notion which since the 1970s has been a strong underlying



force particularly in Sweden. Similarly to the Declaration of Human Rights, the ICCPR also speaks in terms of the rights of *individuals*. It is, however, the reference to culture and religion that might have been the incentive for the emphasis on cultural rights apparent in new legislation on cultural pluralism in many countries from the 1970s onwards. In Sweden for instance, the multicultural policy of ‘equality between Swedes and immigrants’ and the possibility for immigrants and minorities to choose ‘Swedish culture’ or ‘to maintain and develop their original culture’ was accepted by Parliament in 1975 (Ring 1995: 159, see also Prop 1975: 26). This trend towards cultural pluralism was, however, not labelled as ‘multiculturalism’, but as a policy of freedom of choice for ‘members of linguistic minorities domiciled in Sweden’ between ‘retaining and developing their original cultural identity and assuming a Swedish cultural identity’ (SOU 1974, see also Sander 288). The tension between individual and collective rights becomes apparent by looking at how the understanding of this Swedish on-the-surface policy of ‘multiculturalism’ was understood differently by official representatives and members of minority communities. The Swedish authorities understood their multicultural declaration of *equality* (*jämlikhet*), *freedom of choice* (*valfrihet*) and *partnership* (*samverkan*) (SOU 1974: 69:93–6, see also Borevi and Strömblad 2004:153) mainly in terms of *equality*, meaning ‘equality between universal individuals regardless of culture, ethnicity, race, religion and gender’ (Sander 1996:274). Immigrants, on the other hand, tended to regard multiculturalism in terms of equal right to *freedom of choice* in religion, ethnicity, and cultural expressions.<sup>7</sup>

It is also interesting to note that about the same time that the governmental bill about immigrant issues was launched, the Swedish authorities legislated on gender-equal opportunities as well as immigration restrictions. This legislation has partly to be regarded as a result of the authorities’ understanding that labour immigration was more

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<sup>7</sup> See even Anwar (1987), for a discussion on how immigrants understand ‘integration’ as ‘acceptance by the majority of their separate ethnic and cultural identity’ (1987: 110), whereas the majority sees ‘integration’ in terms of ‘any group unabsorbed, or not assimilated, is considered to upset the equalization of social relations in the society’ (1987: 9).

complicated than had been estimated in the 1960s with the economic boom (see for instance Schwarz 1965; 1971; 1973), although social reform was also a driving force in the Social democratic gender equality policy (Florin and Nilsson 1999). Whatever the case, equal opportunity legislation has become one of the most important political hallmarks both in Norway and Sweden from the mid-1970s.

To illustrate the discrepancy between the authorities and the immigrant leaders in understanding state policy, I will draw attention to an incident in Sweden in the run up to the parliamentary election in the autumn of 2006. The Swedish authorities have, as stated above, never voiced the intention of accepting legal pluralism.<sup>8</sup> An Islamist belonging to the *ikhwan* trend,<sup>9</sup> Mahmoud Aldebe, former head of one of the Muslim organizations and a frequent participant in the public debate, had a different opinion, however. In April 2006 he distributed a letter to all the political parties (Aldebe 2006). He referred to various issues which he regarded as important for the Muslim community in Sweden, such as the right to leave from work to attend religious festivals, to have a mosque in every city, to have gender-specific sessions in public indoor swimming pools, and to introduce sharia law in family matters for Muslims in Sweden. The important point in this case is that Aldebe particularly referred to the principle of freedom of religion and to the UN conventions ‘which Sweden has ratified’. In his view this ‘implies the right to a distinctive legislation (*särslagstiftning*)’, particularly in family issues. It is clear that Aldebe understands Swedish multiculturalism as a system open to legal pluralism. Furthermore, Aldebe’s understanding of UN conventions in collective terms became obvious in his claim that the Swedish law of freedom of religion *in contrast to* the recommendations of the UN conventions (probably the ICCPR) is built

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<sup>8</sup> I have discussed ‘the right to marry couples’ (*vigselrätten*), a right for religious communities, elsewhere (Roald 2010). In a sense this right can be regarded in terms of legal pluralism, although most probably legal pluralism not been the intention of giving this (collective) right to different religious organisations.

<sup>9</sup> It is difficult to state a particular belonging for Islamists in Europe as most Islamist movements have secret membership. Islamists within the *ikhwan* trend are thus those persons who are either members of the Muslim Brotherhood or sympathize with this movement’s ideology.

on 'an individualised concept of religion'. In Aldebe's Islamistic view 'Islam' is a system where all rules, values, rituals, and even the Arabic language belong to religious expression, and the concept of religion must therefore, in his view, be broadened in the Swedish context in order to include such expressions. Aldebe's argumentation points at the tension between individual and collective rights in the UN conventions as well as in the Swedish official policy.

Some activists, particularly from minority communities, as the example of Aldebe indicates, tend to claim legal pluralism, where minority communities have equal formal, legal, and constitutional executive positions with the majority, i.e., the minorities should be entitled to live according to their *nomos* (the community's normative universe where legislation and cultural structures are intertwined) (Shachar 2001:2). However, Aldebe's stress on the private sphere of family matters, such as marriage, divorce, custody and heritage, reflects Okin's claim of women being oppressed in the name of multiculturalism, as family legislation in Islam is built on a gender hierarchy with male supremacy. In contrast, the authorities promote rights for minorities to practise religion in terms of prayer, festivals, and to a certain extent dress,<sup>10</sup> but at the same time they tend to stress the protection of every human being's right to obtain his or her individual rights in society.<sup>11</sup> As some representatives from the religious minorities stress the concept of equality on a group level, i.e. each groups' right to profess their culture, they tend to overlook or disregard how the concept of gender equality has become one of the most important aspects within this general social equality. Thus, the tension between the collective claim of group equality and the individual claim of every human being's equal rights, particularly women's equal opportunities with men, seems to be the main focus in the debate on multiculturalism in Sweden and Norway.

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<sup>10</sup> In Norway and Sweden women wearing the *hijab* are protected against explicit discrimination, and the face-veil is not forbidden, as it is in France, for instance.

<sup>11</sup> See the discussion above about exceptions for religious associations in Norway.

In this context it is important to draw attention to the multicultural claim of the individual's right to leave his or her community; the right to live according to the community's *nomos* presupposes the right to leave the community (Kukatha 1992:116). This freedom of choice to remain or to leave the community reflects the Swedish liberal model where immigrants and minorities can either choose 'Swedish culture' or maintain and develop their original 'culture'. The aspect of choice was also one of Roth's concerns in his 1996 work on borders for multicultural practice. His claim is that children's rights should not be restricted by their parents' culture. 'If children are not allowed to take part in other cultures', he says, 'then their acceptance of the 'traditional' culture would not be an expression of an independent choice.' (Roth 1996:92). His solution is 'dialogues without prestige', but it is interesting that in his discussion he seems to favour a cultural change among immigrants towards a Swedish position (Roth 1996:94). Thus it seems that Roth is aware of the tension between freedom of choice and cultural claims within minority groups. The Swedish model might seem 'liberal', in the sense that every individual has the freedom of choice to associate or to dissociate with a cultural/religious community. However in practice it might not be as simple. By looking at Muslim communities, women, young girls and sometimes even boys who want to leave their community might be stopped, sometimes violently as was the case with for instance a Kurdish woman, Fadime (see for instance Wikan 2008). Sweden has had a relatively high number of honour-related killings in recent decades, the latest, a young woman from the Yazidi community who was killed in April 2012. Her brother is suspected of having murdered her two-year-old sister and is now in custody.<sup>12</sup>

Moreover, socialization within collectivistic communities tends to create a symbiotic relationship between members of the group making it difficult for some to dissociate from the community. Those who would prefer both to live according to the majority society's value system and be part of the social setting of their cultural community might lose an important part of their social network. This, due to the minority's understanding of the majority's acceptance of minority groups living according to their

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<sup>12</sup> <http://www.aftonbladet.se/nyheter/article14767793.ab>

*nomos*, might strengthen the notion of group solidarity at the price of loyalty and solidarity with the majority. Moreover, as minorities perceive that it is acceptable to live according to minority values and morals, a minority thinking imposing identity policy in various forms on members of the community might be created. Muslim women marrying non-Muslim men, a forbidden act according to the traditional collectivistic Islamic law schools, would for instance put them at risk of suffering violence in the name of 'honour' or being regarded as social outcasts (Roald 2009).

The issue at stake in the discourse of multiculturalism is whether 'multiculturalism' is actually about fixed and unalterable cultures on the one hand, and elitistic understandings of which elements minority 'cultures' consist of, on the other. A consequence of this notion is that, as 'culture' is commonly regarded in processual terms as well as every 'culture' consisting of various forms and shapes, is the discourse of multiculturalism necessary? This particularly as the multiculturalist discourse only to a certain extent reflects the social reality in Sweden and Norway. Would not cultures eventually amalgamate and would not a new 'culture' surface in every immigrant country? And the most important consequence of this processual concept of culture is: Would not multicultural policy solidify traditional cultural structures instead of letting immigrants adjust to a slow social change inherent in cultural encounters in general? And to draw the question into the religious sphere: Are the existing religions homogenous as well as fixed and static systems not prone to change? In contrast to this consequence analysis of processual concepts, such as identity and culture etc., the philosopher Charles Taylor's discussion of the link between identity and recognition indicates how this issue has been treated in the multicultural debate. Implicitly he portrays a group's identity as unalterable and static, even though he explicitly states that a person's or a group's identity is always defined in dynamic interactions.<sup>13</sup> Similarly, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, in his controversial lecture in February 2008, discussed the aspects of flexibility and change within Islamic jurisprudence, and yet at the same time opened the way for a possible plural jurisdiction, where some

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<sup>13</sup> See Baumann (1999) for a critique of Taylor's concept of identity.

aspects, especially religious marital legislation, might co-exist with British legislation (Williams 2008). In view of the archbishop's, as well as many Islamic scholars', claim of Islamic legislation as flexible, is it thus not possible that Islamic expressions might eventually turn in the direction of a human rights perspective with emphasis on individual rights?

In order to see if the discourse of multiculturalism has hindered developments among Muslims in Sweden and Norway I will turn to Seyla Benhabib's idea that '[i]dentity/difference politics is afflicted by the paradox of wanting to preserve the 'purity of the impure' and the 'immutability of the historical' (Benhabib 2002:11). Multiculturalism promotes identity policies, and as indicated by the above example of Aldebe, the Muslim leader in Sweden, the immigrants' notion of Sweden as a multiculturalist state has led some Muslims to accentuate identity policies despite the state approach of individual rights in both Norway and Sweden. The following discussion will deal with Benhabib's two concepts of 'purity of the impure' and the 'immutability of the historical' in order to investigate Islamic expressions among Swedish and Norwegian Muslims.

### **Purification of the Impure**

The pervasive notion in Muslim communities of Islam as 'one Islam' is an illustration of Benhabib's concept of 'purification of the impure'. In contrast to this ideal of a homogenous Islam, there are a multitude of understandings and practices of Islam in Muslim communities. This is also noted by Nielsen as it comes to Islamic views of sharia (Nielsen and Christoffersen 2010:5ff). Most Muslim minority communities in Western countries today tend to be dominated by leaders with collectivistic theological approaches to the religious texts, particularly in gender issues (Roald, 2001; 2005). This theology was mainly created by male scholars in particular historical periods and in particular social settings quite different from modern society. Muslim leaders in Sweden and Norway tend to have either a traditional collectivistic law-school understanding of Islam (mainly in Pakistani and Turkish communities), or an Islamist understanding (mainly in Arabic-speaking communities but also to a certain extent in Pakistani and

Turkish communities). The Islamist ideology has to a great extent been manifested in the public discourse as Islam *per se*, due mainly to the *da'wa* (call to Islam) activities in the Western world from the 1970s onwards. The extensive dissemination of Islamist literature in the form of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology over the last forty years together with Islamist activities and Islamist leadership in Muslim communities have created an image of Islamism, i.e. 'Islam as a comprehensive system; a way of life' as '*the Islam*'. Although Islamists tend to have a 'modern' approach to politics, many of them have a collectivistic law-school approach to gender issues and family law matters. As will be discussed below, however, some Islamists, particularly the post-*ikhwan*, i.e. sympathizers and previous members of the Muslim Brotherhood who adhere to the movement's ideology but are not organized in the movement (see Roald 2001:54–7), have joined the trend of reinterpreting the Islamic sources in which gender issues have been highlighted.

In contrast to the Muslim leadership, Muslims in general have different ways of relating to Islam and practising their religion. Whereas some follow most religious precepts strictly, others are more relaxed. The difference in ways of practising might have to do with zeal or laziness, but it also has to do with understanding and interpretation of the religious texts. The issue is whether the Islamic texts are regarded as to be understood literally or whether Muslims see it as possible to deduce Islamic principles from the texts. For instance, whereas some Muslims believe that the wearing of the Islamic headscarf/faceveil is an obligatory Islamic precept regardless of geographical locations, others believe that indeed there are some references to women's covering in the Koran, but do these texts talk about the covering of the head and/or the face or do they refer to a general principle of 'decent' dressing? Moreover, an issue which has been raised lately is: should the Koranic verse 33:59 saying that Muslim women should 'draw their cloaks (*jilbab*) close round them', as 'this will be better, so that they may be recognized and not annoyed', be understood as not wearing the headscarf/faceveil in Western countries where women actually might be 'annoyed' when wearing the Islamic dress,

whether headscarf or faceveil? The issue of ‘veiling’ is thus an illustration of variations; i.e. impurity, in an illusion of a ‘pure’ and homogeneous Islamic tradition.

Difference in educational backgrounds is also an issue of importance. Many first-generation Muslim immigrants have little formal education and this influences their understanding and approach to Islam. Many of their descendants, the second-generation Muslims, however, tend to approach Islam according to the majority society’s values of individual rights (human rights), gender equality, and private religiosity in terms of religion being separated from politics and individualized (for instance *fatwa*-shopping on the web and picking and choosing the religious content). The example of Bushra Ishaq, a Norwegian Muslim woman with parents from Pakistan, illustrates the individualization process among second-generation Muslims. Ishaq was a medical student and the leader of the Muslim Student Association (Muslims Studentsamfunn, MSS) in 2009 when she wrote an editorial in the biggest Norwegian newspaper *Aftenposten* under the title ‘Muslims in change’. She argues that due to their high educational standards, young Muslim women in Norway tend to interpret and understand the Islamic sources in a different way than their parents. She wrote:

We struggle for the realization of ourselves as independent individuals as we as Norwegian girls have been socialized into the fight for [gender] equality. Without the Norwegian culture’s fundamental influence and the values of the welfare state, which gives equal right to every citizen, the growing Muslim feminism would not be a reality. (Ishaq 2009)

It is interesting how Ishaq explicitly links Islamic development to Norwegian influence and particularly the welfare state. Her stress on the ‘independent individual’ further reflects how the individual-oriented perspective influences members of minority groups. In Nielsen’s terminology it is possible to name her attitude as a ‘high-profile integration approach’, in the sense that she attends to Norwegian societal ideals and at the same time is ‘critically reviewing the Muslim tradition as it effects religion and cultural tradition’ (Nielsen 2010:12). It is important to note, though, that in the case of new



interpretations and particularly as it comes to gender issues, the notion of a ‘pure’ or ‘one’ Islam is also a strategy from the new generations of Muslims in Norway and Sweden, as indicated by Ishaq’s text. She writes, for instance, that ‘young Muslims look upon the religion in a different way than our parent’s generation’ and she continues, ‘Even though it is hard for many in the West to differentiate between culture and religion, there are many things in the Pakistani culture which opposes Islamic theology’ (Ishaq 2009). The ‘one’ Islam for many of these is an understanding of Islam as compatible with individual rights, democracy, and tolerance—watchwords in contemporary Scandinavia. As these new generations of Muslims have gone through the Scandinavian educational system where these values are taught from an early age, these values tend to become ‘Islamic’ in their worldview (see Roald 2005).

A final issue to discuss is the variation of practices and understanding of Islam in the different Muslim ethnic and national communities in Norway and Sweden. Is the Somali understanding of female circumcision as ‘Islamic’ the ‘true Islam’? Is ‘honour’ violence when it comes to ‘illegitimate’ sexual relations or suspicion of such relations an Islamic phenomenon, as some Muslims from, for instance, Afghanistan and the Middle East tend to believe? Does ‘Islam’ promote gender equality or endorse peace as many second-generation Muslims consider true? What then is ‘Islam’ and what is Muslim ‘culture’? As shown above, the discrepancy between Aldebe’s and Ishaq’s view of what Islam is indicate a flux of thoughts and notions, e.g., a process of ideas rather than a purification and a homogenization of a religious tradition.

As Benhabib has pointed at, multiculturalism tends to be about purification of the ‘impure’, and homogenizing of the heterogeneous. Culture and religion are not homogeneous entities as shown by Ishaq’s approach to gender issues in Islam, and Muslim leaders’ efforts to try to identify specific cultural or religious expressions which are supposedly ‘genuine’ in each cultural and religious community might be virtually impossible. However, as also noted above, the purification of the impure is also used by new generation Muslims in order to reject cultural traits which are not seen as compatible with ‘modern’ human rights values. Thus the purification of the ‘impure’ at

least on a micro level might be an agent of change within the Muslim communities, despite the attempt from the first-generation Muslim leaders to reinforce collectivistic cultural and legal (Islamic law-school) perspectives in the process of ‘purifying’ the ‘impure’.

### **‘Immutability of the Historical’**

The vital question is whether a religion, and in the present context, ‘Islam’ really is a fixed and static system as commonly believed, or whether the Islamic tradition, as other religious systems have proved to be, is in a flux of change, as also shown above. The common notion of Islam as static and unchangeable reflects Benhabib’s idea of how identity politics is about the attempt to preserve the ‘immutability of the historical’. The point at stake is whether Islam is understood in the same way today as in the past in its formative period? Islamic legal rules were consolidated in a time when social developments, political systems, and social relations were based on collective rights and family adherence. This socio-political structure is in contrast to contemporary Norwegian and Swedish society. Whereas some Muslims tend to live in segregation from the majority society with social networks mostly in their own communities, in Nielsen’s terminology the ‘high-profile segregation’ approach, many Muslims participate in majority society in schools, at work, and in socio-political and economic activities and—like Ishaq—their approach is one of ‘high-profile integration’ (Nielsen 2010:11–12). Although the latter goes for some from the first-generation Muslim immigrant communities, it is particularly the new generations of Muslims, who to a great extent are socialized into majority society through schools, friends and the public discourse, who tend to be influenced by majority cultural ideas and thought. One example is the view of gender equality. As most first-generation Muslim immigrants believe that women and men have equal worth but different social roles in Islam, their children tend to see Islam in terms of gender equality. In a study on gender equality in 2005, I discovered how the first-generation practising Muslims in Norway claimed that there is no gender equality in Islam, whereas their children, particularly those with higher education and with an Islamic orientation, claimed that Islam *is* gender equality.

This example indicates the strong stand of gender equality in Norwegian society. As children attend Norwegian schools, they are culturally socialized into the pattern of equal gender opportunity and link this 'positive' value to their faith.<sup>14</sup>

Even the notion of female leadership has come under scrutiny lately, on a global level, due to influences from Islamists living in Western countries and pressure from the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). It is worth noting that Norway and Sweden are among the few countries where Islamic communities have elected women in positions as top leaders of Muslim organizations. Even Muslim organizations on a lower level have elected women as leaders. Bushra Ishaq was for instance the elected leader of the Norwegian organization Muslim Students Association (Muslimsk Studentsamfunn) in 2009 and one of the local mosques in the north of Norway also has a female convert its top leader.<sup>15</sup> In view of the general prohibition against female leadership in the traditional law-school understanding of Islam it is obvious that there is an ongoing change in the Islamic communities in Scandinavia. The consequence of an idea of society's multicultural policy might be the impediment of such changes as the notion of multiculturalism, as shown by the example of Aldebe, creates a tendency to encourage cultural differences instead of the synthesis of different cultural expressions in the cultural encounters in a plural society. However, as indicated above, in Sweden and in Norway changes towards more individual-oriented and human-rights perspectives have started to gain ground in Muslim communities, particularly as the new generations of Norwegian and Swedish Muslims grow up and attain important public positions. It remains to see how influential this trend will be in the future.

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<sup>14</sup> See for instance Sayyid (1997) for a discussion of how the 'good' values become 'Islamic' in new cultural settings.

<sup>15</sup> '126 moskéer- én kvinnelig leder', *Vårt Land*, 20 January 2010. Accessed 27 May 2013, at <http://www.vl.no/samfunn/article8675.zrm>

Traditional legislation, most often promoted by men and religious leaders, indicates that the cultural content of minority communities in the secular state will often consist of the hegemonic ideology instead of alternative interpretations of the holy texts. This is particularly apparent in family legislation. Traditionally speaking, both in Judaic and in Islamic legislation, women have difficulties, for instance, obtaining a divorce against the will of their husbands. This pertains to religious minorities in Western countries, but even to countries with Muslim majority populations, as well as to Israel where the family law is based on traditional collectivistic interpretations of the Jewish scriptures. It is thus more common for Muslim and Jewish women in minority communities to be victims of 'limping' marriages, i.e. being divorced in one legal system (the secular state) and married in another legal system (the religious), than men. In a study on divorce instigated by wives in Sweden from 2007 onwards, I discovered how some women who were divorced according to the Swedish legal system could not get their Islamic divorce if their husbands had refused to sign the divorce document in the Swedish court. In Sweden the divorce is effective after six months, even if one of the parties repudiates it. The result is that these women have difficulties in remarrying due to psychological factors such as being excluded by the group if they remarry without obtaining the Islamic divorce, or, if they were married in a Muslim country, they would be regarded as committing bigamy and thus punished if they remarry without having an accepted Islamic divorce certificate (see Roald 2010).

Lately, discussions within Muslim communities in Norway and Sweden indicate a change in the field of family legislation. The new generation of Muslims, men and women, are influenced by the human rights discourse of gender equality (Nielsen and Christoffersen 20010; Roald 2005). Even on a global level, the increase in women with higher education in Islamic studies as well as in other academic fields has had an impact on the Muslim leadership. It is interesting to note that the European Council of Fatwa and Research, based in Ireland and headed by the notable Islamist, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, for instance has discussed whether a divorce in the secular Western societies should count as an Islamic divorce. There is a disagreement within the Council, but the Sunni

decentralized and thus individualistic approach (that every Muslim is in principle free to follow the scholar of his or her own choice) has made it possible for some women to adhere to those scholars who promote the idea of a secular divorce equalling an Islamic divorce. However, many women are still rejected by their communities and by legal systems in Muslim countries as bigamists if they remarry without an Islamic divorce document (Roald 2009).

It is also worth looking into the difference in understanding of sharia and family issues in Sweden between the first-generation Arabic-speaking Islamist Aldebe, mentioned above, and the Muslim political activist with a pronounced Islamic orientation, Mehmet Kaplan, of Turkish origin. They both belong to the Muslim leadership but Aldebe, who came to Sweden as an adult, is a proponent for introducing Islamic family legislation in Sweden, as 'it is family legislation which is important for Muslims in Sweden; marriage, divorce, custody of children, etc.' (Dagens Nyheter 27 April 2006). Aldebe's concept of sharia reflects the practice of ancient rulers in the Muslim empire of distinguishing between family legislation, dealing with the private sphere and subordinated to the Islamic scholars, and the rest of sharia legislation, dealing with the public sphere and subordinated to the political leadership. Kaplan, on the other hand, who came to Sweden as a young child, decisively rejects Aldebe's claim, saying that it is completely 'taken out of the air' (Dagens Nyheter 28 April 2006). Kaplan's attitude reflects the secular society's norm of legal gender equality. This example illustrates both the heterogeneity of ideas in the Muslim community, as well as the development of Islamic ideas, in both a historical and national context. As the example of Aldebe and Kaplan indicates, the first-generation Muslim immigrants are more prone to adhere to a traditional and collectivistic theology, whereas second-generation Swedish and Norwegian Muslims are more tuned into a human rights perspective of secular society.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> There are also examples of first-generation European Muslims who tend to end up in rigid belief systems such as salafism and some might even develop a radical, violent approach to the Islamic sources, such as those involved in the events of 7/7 2005 in Great Britain. However in my research I have discovered a stronger general tendency towards a human rights perspective among the new generation Muslims than a trend towards extremist understandings of 'Islam', without denying its existence.

Traditional sharia legislation is a product of a society different from that of contemporary Europe. Moreover, Muslims on a global level differ concerning the content of sharia, i.e., which sharia legislation should be applied in countries with Muslim majority populations and in Muslim communities in the West; the traditional law-school rules or rules more in line with the human rights perspective? In addition is the wide spectrum of views among Muslims of whether sharia legislation indeed is desirable or not in the European context. It is interesting to note that many Muslim women's organizations in Canada protested against a proposal at the beginning of the last decade, to introduce sharia in Canada (Hogben 2005).<sup>17</sup> Thus, the suggestion of opening up for religious legislation made by the Archbishop of Canterbury would probably create more problems than it would solve.<sup>18</sup>

Benhabib's idea of multiculturalism as a preserver of the 'immutability of history' is important to consider in view of the examples above. It is obvious that Muslims in minority communities go through profound changes of belief and practice, due on the one hand to the constant cultural encounters as well as discussions in the public space, where the majority society contests Muslim belief and practice, and on the other due to the fact that new generations of Norwegian and Swedish Muslims go through the communal school system and are thus socialized into values of human rights and gender equality and private religiosity.<sup>19</sup>

### **Reflections**

In the context of Norwegian and Swedish Muslim communities, the impossibility to 'purify the impure' in cultural expressions as well as the rapid theological changes going on in contemporary Islam, it is pertinent to ask whether the notion that

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<sup>17</sup> During a Metropolis conference, 17–21 October 2005 in Toronto, Canada, I attended Alia Hogben's contribution: 'Balancing Gender Equality and Religious Diversity: Muslim Women in Western Societies, Islamic Law & the Justice System'.

<sup>18</sup> See Shah (2010: 120 ff.) for a discussion on the Archbishop of Canterbury's suggestion.

<sup>19</sup> With private religiosity I mean both the tendency to differentiate between secular and religious spheres, as well as the tendency to individualize religious expressions by 'fatwa shopping' on the internet or by individual interpretations through personal studies of the Islamic sources.

multiculturalism with acceptance of Muslim cultural and religious practices would lead to a situation where traditional Islamic interpretations will be congealed/frozen in time and space? As shown, Norwegian and Swedish societies are not committed to multiculturalist policies, but the authorities' liberal policies with funding for religious activities, anti-discrimination laws, and a corporatist policy towards minorities have created an image among community leaders of acceptance for multiculturalist ideas. The idea of opening the way for Islamic legislation as it applies to family law would possibly reinforce the collectivistic perspective in Islamic legislation as 'the correct' Islamic understanding. It is even pertinent to ask whether the Norwegian authorities' acceptance of internal dealings by religious associations in matters of leadership and marriage ceremonies for homosexuals would also be an obstacle for a rapprochement of Islamic interpretations with liberal individualistic human right ideas, a development many Christian and Jewish groups have gone through. Particularly for minorities living in Western countries with the possibility of a dynamic interaction with other minorities and majority society it is important to see culture and religion in terms of processual changes which can make it possible to empower weak and vulnerable sectors within the community such as women, children and homosexuals. As indicated above there are changes towards a more 'Norwegian' and 'Swedish' understanding of Islam. Whether this is a result of the 'liberal' Swedish and Norwegian policy model of freedom of choice is difficult to evaluate; the right to remain or to leave the community is a matter of hardship particularly in Muslim communities, as the collectivistic socialization into the family and community tend to be a severe obstacle for the individual choice to adhere to Swedish/Norwegian 'culture'. Despite this, however, there are changes towards a more individual-orientated understanding of Islam, but the issue at stake is whether these changes would have more fertile ground in a society where individuals rather than communities are favoured. This approach reflects Tariq Ramadan's idea of a 'sense of belonging'<sup>20</sup> where Muslim immigrants and their descendants attach

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<sup>20</sup> Tariq Ramadan talked about 'sense of belonging' in a lecture on religion given at the Norwegian Academy of Science, 1–2 November 2007.

themselves to the Norwegian and Swedish social system, particularly the family law system, rather than searching for legal plurality. Islamic family legislation is already a plural system with various countries with Muslim majority populations having different laws.

An obvious trend in the Muslim communities in Norway and Sweden is the discrepancy between some of the Muslim leaders belonging to the first-generation immigrant communities and the second-generation Norwegian and Swedish Muslims. Whereas the ideal of multiculturalist policies with the emphasis on traditional Islamic law-schools in family matters seems to be an ideal for leaders such as Aldebe, the Norwegian Muslim Ishaq tends to conflate Islamic expressions on gender relation with the Norwegian ideal of equal gender opportunities. The conflict between Aldebe and Kaplan further reinforces this generational shift of Islamic understanding.

The discourse of multiculturalism might have had a hindering effect for developments in religious and cultural changes among the first-generation Muslim immigrants. However as it comes to the next generation, the first generation Swedish and Norwegian-born Muslims, the Norwegian and Swedish societies seem to have affected their understanding of Islam towards a human rights and a gender equality paradigm—essential values in these two societies.

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## **Islamic Religious Education in State Funded Muslim Schools in Sweden: A Sign of Secularization or Not?**

Jenny Berglund

### ***Abstract***

*In this article the establishment of publicly funded Muslim schools in Sweden is described and analysed. This is done by reference to relevant debates about these schools as well as to the content of the extracurricular subject Islamic Religious Education (IRE), which is what distinguishes a Muslim school from other schools in Sweden. The article also raises the question to what extent the appearance of IRE within publicly funded Muslim schools implies that Islam in the Swedish context is turning into what José Casanova has termed a 'deprivatized public religion'. It claims that Islam to a certain extent tends to be viewed as deprivatized even though it is not articulated in this way in schools. The conclusion drawn in relation to the study presented in this chapter is that Islam is rather following the Swedish secularization pattern and is not viewed as an alternative societal order which instead would indicate a de-privatization.*

Swedish society in the twenty-first century is ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse, with equally diverse opinion as to how this plurality should be managed. While plurality is not a new phenomenon in Sweden, its character has changed, most notably in relation to minority demands. During the sixties and seventies, as in most European countries, most minorities simply asked 'to be left alone ... [and] ... civilly tolerated' (Modood & Kastoryano 2006:171). Today this is no longer enough, as they increasingly seek augmented recognition and respect as citizens with equal rights. This shift could be understood as a rejection of the notion that minorities should assimilate to the majority

culture in the public sphere and only express cultural differences privately, and a corresponding call for the acceptance of cultural and ethnic difference in *both* the private *and* the public spheres (Modood & Kastoryano 2006:171). The tension between assimilation and public acceptance of cultural differences is relevant to our understanding of the establishment of Muslim schools, since one way of understanding these is as examples of political engagement developing out of the demand for recognition and equality (see for example: Bergesen 2003; Berglund & Larsson 2007; Jackson 2003, 2005; Jensen 2004; Maréchal 2002). In Sweden, these Muslim schools are financed by the state but run privately.

This article is based on a study I conducted for my dissertation: ‘Teaching Islam, Islamic Religious Education in Sweden’ (Berglund 2010). The study was ethnographic, concentrating on daily life in classrooms and the cultural practices of Islamic Religious Education (IRE), the extracurricular subject, that in terms of schedule, distinguishes Muslim from non-Muslim schools.<sup>1</sup>

In this article I will first describe and analyse the establishment of Muslim schools in Sweden by reference to relevant debates about these schools. I will then present and discuss the content and variations of what the IRE teachers most often call ‘Islamic history’, which is a part of IRE that could be found in all Muslim schools.<sup>2</sup>

In the concluding part, I will discuss to what extent the appearance of IRE within publicly funded Muslim schools implies that Islam in the Swedish context is turning

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<sup>1</sup> Since the term ‘Islamic education’ has been applied to various types of Muslim education, I will use the term Islamic Religious Education (IRE) referring specifically to extra-curricular school subjects that have a confessional character and are found in Muslim schools in Sweden. Thus, IRE refers to all confessional subjects offered in the schools in case, even though the schools refer to them in other terms (e.g., Quran, *din* [religion], Islam, religion-Islam).

<sup>2</sup> In most schools IRE also contains classical Quran education, i.e. learning the Quran by heart, but note that this is not the case in all schools. Some sort of singing lesson is also common within IRE, but the kind of singing varies widely, see Berglund 2010.

into what José Casanova has termed a ‘deprivatized public religion’, i.e. whether Islam in IRE is employed to renegotiate and shift established boundaries between the private and public spheres, or if it is simply accommodated to a Swedish Protestant view of religion as personal faith and morality, and as such a religious signifier of the nation. Studying Muslim schools and IRE could be a fruitful way to learn about Swedish Islam and its relation to secularization (Casanova 1994:6), since schools are powerful means to foster the attitudes of the younger generation, what is taught about Islam in these schools indicates what some Swedish Muslims perceive as vital knowledge for a growing generation in a secular country like Sweden.

The Islamic religious education presented in this article does not represent IRE as taught in *all* Swedish Muslim schools. Nonetheless, after visiting nine out of the sixteen Swedish Muslim schools that offer IRE and conducting interviews with teachers and headmasters alike, it appears that most of the themes presented here do recur in other classrooms, although perhaps treated differently.<sup>3</sup> It has been argued that teaching at Muslim schools should not be seen as an example of *Swedish* Islam, i.e. as a product of Swedish society, but rather as the product of isolated communities segregated from the Swedish society wanting to transmit a conservative interpretation of Islam with little or no connection to Swedish society and values (Carlbom 2003). However, this conclusion is based on the experience from one particular Muslim school which is not among the three main sites of my fieldwork. My counterargument is that ethnographic study of the content of IRE in Muslim schools is a means of better understanding the institutionalization of Islam *in Sweden*, and as such IRE in any Muslim independent school is necessarily the product of Swedish society, and could thereby potentially include signs that are possible to construe in terms of secularization or not. While it may not be possible to generalize the results of a qualitative study such as this, the knowledge derived about the lived classroom experience of IRE has implications for the

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<sup>3</sup> It would of course be interesting to determine which elements of IRE content are representative of all Muslim schools in Sweden.



general European discussion on confessional education—increasingly viewed as an important alternative by both state and private school facilities.

### **Background: RE in Sweden**

For Muslims as a religious minority in Sweden there are many challenges. One such challenge is the question of Islamic education and instruction. How to ‘transmit’ religious tradition to the coming generation is known as one of the most important questions for survival of a religious minority.<sup>4</sup> Some Muslim children attend supplementary classes at afternoons and weekends to learn about their religious tradition, others are taught at home. Crucial questions in this discussion are who should have responsibility for this instruction and what interpretation of Islam should be taught. Of importance for our discussion about teaching Islam is the position of religious education (RE) within the public school system.

In every country religious education has been shaped by a specific combination of factors, e.g. the structure of its educational system, the political history etc. The country’s religious disposition is also significant since the dominance of a particular religious tradition often shapes the educational system, even where religious freedom is guaranteed. The Swedish school system has a long history of Christian education related to the Lutheran State Church. Although schooling was made compulsory for all children in 1842, Sven Hartman notes that ‘Swedes [had been] a reading people’ long before then—a result of the Ecclesiastical Act of 1686 which charged parents and masters with the domestic responsibility of teaching their children and servants to read. At that time the most important school subject was religious instruction and it remained so until a major curriculum adjustment was undertaken in 1919, the starting point of the secularization of Swedish schools. From then on religious instruction was reduced by half, other subjects were introduced, and ‘[f]ostering for national citizenship instead of the Lutheran faith became the task of the school system’ (Hartman 2007: 260). In 1962 another school reform required the subject of Christianity to maintain a ‘neutral’ profile

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<sup>4</sup> See Berglund (2011) for a discussion about ‘transmitting’ religious traditions.

with respect to questions of faith; and in 1969, the subject's name was changed from Christianity to Religious Education (*religionskunskap*), indicating the transition from confessional to non-confessional religious education that prioritized teaching *about* religion—including different religions—from a Study of Religions perspective. From then on Religious Education also became more pupil-centred, focusing increasingly on 'life questions'. The Swedish national curriculum states:

Education in the Swedish school system shall be non-denominational [non-confessional]. The task of the school is to encourage all pupils to discover their own uniqueness as individuals and thereby actively participate in social life by giving of their best in responsible freedom. (Curriculum for the Compulsory School System, the Pre-school Class and the Leisure-time Centre 1994).

The use of the term non-denominational (*icke-konfessionell*) in the above quotation implies that in the Swedish school system religious education is to be presented so that no particular worldview is prioritized and pupils from all cultural, ethnic and religious backgrounds feel comfortable to attend. This neutrality, however, does not extend to what is described as society's 'foundational values', the mediation of which the national curriculum considers a primary educational task. The curriculum states:

The school has the important task of imparting, instilling and forming in pupils those foundational values on which our society is based. The inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable are all values that the school should represent and impart. In accordance with the ethics borne by Christian tradition and Western humanism, this is achieved by fostering in the individual a sense of justice, generosity of spirit, tolerance and responsibility.

In accordance with Sweden's Education Act, the general goals outlined in the above quotation are meant to be achieved in both non-denominational and denominational

settings, and thus the ‘objectivity’ of education is not to be intruded upon by indoctrination or tendentious modes of discourse, regardless of the school’s profile. Schools with confessional profiles can set aside a few hours per week for religious subjects as an extracurricular activity. In the case of Muslim schools, this amounts to one to three hours per week of Islamic religious education. And since there is no national syllabus for such subjects, local syllabi must be written instead. These must also adhere to the national ‘foundational values’.

### **The Establishment of Muslim Schools**

In 1992 Sweden changed its educational policies to allow for a range of private actors to obtain state funding for so-called ‘independent schools’.<sup>5</sup> In 1993 Sweden’s first Muslim school opened in the city of Malmö; to date, that number has increased to fifteen. Of these, nine have been classified as ‘Islamic’ by the Swedish National Agency for Education (see table below) and six have been classified as ‘Swedish-Arabic’ or the like. Because some of the schools characterized as ‘Swedish-Arabic’ provide some sort of IRE—e.g., lessons in the Quran—this study considers them to be ‘Muslim’ as well. Each such Muslim school currently educates between 20 and 250 pupils.

Schools classified as ‘independent’ are generally divided into three distinct profile categories: ‘Denominational’; ‘Waldorf’; and ‘General’. Among the denominational we find the Christian, Jewish and Muslim schools. According to the Education Act, independent schools must open their doors to everyone, regardless of faith, and must be approved by the National Agency for Education. The nature of one denominational school may be extremely different from another. A distinction is often drawn between ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ profiles, depending on the impact that a specific religion has on the profile of the school. Even though a small number of Christian schools and one Jewish school existed in Sweden before the 1990s, the policy change led to a vast increase of denominational schools:

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<sup>5</sup> The word *independent* here refers to the fact that the schools are run independently, i.e. they are run privately, not by the municipality, even though they receive public funding.

	Christian	Muslim	Jewish
Compulsory schools	54	9	3
Upper secondary schools	6	0	0

Table 1: Denominational schools in Sweden (Skolverket 2006)

Although the table only lists schools designated as ‘denominational’ by Sweden’s National Agency for Education, it nonetheless indicates that there are much fewer Muslim schools than Christian. It also shows that Muslim schools remain within the compulsory segment of the Swedish school system, no Muslim upper secondary schools having yet been established (nearly all pupils continue to upper secondary school even though it is not compulsory).

The education offered by all independent schools must have the same basic aims as the education offered by municipal schools, while they can have a religious ‘profile’.<sup>6</sup> This profile often consists of a specific school ethos and additional curricular subjects that are incorporated into the weekly schedule. The aims of the school subjects that are stipulated in the national syllabi also have to be pursued in independent schools, this means that the aims of RE, as a non-confessional school subject, for example, to provide knowledge about different religions, also have to be reached in all schools. At most Muslim schools this is done by separating RE from IRE, where RE is taught together with history and social science by one teacher and IRE by another (Muslim) teacher.

Considering the reasons for establishing Muslim schools in Sweden, a study conducted in 1997 by the Swedish National Agency for Education concluded that certain Muslim parents send their children to Muslim schools because of negatively biased and inaccurate views of Islam in municipal schools and schoolbooks; disregard for common

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<sup>6</sup> Municipal schools might also have a special profile, for example, football, arts or a specific pedagogy. So far though, there are no municipal schools that have chosen (or even tried to) establish a denominational profile.

Islamic rules regarding diet, dress, prayer, chastity, fasting, and so forth; poor religious education by the standards of Islam; insufficient discipline; fear of exposure to narcotics and alcohol; and too great a diversity of immigrant groups in the neighbouring municipal schools. Another important reason concerns the difficulties encountered by these Muslim parents in their interactions with municipal school officials and staffs—interactions that had left them feeling humiliated and alienated. Reportedly, it was such incidents that convinced them that it was impossible to execute their parental responsibilities effectively within the municipal school framework; thus they opted to send their children to a Muslim school instead. A more recent study indicates the same thing: parents choose to send their children to Muslim schools more for purposes of security and well-being than for the purpose of religion although the criticism against the perceived ‘neutral’ position mentioned above also exists (Bunar & Kallstenius 2006). Thus their choice might be seen as one way of avoiding discrimination and obtaining acceptance of difference—i.e., as primarily involving concerns over power of influence and democratic rights. It is impossible to exclude such considerations from any comprehensive discussion regarding Muslim schools in Sweden. Ajagan-Lester (2001) even claims that the establishment of Muslim schools in Sweden might be seen as a reaction against municipal schools as they have only heteronomy and submission to offer to minority pupils. Whether or not one accepts the validity of this reasoning, it is also important to many Muslim parents to find an educational environment where their children can be educated not only *about* Islam via RE textbooks based on a secularized religious studies approach, but also *into* Islam via confessional lessons in which Islam is the norm and the child learns about the ‘good life’ from the Islamic point of view. Choosing education *into* Islam could thus also be understood as opposition to education *into* secularism, which is the ‘neutrality’ that municipal schools are considered to uphold. A surprising circumstance for this discussion is that there are to date no available statistics comparing the performances of Muslim pupils in Muslim and municipal schools, which would have been interesting for the present discussion.

Although, as indicated above, the decision to send one's child to a Muslim school is not always based on the fact that it offers IRE, this extracurricular subject in the school syllabus is nonetheless what formally distinguishes *Muslim* 'free schools'. As will be demonstrated below, its content shows how IRE is formed within the framework and under the jurisdiction of the Swedish school system.

### **Method**

The aim of my fieldwork has been to gather an extensive and diverse collection of information. The first step was to gain access to a number of Muslim schools, which turned out to be far more difficult than I had imagined. The causes of initial resistance appeared to centre upon the ongoing debate over Sweden's denominational schools and the increasing threat felt by Muslims due to the rise of Islamophobia. With particular reference to Muslim schools, two covertly filmed television programmes had raised fears that ill-intentioned guests might bring hidden cameras or other recording devices into the school to further their own agendas (These programmes, titled *I skolans våld* (*In the School's Clutches*) were broadcast on 8 May 2003 and 12 May 2004. The programmes were part of the series *Dokument inifrån*, which examines aspects of Swedish society considered of general interest. The reporter with the hidden camera found that several headmasters were so eager to get pupils enrolled in their school (and thereby get the financial support from the state that is tied to each pupil) that they were prepared to accept claims from parents that were not in line with the national curriculum.

Out of the sixteen schools that I initially contacted I was ultimately able to visit nine. From those nine I eventually selected three. These particular schools were chosen for the study because their IRE lessons were given in Swedish.

Observation mainly took place in IRE classrooms but also in corridors, canteens and in the schoolyard. In the IRE classrooms I sat on a chair located either at the back of the room or next to one of the pupils; from this vantage point I observed what was going on, continuously taking notes. While priority was given to the experiences and

viewpoints of the informants in order to comprehend their culture and religion, it should be acknowledged that their viewpoints are ultimately mediated by me as researcher. The primary focus was on the statements and conduct of the teachers, although I also recorded the questions, answers and reactions of the pupils, as reference points for both the teachers and myself. Interviews have been a necessary complement to observation, since it has been through interviews that informants were able to explain the organization of their teaching and indicate the system of meaning that informed their lessons. The aim of these interviews has been to create a narrative that provides the reader with new insight and simultaneously does justice to the personal expression of each informant's point of view. Questions concerning the teaching behaviour that I had just observed directed the interview process; in this way, observation and interview worked together. My first intention was to tape-record the interviews. From the start, however, it was obvious that the tape recorder would be a cause of distraction and anxiety for teachers and pupils alike.<sup>7</sup> What has helped in this regard is my experience of teaching in a Muslim school.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> One reason for this type of negative reaction is the belief of many of the teachers that the above mentioned television programmes manipulated audio-video footage to misrepresent Muslim school life. Understanding this point of view, I decided to take notes while interviewing and observing, turning these into field descriptions shortly thereafter and then allowing my informants to review these writings to insure that they contained no misunderstandings. This approach turned out to be extremely fruitful since the field notes often became the basis of conversations about what had transpired during the lessons. Within the discipline of ethnography it is often acknowledged that the presence of tape and/or video recorders might discourage informants; see Hammersley and Atkinson (1995:185) and Glaser (1998, Chapter 7) which proffers a number of arguments against the recording of interviews for grounded theory research, the primary one being that since descriptive completeness is not a goal, it is not necessary to record and transcribe interviews.

<sup>8</sup> Between 1999 and 2003 I taught mathematics, Swedish, English, physical education and the natural and social sciences in a Muslim school. Helene Johnson and Mike Castelli have shown that many researchers that have studied Muslim schools in England have lacked knowledge and previous social interaction with this kind of environment. For them 'it is clear that orientalism must be faced head on and that there are important issues here for researchers about the achieving of an objectively informed position'—

### **Islamic History in IRE**

All of the schools that were objects of this study offered IRE as an extracurricular subject one to three hours per week on top of the school subjects, including RE, that are required by the national curriculum. These hours of education were occupied by the teaching of the Quran, Islamic history and Islam-related songs.<sup>9</sup> I will provide some descriptions of how Islamic history is used in IRE, since the ways in which history is used in IRE indicate differences in how Islam is interpreted in relation to Swedish majority society.

At all schools, IRE features the teaching of Islamic history through religious narratives from *hadith*, *sira* and *qissa*. The messages contained within these narratives could be understood in terms of providing Muslim role models; explaining the Quran and thereby establishing the ‘right faith’; and, not least, entertaining the children.

Most narratives selected for use in the classrooms indicate what each teacher considers correct Muslim behaviour, as apparent through the examples of prophets and other important figures from Islamic history where the moral message stands out. For example, Fatme’s approach to teaching is grounded in her view that it is important to avoid creating ‘us-them’ dichotomies between ‘Muslims’ and ‘Swedes’ (or non-Muslims). To avoid such dichotomies, she selects historical narratives that can be related to the contemporary circumstances of her pupils and attempts to show that both Islamic culture and Swedish society regard similar types of behaviour as ‘good’ (Interview with Fatme 20/12/06). Fatme repeatedly emphasizes that ‘Islam is a private matter’, and often contrasts her view with the view she claims is prevailing in the Swedish media; that Islam mixes religion and politics (Interview with Fatme 20/12/06). Her way of talking about Islam as ‘private’ could rather be understood as meaning personal and

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something that has become even more apparent in the aftermath of 9/11; Johnsson and Castelli 2002:38–9.

<sup>9</sup> The remainder of each school’s general schedule consisted of the standard subjects prescribed by the Swedish national curriculum.



resembles the way many secularized Protestants in Sweden would talk about religion. She relates this notion of Islam as ‘private’ (personal) to her choice of narratives, specifically to narratives that contain moral messages that she believes are ‘good for their identity’. She says that ‘in Sweden the choice of behaviour is more up to the individual’, indicating that in other societies this would be more of a collective responsibility. Her choice of narratives can thus be understood in terms of her self-described educational aims: to help pupils to become secure as Muslims and ‘obtain a good foundation for their identity’ as Swedish Muslims (Fatme 19/10/05). The use of narratives to exemplify ideal Muslim conduct points not only to the significance of the past, but also to its relevance for both the present and the future. This could be seen in the selection of narratives that are considered relevant to the situation of Muslim pupils in modern-day Swedish society—e.g., narratives that concern the importance of generosity and good behaviour towards neighbours. This particular use of narratives can be characterized as a way of connecting the ‘macro’ world of Islamic history to the ‘micro’ world of the pupils.

In this connection it is interesting to see that all female teachers (most IRE teachers in Sweden’s Muslim schools are female) acknowledge the scarcity of female role models in the available teaching materials and they have therefore developed specific strategies for dealing with this deficiency; one of these was to identify and introduce narratives about important women in Islamic history. Many of the Islamic narratives that present historical figures as role models are gendered, in the sense that nearly all historical religious stories, regardless of the tradition, involve *men* rather than *women*. All three teachers expressed concern over the paucity of narratives with women as role models and described their attempts to compensate; all of them confirmed the necessity of acknowledging and highlighting the role of women in Islamic history:

Noor: It is important to show strong women; some people forget that (Noor 17/03/05).

Fatme: It is important for the girls to hear about the women that are part of Islamic history; the narratives show the pupils that women have a good position within Islam (Fatme 20/09/05).

Sana: I tell about women in Islam so that the pupils can have female role models, and also to counteract the image they get from the media, which depicts Islam as oppressing women. This is in line with the national curriculum. There are parents that do not know so much about Islam; thus they allow the boys to dominate. (Sana 17/10/05).

Each teacher's choice of narratives determines the manner in which gender is represented to her pupils. In other words, both the choice of a given narrative and the manner in which it is told are related to the way that gender is presented and negotiated in the classroom. In general, however, and despite the teachers' best intentions, most of the narratives they have at their disposal are male-dominated and tend to uphold traditional gender role models (cf. Raudvere 2002:10).

One example of a narrative involving an important woman in Islamic history comes from Noor, who recounts to her fourth-grade class the story of the *karamat* (marvels) made by Nafiza. Noor tells her class that the narrative comes from the book, *Attariq al-mahbub lidukhul al-qulub (The path of the beloved [in order] to enter [the] hearts)*. It can be seen lying on her desk. She explains that the book is about 'narratives, prophets and strong women':

Nafiza was a *waliya*—a friend of God [feminine form]. Her neighbour was a Jewish woman whose daughter happened to be handicapped. The woman asked Nafiza if she could help her daughter. Nafiza made *wudu* and then rubbed her *wudu*-water on the girl's body. The girl became free of her handicap, and both she and her mother became Muslims. (Classroom observation 17/03/05).

Noor defines the word *karamat* as 'fantastic happenings that are not quite on the level of miracles'. She also notes that while 'only prophets can create miracles, both male

(*waliy*) and female (*waliya*) friends of God can create fantastic happenings' (Noor 17/03/05). Noor's belief in the necessity of introducing narratives about women can be understood to mean that since there are many more narratives about men, it is her educational duty to show that there are many significant women in Islamic history. She indicates that by highlighting the religious accomplishments of 'strong' Muslim women she is doing her part to counteract the prevalent image of women as the weaker sex.

Fatme also notes that she uses a special book about women in the Quran to supplement the narratives that are included in her regular teaching materials.<sup>10</sup> This book contains tales involving important women in Islamic history, indicating to her pupils that 'women have good status within Islam' (Fatme 20/09/05). Another reason for the inclusion of these specialized books is mentioned by Sana at the beginning of this section: to counteract the negative picture of Muslim women that dominates Swedish society. This is in keeping with the opinions of Fatme and Noor as well.<sup>11</sup>

Sana supplements her teaching with the book *Tahrir al-mar'a fi 'asr ar-risala* (*The Liberation of Women in the Time of the Message*, i.e. the Prophet's message) by 'Abd al-Halim Abu Shaqqa (1990).<sup>12</sup> She considers the book important because it describes how Muslim women have often been hindered by *sadd al-dharai*, a precautionary principle intended to forestall deeds that, if pursued, might lead to conduct that is not permitted (Izzi Dien 2008). She explains that 'some have used this rule to stop women, while others have misunderstood it. The book is important because it proves that arguments in support of this rule have been frequently misinterpreted.' (Sana 24/10/05).

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<sup>10</sup> I asked Fatme for the title and author of this book, but was told that she keeps it at home and remembers neither its title nor its author. It should be noted, however, that Jesus' mother '*Maryam*' is the only woman named in the Quran; see, for example, *sura al-Maida* (Q 5:110).

<sup>11</sup> To verify the argument that Sweden's impression of Muslim women is predominantly negative, see, for example, Integrationsverket 2006:159–162, which exemplifies Swedish attitudes towards the practice of veiling.

<sup>12</sup> Sana's utilization of a book by Abu Shaqqa is in keeping with her reformist stance (discussed above). See, for example, Roald 2001:133–5.

During my fieldwork, Sana often mentioned misunderstanding or misinterpretation as a primary cause of the circumstances of Muslim women. However, she also mentioned that there was ‘too much talk about men and women and differences’ and considered it more productive to ‘talk about “people” and what they should do’ (Sana 21/10/05). Like the other teachers, Sana often chooses narratives describing Muslim women as strong, as she considers this to be in keeping with the national curriculum (Sana 17/10/05 and 21/11/05). The portion of the national curriculum she refers to states that the equality of women and men is one of the fundamental values upon which our society rests, and that it is the duty of educational institutions to impart this value and instil it in their pupils (Curriculum for the Compulsory School System, the Pre-school Class and the Leisure-time Centre 2006:3).<sup>13</sup>

Comparing statements made by the teachers with my own observations of their classrooms, it appears that Sana has the most explicit strategy for furthering the status of Muslim women. For example, in response to the paucity of teaching materials that depict female images, she utilizes more than just one supplementary book, ordering additional books from abroad and copying their relevant pages for her own and her pupils’ use. One reason for this is that she considers some other pages of the same books to be deficient because they contain few pictures of girls or of boys and girls doing things together (Sana 24/10/05). Since in Swedish society boys and girls participate together in most activities, Sana wants the same principle to be reflected in the images she employs in her classroom. Thus she tends to select books that have been produced in either Jordan or France, since these contain images of Muslims and Christians living together in harmony as well as a good many that depict Muslim girls (Sana 24/10/05). The way the teachers use Islam could be construed not only as a means to argue for the position of women but also as a way (at least on a discursive level) to equate Islam with a public document such as the national curriculum, a strategy that could be understood as a sign of deprivatization (Casanova 1994).

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<sup>13</sup> Note that the national curriculum in Sweden also states that ‘schools are responsible for counteracting traditional gender roles’.

Narratives are also used in IRE to establish the ‘right faith’ in competition with other interpretations of Islam—i.e., the faith that the teachers regard as authentic Islam. Sana believes it is possible for Islam to guide all aspects of life, which she sees as the ‘correct’ way to practise Islam. She explains: ‘There are many common denominators between the Swedish welfare state and Islam—for example, the call to help the poor’ (Sana 12/10/05). The way that she brings this view to bear on her pupils is made clear in the following lesson about *sadaqa* (voluntary alms) and *zakat* (religious tax):

The class talks about the earthquake that just occurred in Pakistan and Sana says: ‘Muhammad said that humanity should be like a body: if there is pain in one part, the other parts cannot feel good. [In the same way], if those in one country are having problems, those in other countries must help them. We teachers are going to collect money to send to the earthquake victims, just as we did to the victims of the tsunami. One can send clothes, money, medicine and other things that are needed, but one should also perform *dua* [the prayer of request]’.

Many pupils join in the discussion, telling about circumstances in which they encountered the poor and their families gave food or money in charity. Sana remarks that it is very good to share with others.

Sana comments upon the stories told by her pupils: ‘Think about two different societies: in one, everyone eats and drinks well and has enough clothes and money—and everyone shares with others; in the other, some are very rich and some are very poor. Where would you want to live?’ (Classroom observation 12/10/05).

She begins to tell a *mathal*: ‘Once there was an old man that had three boys. He had a big farm that produced a great deal of fruits and vegetables. After picking the fruits and vegetables, he always called upon the poor to give them all that was left. But his children thought it would be better to sell what was left so they could

become rich. When the father died, the sons planned to pick all the fruits and vegetables before the sun rose and the poor arrived [to receive their share]. They went in the night and tried to find the garden, but could not because everything had been destroyed. Here Allah gives proof that if you do not share with others, everything will be destroyed. Does anyone know these verses?’ (Classroom observation 12/10/05).

No one answers and Sana goes on to recite and explain the verses herself [they can be found in Q 68:33–34]: ‘As long as they shared with others, Allah gave *baraka* to their farm; but the sons’ did not want to continue their father’s practice and Allah knew this’ (Classroom observation 12/10/05).

Because Sana’s narrative closely resembles that which is found in the Quran, it provides an example of a tale used to bring meaning to the Quran and shows how teachers use narratives from Islamic history as a means of providing explanations for the Quran. Sana explains her attempt to indicate to her pupils that God is just and that caring for the poor is an important virtue. As the lesson continues, Sana attempts to show her pupils how *zakat* can work on a greater societal level. She asks:

Has anyone heard of Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz? After the time of the four caliphs, there was some chaos. After the chaos, people became a little weaker. Umar was young and rich. When he received the responsibility of being caliph, he really started to follow the Prophet Muhammad. He ordered everyone to pay *zakat* and they went out in search of the poor. But there were no poor to be found because everyone was sharing with each other. [Umar] did much for those without any money. He found them jobs and gave them money for their marriages. He also found support persons [*resursperson*] for all those that were handicapped. (Classroom observation (12/10/05).

Sana attempts to link the remote time of caliph Umar II with contemporary Sweden by highlighting aspects of the narrative which are recognizable to her pupils and mirror

features of the modern world. For example, the challenge of finding a job is likely something that Sana's pupils are familiar with, since a significant percentage of their parents remain unemployed—at least according to Sana. They are also likely aware of the extensive costs of getting married: the big wedding, the new home and so forth. The notion of a 'support person' is also something that her pupils can comprehend, since some school children with special needs have support persons of their own.<sup>14</sup> Sana's teaching of this narrative can be viewed as an attempt to link the Islamic pillar *zakat* with Swedish welfare values. It also illustrates how the school context influences the way she tells the narrative.

During our post-lesson interview, Sana explains that it is important for the children to see the link between Islam and the Swedish welfare state, e.g. by comparing national welfare benefits to Umar b. Abd al-Aziz's support for the poor (Sana 07/12/06). As a teacher of Muslim children, Sana thus appears committed to finding points of similarity, agreement and harmony between Islam and Swedish society, since it would be just as easy to find points of difference, disagreement and discord. Clearly, the eighth-century reign of Umar b. Abd al-Aziz could have supplied numerous negative contrasts, had that been Sana's aim.

Sana's presentation of the narrative of Umar b. Abd al-Aziz gives Islam a social meaning, since his rule is proffered as a model of good Islamic governance. Speaking of Islam in societal and political terms is generally indicative of Muslims that are part of one or another reformist tradition (Larsson 2006). This could, on the one hand, be understood as an example of how Islam is brought into the public sphere to participate in defining and setting boundaries between the private and public sphere, but on the other, since Sana brings forward the similarities with Swedish society, not the differences, a border between the two is not created (Casanova 1994:6).

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<sup>14</sup> In Sweden, handicapped children are supplied with state-paid resource persons to help them in school.

### **Islamic History in its Swedish Context**

When teaching Islamic history through narrative traditions, all the three schools emphasize ethics, especially regarding how ‘good Muslims’ should conduct themselves in society—using pedestrian crossings, considering the needs of neighbours, respecting the beliefs of others, and so forth. The teachers consider the narratives to be valuable references when deciding what is right or wrong in their lives.

Narratives are also used to explain the Quran and convey theological messages, and could thus be seen as teachers’ attempts to establish the ‘right faith’ with reference to a number of currently debated issues—both in Sweden and globally—concerning the degree to which Islam should guide all aspects of life, gender equality, and so forth. Their choices also express different ways of relating to authority, i.e. whose interpretation should be chosen; for example, that of established scholars or the teacher’s own interpretation. Each teacher’s specific selection of narratives as well as the manner in which these are utilized and explained in the classroom brings out differences in interpretive traditions.

The articulated desire to address the ‘present situation of the pupils’ took a variety of forms among the studied teachers. Certain narratives also had the aim of counterbalancing the negative image of Islam seen to exist in the greater Swedish society, a selection that points to the fact that the teachers consider this image troublesome for the pupils. The selection of narratives that depict important women in Islamic history, for example, can be viewed as an attempt by teachers to provide examples for children to counter the presumption that women hold a low position in Islam.

Several of the choices of content at the schools express the teachers’ view that Swedish Muslims, as a cultural and religious minority, must exhibit virtue in relation to the non-Muslim majority. It should be noted, however, that the non-Muslims to whom pupils are encouraged to behave well towards are invariably Christians or Jews, i.e. ‘believers’; the possibility of encountering non-believers never really arises in classroom



discussions. Since a large part of the Swedish population are self-declared 'agnostics' and many are atheists, this shows that in spite of the best intentions to connect IRE with Swedish social reality, that reality itself is perceived through a peculiarly Muslim lens.

### **Concluding Discussion**

I will now return to the questions posed in the beginning and discuss how we can understand Islamic history as used in IRE as a lived classroom practice in relation to its Swedish context, and whether Islam in Sweden is following the same overall secularizing pattern as the national church, or developing into a de-privatized public religion in Casanova's sense.

In all the studied schools IRE is articulated by the teachers as a subject that guides pupils *into* Islam by showing them the best possible way to live their lives as Muslims. In most cases, the teachers describe the overriding aim of their instruction in similar terms: to enable pupils to become 'good Muslims' in Swedish society; to become acquainted with Islam's history and religious texts; and to become familiar with Islamic practice. Moreover, all the teachers express similar concerns about the 'negative image' of Islam in Swedish society and also express that learning about Islamic history is essential to their pupils' future as Swedish Muslims. They also consider it to be a risk that the pupils might feel lost in Swedish society if they do not have a fixed ethical point of reference when they have to make decisions in life. For these teachers, this point of reference is Islam. But Swedish IRE classrooms potentially contain teachers and pupils of various ethnic backgrounds belonging to different theological traditions that practice Islam in a variety of ways. Consequently, the same questions that all the teachers agree are important are addressed slightly differently in different classrooms.

The use of Islamic history indicates that discussion on matters such as 'authentic Islam' and what aspects of life Islam should influence are part of the teaching that is offered in Swedish Muslim schools. The teachers themselves express a desire to keep within the limits of Islamic laws (*sharia*), however, to varying degrees, each can be seen to press for change. On the one hand, existing interpretations and previous opinions of renowned

Islamic scholars are employed to account for educational choices and the form of Islam that is brought forward in the classrooms; on the other hand, these interpretations and opinions function to restrict those choices, as do the 'foundational' values of Sweden's national curriculum. It should be noted in this connection that adapting the content of IRE is not a matter of inventing new interpretations or Islamic traditions; it is a matter of shifting perspectives on what in the common Islamic tradition is considered to be fundamental, essential and relevant. In this study, these shifts are often based on each teacher's assessment of what ethics and faith are 'required' for Muslim children within the framework of Swedish society. This demonstrates how tradition, local school context, situational perceptions and globally/nationally debated issues merge to affect the content of IRE, and thereby the type of Islam that is promoted in these classes.

It is well known that teachers necessarily interpret the 'foundational' values of the national curriculum differently, depending on personal background. Concerning these Muslim teachers, this might include experiences of socio-cultural isolation and discrimination, and of having your religion misrepresented in the media and certain books. This study shows how teachers attempt to counterbalance and redress these experiences by encouraging the children to develop feelings of connectedness to both Islamic traditions and Swedish society, by referring the content of IRE to both contexts. Other content-related decisions were described as necessary adaptations in response to the goals and requirements of the national curriculum as well as the pupils' situation in Sweden. In this regard, it appeared to be in response to lived classroom circumstances and teacher-pupil interactions—the 'acute' educational context—that adaptations were apparent. These adaptations, which appear as ordinary classroom dialogues, teacher statements and real-time choices, carry the potential of eventually leading to subtle shifts in interpretation regarding such matters as the role of Muslim women, etc.

The endeavour of various groups and individuals to gain space for their particular understanding of Islam is of significance because competing opinions exist about a number of relevant issues: e.g., the degree to which Islam should guide the lives of adherents; the manner in which Muslim minorities should interact with the majority

society; attitudes towards Western cultural expressions and values; the status and role of women, etc. One way of characterizing the competition between disparate voices within a religious tradition is as an internal struggle for space; but one can conceive of a type of external struggle as well—one in which articulations are primarily intended to sway the opinions and attitudes of the majority society. Since Sweden reformed its educational policies in 1992 to make it possible for a diversity of religious actors to obtain state funding for independent schools, the emerging schools have created a community standing and voice for minority traditions that provides one way of engaging in an external struggle for space, a struggle that tends to promote the development of Islam rather as a de-privatized religion, with Muslim schools being visible institutions within Swedish society, afforded the opportunity of entering into dialogue with majority institutions as equivalents and, by so doing, creating a space for outside recognition of their particular notion of ‘authentic Islam’.

This brings forward the role of the secular majority society for the outcome of the question of the de-privatization of Islam in Scandinavia that is the subject of this volume. The tendency to focus on faith and ethics as well as connecting to a discourse of Islam as a private matter could be construed in relation to what questions are considered to belong to religion not only by the secular majority society but also within the Church of Sweden, the former state church. This tendency encapsulates the secular assumption that religion belongs to the private sphere not the public. In one way this view creates a paradox in relation to those who argue that Muslim schools do not belong in a secular society since it gives the same answer as secularism to the question about where there is room for religion, i.e. not in public sphere (school), thereby moving religion away from the public realm. But although there is a discourse concerning Islam as a private matter among Swedish Muslims, thereby following the thesis of ‘privatization’ of Islam as a step towards secularization, it is generally not accepted by the majority society since Islam as private (functioning as the faith and ethics of individuals) still tends to be visible in the public sphere in ways other than Protestant-Lutheran Christianity (food, certain clothing, holidays, *schools*, etc). In this sense Islam

tends to be viewed as deprivatized even though it to a certain extent is not articulated in this way.

When the Swedish national public school curriculum states that it does not *in theory* prioritize one religion before any other, but *in reality* tends to exclude looks and behaviours related to other worldviews, it pushes people into creating their own institutions. As has been brought forward in the introduction to this volume, despite the general tendency to view religion as a private matter and mainly concerned with faith and morality, many Swedes are Protestant in terms of actions but not in terms of beliefs, which for example could be viewed in the general neglect of holidays other than Protestant Christian ones as well as in attitudes towards clothing. In this way the establishment of Muslim schools in Sweden thereby confirms the notion that there is no room for Islam in the vast majority of schools, which are not religious.

The fact that many Muslim schools have been established in response to bad experiences at municipal schools involving feelings of humiliation and exclusion, with parents having been treated like outsiders, also points in a direction that could be understood as if Islam when held as a private matter is not accepted, since the private/individual choice of food, clothing, celebration of festivities are actions that have been criticized or not accepted by teachers or school personnel and thereby caused these parents and pupils to feel excluded of the sphere of belonging and participation. For these reasons, they have occasionally decided to establish their own school. One way of understanding the establishment of independent Muslim schools in Sweden is, as mentioned above, as an outgrowth of two trends: the need for tolerant, understanding and supportive environments on the one hand, and the demand for recognition, equal opportunity and full participation on the other. It could be understood as a way for Muslims to take power over what is stated in the national curriculum: ‘all parents will feel able to send their children to school confident that they will not be prejudiced in favour of a particular view’ (Curriculum for the Compulsory School System, the Pre-school Class and the Leisure-time Centre 2006:4). Since the existence of Muslim schools has created a good deal of debate in the Swedish society, the reaction could be

interpreted as a sign that according to the majority society this is not considered the 'right' way for a minority to take action over education.

One could of course argue that the very fact that many more Christian than Muslim schools exist suggests the opposite, but there is an important difference. The establishment of Christian schools seems to have more to do with what parents want to add to their children's schooling than the Muslim ones, where parents rather state that they want to get away from a situation where they feel humiliated and excluded.

Not surprisingly there is no simple answer to the question whether Islam in Sweden is following the same overall secularizing pattern as the national churches, or whether it is developing into a 'de-privatized public religion'. In relation to the study presented in this chapter I claim that to a large extent the understandings of Islam that guide the content of IRE in these Muslim schools are following the Swedish secularization pattern, shown for example by the fact that the teachers repeatedly refer to faith and ethics as what signifies Muslim life in Sweden. Even though there are implicit references to Islam's potential for guiding society as well as politics made in IRE, in the classrooms where I have been, this is done with reference to similarities to Swedish society, not as an alternative societal order which instead would indicate a de-privatization.

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### **TV Programmes**

*I skolans våld* and *I skolans våld 2* (*In the school's clutches* and *In the school's clutches 2*), broadcast on 8 May 2003 and 12 May 2004 at SVT [Swedish Television], directed by Evin Rubar.

### **Internet**

Skolverket 2006:

[http://www3.skolverket.se/friskola03/1\\_sok\\_i\\_be\\_p.aspx?skolkategori=GR&inr](http://www3.skolverket.se/friskola03/1_sok_i_be_p.aspx?skolkategori=GR&inr)

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# The State and the Imams: Summary of a Government Report on Training Programmes for Imams in Sweden<sup>1</sup>

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## *Abstract*

*The aim of this article is to show how the issue of imam training programmes was analysed and discussed in the official Swedish report Staten och imamerna. Religion, integration, autonomi (The State and the imams: religion, integration, autonomy) (SOU 2009:52), issued by the Swedish Ministry of Education in 2009. The Swedish report is here described with reference to contemporary debates and discussions about integration, security and equal civil rights in Europe. The enquiry came to the conclusion that the Swedish state should not support a specific training programme for imams. The Swedish state should be confessionally neutral, and to start a specific training for imams at university level and on state initiative would conflict with confessional neutrality; in addition, to single out Muslims would signal that Muslims are considered to be a problem group more in need of training than other religious (especially other migrant religious) groups.*

After the 9/11 atrocities in New York and Washington, the bombs in the Attocha station in Madrid (11 March 2004), the murder of Theo van Gogh in Amsterdam (2 November 2004), and the attacks on the London transportation systems (7 July 2005) a growing number of governments in Western Europe have become interested in the training of

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all information and data in this article are taken from *Staten och imamerna. Religion, integration, autonomi*, SOU 2009:52). The whole report can be downloaded from <http://www.sweden.gov.se/sb/d/11358/a/127317>.

imams (for an overview of this question, see, Drees & van Koningsveld 2008; Larsson 2009; Schepelern Johansen 2005). The overarching questions could be formulated in the following way: ‘Do imams contribute to integration, peace and harmony, or do they foster division and hatred of non-Muslims in Europe?’ But even though the training of imams has recently been connected with the question of security and the growing fear of terrorism in Europe, significantly this issue is also closely related to the questions of integration and equal rights for all citizens, no matter what their ethnic, social and religious backgrounds.

Before I discuss the Swedish enquiry into imams, it is worth remembering that imams have actually received training in Europe since long before the rise of modern terrorism in the name of Islam. Imam training institutions have, for example, existed in Bosnia-Herzegovina since the sixteenth century, they also received training during the Second World War in Nazi Germany, and a more recent example is the growing number of Pakistani and Bangladeshi Muslim communities that have founded training institutions for imams in the UK since the 1970s (see Drees & van Koningsveld 2008; Gilliat-Ray 2006; Larsson 2009; Schepelern Johansen 2005). Despite the existence of these institutions of higher Muslim learning, it is clear that most Western governments were uninterested in the education of imams prior to the rise of terrorism in the West.

With the terror attacks on European soil, mentioned above, it became painfully clear to a mounting number of Europeans that the great majority of the terrorists involved had actually been born and raised in the West. The crucial question was how to combat radicalization and extremism in Europe. Public discussion became heated, and populist parties across the continent argued that migration, Islam and Muslims were the root problem and that Islam was incompatible with so-called Western norms and values. Muslims were often portrayed as Trojan horses disloyal to their host countries. Other voices argued that the problem was segregation, racism and frustration among migrant groups (see Gilliat-Ray 2006; Haddad & Balz 2008). It was also common to analyse terrorist acts as a response to Western policies in the Muslim world (especially in Iraq, but also in Palestine, Chechnia and Kashmir). The provocation of and hatred for Islam

and Muslims was also allegedly illustrated by the Muhammad cartoon crisis and the Danish government's unwillingness to listen to the Muslims. Without going into any detail, it is evident that the post-9/11 public discussion has been and still is very emotional and heated when it comes to the question of Islam, Muslims, multiculturalism, migration and European identities (see, for example, Amnå 2010; Haddad & Balz 2008; Klausen 2004; Larsson 2009; Nielsen 2005).

One response to the political turmoil that followed the incidents and discussions described above was the attempt to set up specific training programmes for imams in order to make them (i.e. the imams) more 'efficient' in combating violent and extreme interpretations of Islam that would support or create so-called parallel societies. On the one hand, this support for Islamic education by Western governments can be interpreted as a right given to Muslims. As citizens they should have equal opportunities to uphold their own traditions and values as long as these do not conflict with Western legal traditions (Amnå 2010; Larsson 2010). However, it is also evident that education can function as an instrument for control and influence. To put it in the words of Jonathan Birt (2006), the debate was often related to the question of 'good' and 'bad' imams. A 'good' imam was generally interpreted as an imam who was loyal to Western governments and was willing to function as a tool for integration and harmony. The 'bad' imam was primarily one who failed to pay any attention to these questions and whose interest was mainly focused on Islamic theology. In the worst case his primary focus is on Islamic interpretations that uphold values that hinder integration and that are contrary to Western legal systems (Birt 2006).

Against this backdrop, a number of governmental and non-governmental initiatives have recently been set up to meet the demand for the education of imams in Europe. These programmes have all been formulated and adjusted to fit local regulations and to meet the relationships between the state and religious bodies in the countries concerned. Without any attempt to make an empirical study of the educational systems set up for imam training programmes in Europe, it is clear that most initiatives and debates have taken place in the Netherlands and Germany. The existing programmes in these

countries have been analysed, supported and criticized in both public media and academic publications. But the aim of my paper is not to outline the European discussion of imam training programmes or to present local differences in general (for such a discussion and analysis, see Drees & van Koningsveld 2008; Larsson 2009; Schepelern Johansen 2005)). The specific contents of these initiatives and their historical roots in classical Islamic higher learning are not the topics of this paper (on this discussion, see, for example, Hefner & Zaman 2007). My aim is rather to show how the issue of imam training programmes was analysed and discussed in the official report *Staten och imamerna. Religion, integration, autonomi* (The State and the Imams: Religion, Integration, Autonomy), issued by the Ministry of Education in Sweden in 2009 (SOU 2009). Contrary to the above initiatives, the Swedish government has so far rejected the idea of specific training programmes for imams at Swedish universities. It is important to stress that the government is not opposed to Muslims starting their own training institutions (confessional or non-confessional) or taking part in relevant courses at universities and other academic institutions.

Before I present the arguments employed in the governmental report, the reader should know that I took part in the enquiry as an expert on Islam and Muslims in Sweden. The official report was well received by both academics and governmental and non-governmental organizations given the opportunity to comment on it (for more details, see Larsson 2010). That said, it should also be emphasized that some individual Muslim leaders, as well as the then Minister of Education in Sweden, Lars Leijonborg, were not happy with the report's conclusions (see Larsson 2010). Some Muslims, for example, were disappointed that the Swedish state was unwilling to pay for a training programme for imams that would cover the students' costs and salaries for the imams. However, this criticism was not shared by all imams, and the majority seemed to be content with the final conclusions and the work of the enquiry. The Minister of Education expressed his belief that imams were still in need of a special training programme to prepare them to work in Swedish society and uphold so-called Swedish values (see Larsson 2010), but he too accepted the conclusions of the enquiry.

## **The Background**

Besides the obvious fact that the Swedish government was aware of the ongoing European discussions on imam training programmes, the incentive to commission an official enquiry came from the Ministry of Education and Culture, which had been approached by Muslim groups asking whether it would be possible to support a specific training programme that would make it easier for imams to work more efficiently in Sweden (SOU 2009:15). The Muslim groups that had been in contact with government bodies had, among many other things, pointed out that Muslim religious leaders (i.e. imams) can both support and hinder integration. If they are not well educated, they warned, imams have the potential to become a problem for society, but if they are part of the social system, then they have the great potential to foster peaceful coexistence and harmony and to facilitate integration. In order to consider both the possibility and the need for imams in Sweden to be educated, the Minister of Education, Lars Leijonborg, commissioned an official report on this question. The enquiry, conducted between 22 May 2008 and 1 June 2009, was to focus on the following:

- To map and analyse the need for the training of imams in Sweden that had been pointed out by Muslim groups and organizations,
- To describe and analyse the needs that imams ask for when it comes to language training, theology and knowledge about Swedish society.
- To investigate whether the educational programmes that exist in Sweden can meet the needs of the imams and whether they could be adjusted to meet this demand.
- To describe how other European states have handled the so-called imam question.<sup>1</sup>

The enquiry was led and supervised by Professor Erik Amnå, Professor of Political Science at Örebro University, Sweden.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Kommittédirektiv: Utbildning för imamer*, Dr. 2008:66. Retrieved from <http://www.ud.se/sb/d/108/a/105784>. Also published in SOU 2009: 111–15.

### **The Investigation**

In order to answer the questions raised above, it was necessary to collect information on the situation of imams in Sweden. Three methods were used to collect the material for the report.

As an initial procedure, it was necessary to collect quantitative data on the number of individuals who were working as imams in Sweden, their training background, whether they were interested in a possible training programme and what this programme should include. In order to contact as many imams as possible, the Swedish government body Nämnden för statligt stöd till trossamfund (Commission for Government Support to Faith Communities, SST) was contacted to help the enquiry contact Islamic organizations. When the report was written, SST was able to give contact information concerning 181 Islamic organizations and mosques in Sweden that had received state grants via SST. These organizations were contacted, and the imam of each was asked to fill out information about his training background, the number of hours he worked as an imam during a regular week, and whether he was interested in a training programme for imams being set up in Sweden. Of the 121 responses that were returned, it was clear that most individuals working as imams in Sweden have a long training background from a number of different countries, that a large majority only worked as imams in their free time and that they also had other jobs to support themselves and their families. Most of the respondents were interested in and positive about a Swedish imam training programme, but they were mainly interested in improving their knowledge of the Swedish language, the history of the country and family counselling techniques; most were not interested in an academic, non-confessional study of religion in general or of Islam in particular (SOU 2009: 38–48, 117–21).

As a second method, meetings were set up with both Muslim and non-Muslim interest groups in society in towns and cities including Uppsala, Stockholm, Örebro, Göteborg and Malmö. Meetings with representatives of municipalities, interest groups (for

example, the Church of Sweden), educational institutions (for example, universities), the Muslim vocational training institution Ibn Rushd<sup>1</sup> and government bodies were also organized in 2009. A research meeting was also conducted in Stockholm with experts from Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark and Norway. The speakers from municipalities and universities were invited to give their opinions about imam training programmes in Europe (SOU 2009:48–53, 123–4). It was very important to organize different meetings with various representatives, and the enquiry had to be transparent and open for dialogue and invite the participation of as many groups and individuals as possible.

As a third method, we (i.e. Erik Amnå and the two secretaries to the enquiry) tried to meet as many imams as possible, and approximately twenty meetings with representatives of Sunni, Shia and Ahmadiyya Muslims were organized (SOU 2009:123–4). These meetings were informal and the aim was to collect information and to discuss with imams the possible pros and cons of the setting up of a Swedish imam-training programme. At the end of the work of the enquiry a large meeting with imams from the whole country was organized in Stockholm in order to inform them about the work and to give them the opportunity to discuss and comment on the final conclusions.

### **Conclusions**

On the basis of the information and data collected and the meetings with imams and other counterparts mentioned above, the enquiry came to the following conclusions (see SOU 2009:81–109). Even though it could be important to support imams in their work for the integration and participation of Muslims in society, it was felt to be against the principles of the state to support any one specific religious group. The Swedish state should be confessionally neutral, and to start a specific training for imams could also be difficult since it would send a signal that Muslims are considered a problem group more in need of training than other religious (especially other migrant religious) groups. To

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<sup>1</sup> For this non-governmental institution see *Ibn Rushd – ett nytt studieförbund. En utvärdering av Ibn Rushds väg till statsbidragsberättigat studieförbund*. Folkbildningsrådet utvärderar No. 1 2008.

set up an imam training programme could even fuel Islamophobia and hatred for Muslims in Swedish society. Furthermore, it is also wrong for the state to stress the importance of imams. The state should rather emphasize that different government bodies and municipalities are free to start training programmes on their own if they think that imams are in need of better training to be able to participate and work in institutions such as, for example, hospitals, prisons and other social services.

It was also evident that the imams and other Muslim representatives who participated in the enquiry were not interested in receiving training in Islamic theology or religious studies that were taught by non-Muslim academics (i.e. lecturers in religious studies at Swedish universities) and that most of them were reluctant to borrow money for this kind of training. The imams in the enquiry were also unable to present *any* alternative to a training programme, and it would be impossible for the Swedish state to start several programmes that, for example, paid attention to different Islamic law schools.

It was also pointed out that the existing European initiatives in Germany and the Netherlands had not been successful in solving internal tensions within and between different Muslim groups. In general the enquiry found that most European initiatives had suffered from low support from the Muslim community and that they had not been able to solve the problems of integration and participation in society faced by most imams in Europe. It was also argued that the existing European imam training programmes had been unable to reach out to those imams who were in greatest need of training. Imams holding radical, violent or anti-Western opinions were unlikely to attend these programmes.

In conclusion it was stressed rather that the state should improve and support the existing training systems that were available at universities and other academic institutions to help imams acquire a better knowledge of the Swedish language and of Swedish society in general. No imam training programme was going to solve the problems of the Muslim community, and in the worst case scenario it could even be used as an excuse for Islamophobia and discrimination against Muslims. The Swedish



state should rather strive for equality and confessional neutrality and support freedom of religion. Professor Erik Amnå, who was responsible for consultation with imams in Sweden as part of the enquiry discussed in this article, points to the future when he stresses that Swedish bureaucrats have to learn more about democracy and multiculturalism. He writes:

To begin with, the more or less hidden tradition of a partial religious embedding of public institutions has to be publicly scrutinised and replaced by the principle of the fair, equal and confessional neutral treatment of all citizens. Since minority and migration groups in the Swedish context are substantially identical, welfare policies must be used to wipe out the differences that cause particular harm to them, primarily due to their lack of socioeconomic resources. Furthermore, to strengthen diversity and pluralism within the common constitutional framework of values, civil society organisations as well as government institutions have to realise and value the fact that their cooperative interdependence necessitates mutual independence. Tendencies towards subordination and colonisation have to be countered. Consequently, educational institutions must be rewarded with continuous support by bringing young and old citizens together jointly to reflect, review and reshape those common values that are necessary to keep societies together, as well as those values that are necessary to keep societies plural with autonomy in all other respects. (Amnå 2010:21).

However, when the enquiry's report was presented on 1 June 2009, the then Minister of Education, Lars Leijonborg, said that he 'respected' the conclusions that were presented in the report, but he still believed that imams in Sweden were in need of training (Larsson 2010). Nonetheless the government bodies and other interest groups that were given an opportunity to respond to the enquiry were in general positive (for further references, see Larsson 2010), though at the time of writing this summary, discussion about a Swedish imam training programme is non-existent. Some Muslim groups have expressed the ambition to start a kind of training programme for imams, but this attempt

is still very preliminary, and there is no massive demand for a training programme among Swedish Muslims at the moment.

In analysing the work of the Swedish imam enquiry, it is evident that the discussion about the possibility of starting an imam training programme in Sweden was also greatly coloured by the fact that the former state Church of Sweden has established a new relationship with the Swedish state. Since 2000 Sweden has no longer had a state church, and the government is therefore more eager to stress that all religious institutions and bodies should be treated equally. To start an imam training programme with confessional components would have been a clear break with this development, and the enquiry therefore stressed that the state should remain neutral when it comes to confessional matters and religious belief. From this point of view the final results and recommendations of the enquiry clearly illustrate how the Swedish government is striving to make a clear separation between church (religion) and state. Departments of religious studies at Swedish universities also received criticism from the Swedish national agency for higher education in 2010/2011 for not making a clear distinction between confessional beliefs and the academic study of religion when it comes to courses in religious studies at Swedish universities. This is yet another illustration of the fact that the Swedish state is trying to maintain a strict separation between church and state. Accordingly the imam enquiry felt it would be a move in the wrong direction to make possible confessional Islamic religious education in the universities. Besides the fact that most imams would be unlikely to agree on any *one* imam training programme capable of uniting all branches of Muslims and that they were uninterested in religious training given by non-Muslims, it is evident that the enquiry was informed by the government's attempt to separate church (and religion generally) from the state.

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