UMMAH IN THE NORTH ATLANTIC:

The community of Muslims in Iceland

Kristján Þór Sigurðsson

Thesis for the degree of PhD
in Anthropology

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Ágrip

Þessi ritgerð fjallar um samfélag múslíma á Íslandi, innbyrðis tengsl þess sem og samskipti við íslenskt þjóðfélag og stofnanir þess. Staða þessa samfélags er sett í sögulegt og pólitískt samhengi og einkum þá orðræðu sem varð áberandi eftir 11. September 2001, þar sem viðhorf Vesturlanda til múslíma, íslam og hins svokallaða múslímska heims, tóku í vaxandi mæli á sig neikvæðan blæ. Þetta lýsti sér m.a. í aukinni andúð gegn múslímum í vestrænum ríkjum, þar sem hugtakið íslamófóbía varð áberandi í opinberri orðræðu. Hið fámenna samfélag múslíma á Íslandi hefur ekki farið varhluta af þessari orðræðu, en hún varð samt fyrst áberandi í kjölfarið á úthlutun lóðar til moskubyggingar, en fyrir þann tíma höfðu and-múslímsk viðhorf á Íslandi fyrst og fremst verið innflutt erlendis frá, þar sem ekki var hægt að heimfæra þessi viðhorf til atvika á Íslandi. Fram að úthlutun lóðarinnar var samfélag múslíma á Íslandi nær ósýnilegt og þess vegna þurfti að flytja neikvæða umfjöllun erlendis frá og tengja þá neikvæðni múslímum á Íslandi.

Megin markmið ritgerðarinnar er að sýna fram á stöðu samfélags múslíma á Íslandi útfrá þeirra eigin sjónarhóli og setja hana í hnattrænt, sögulegt og pólitískt samhengi og greina frá félagslegum, menningarlegum og trúarlegum þáttum í því samhengi. Rannsóknin byggir á etnógrafískri þáttökuaðferð, opnum viðtölum og óformlegum samræðum á vettvangi, sem og á fjölmiðlarýni og opinberri orðræðu um þennan þjóðfélagshóp á Íslandi. Helstu kenningalegu áherslur snúa að félagslegum og menningarlegum margbreytileika, samskiptum minnihlutahópa við meirihlutasamfélagið og um skörum margbreytilegra sjálfumleika í flóknu félagslegu og menningarlegu umhverfi.

Í ritgerðinni skoða ég skipulag hins múslímska samfélags á Íslandi, trúfélög og þann starfa sem þar á sér stað og samskipti þessara félaga innbyrðis. Ég greini frá samskiptum þessara trúfélaga við nokkrar íslenskar stofnanir tengdar ríkinu, og þar sést að samfélag múslíma á Íslandi er í töluvert miklum formlegum og óformlegum samskiptum við bæði veraldlegar og trúarlegar stofnanir og félög. Ég beini sjónum að því hvað það felur í sér að vera múslími, hvað múslímskur sjálfumleiki er, með orðum þátttakenda minna, og hvernig sá þáttur skarast við sjálfumleika tengda þjóðerni, uppruna og margskonar menningarlegum þáttum. Ég geri grein fyrir trúarlegum orðræðum meðal þátttakenda minna, trúarlegu áhrifavaldi í eins fámennu trúarlegu samfélagi eins og á Íslandi, sem og trúarlegum athöfnum, sem höfundur tók þátt í. Spurt er hvort hægt sé að tala um eitthvað sérstakt íslenskt íslam en samkvæmt athugunum höfundar og ummæla þátttakenda er það ekki tilfellið. Hluti af umræðunni um trúarlega sjálfsmynd er um íslenska trúskiptinga, Íslendinga sem hafa tekið íslamstrú og um hverskonar félagsleg og menningarleg umskipti það felur í sér. Einnig er varpað ljósi á menningarlega og félagslega þætti sem snúa bæði að íslensku þjóðfélagi og félagslegum og trúarlegum hefðum múslíma og íslam, sem hefur margvíslegar birtingarmyndir.

Að lokum er fjallað um orðræður og umræður sem urðu áberandi í íslensku samfélagi, einkum meðal opinberra aðila úr stjórnmálum og fjölmiðlaheimi. Þar lýsi ég og greini fjölmiðlaumræðu í kjölfar moskumálsins svokallaða, í kjölfar úthlutunar lóðar fyrir mosku í Reykjavík 2013, sem varð áberandi um skeið, þar sem and-múslímskum hugmyndum og viðhorfum var gefið vind undir vængi, sem var í fyrsta sinn sem íslamófóbía byggðist á innlendum atburðum og aðstæðum, en áður höfðu slíkar hugmyndir einkum verið endurunnar úr erlendri umræðu, einkum frá miðlum á Norðurlöndum. Þessi orðræða mótaði ákveðnar neikvæðar staðalímyndir um múslíma og íslam, sem stönguðust á við sjálfsskilning múslímanna sjálfra, það sem kalla má baráttuna um sjálfumleikann. Af þessu má sjá að þessi ritgerð fjallar að miklu leyti um sjálfumleika múslíma á Íslandi og baráttu þeirra við að fá að vera það sem þeir eru, ekki það sem aðrir ákveða að þeir séu. Þetta er sett í sögulegt og pólitískt samhengi, þar sem oríentalískir undirtónar um „okkur“ og „hina“ eru nær alltaf til staðar, og hvernig það birtist á margvíslegan hátt í hinum flóknu samskiptum múslíma á Íslandi, bæði innan samfélags þeirra sem og við samfélagið „fyrir utan“. Þessi samskipti eru margvísleg, ekki bara neikvæð, en tortryggni í garð múslíma ristir samt ekki djúpt í íslensku samfélagi, þegar á reynir, eins og moskumálið leiddi í ljós. Rannsóknin varpar ljósi á samfélag múslíma á Íslandi, stöðu þess og tengsl við íslenskt þjóðfélag, sem framlag til að bæta samskipti ólíkra hópa á Íslandi.

Abstract

This dissertation concerns the community of Muslims in Iceland. The position of this community is placed in political and historical contexts and in particular within the discourses following the 9/11 attacks, where the approach of the West toward Muslims, Islam and the so-called Muslim world was increasingly negative. This manifested itself in growing antipathy toward Muslims in the Western societies, where Islamophobia became increasingly conspicuous in the public domain. The small community of Muslims in Iceland has not escaped this development, with such discourses making their way into the public domain, especially following the allotment of a plot of land for a mosque. Before that, anti-Muslim sentiments had mainly been based on news and discourses from foreign media.

The main goal of this dissertation is to demonstrate the position of the Muslim community in Iceland from their own point of view and place it in a global, historical and political context, and to describe the social, cultural and religious factors relating to that context. The research is based on ethnographic fieldwork, participant-observation with semi-structured interviews and informal conversations in the field. Also, textual overview and analysis of media discussions and public utterances concerning the Muslim community in Iceland play an important part of the data. The main theoretical emphasis is on social and cultural diversity, asymmetrical relations between minority groups and majority society and theories concerned with the intersection of diverse identities in a complex social and cultural environment.

I look at the organisation of the Muslim community in Iceland, the religious associations and the social and religious activities, as well as the internal relations between the associations. I account for the relations of the Muslim associations with Icelandic institutions linked to the Icelandic state, demonstrating that the Muslims in Iceland have important relations and co-operations with both secular and religious institutions in Iceland. In the dissertation I look at what it means to be a Muslim, what Muslim identity might be, as understood by my participants, and how this identity intersects with national and cultural identities and feelings of belonging. I examine the religious discourses among my participants, discuss religious authority in this small but diverse community in Iceland, as well as describing some religious rituals and practices which I participated in. I ask if it is possible to define a specific Icelandic Islam? According to my own observations and the views of my participants, that is in fact impossible. An important part of the discussion of religious identity concerns Icelandic converts, who have embraced Islam and the social and cultural changes that it entails, the light it casts upon some social and cultural aspects relevant to Icelandic society, as well as to the social and religious traditions of Muslims and Islam.

Finally, I discuss discourses and debates which emerged in the public domain among some politicians and the press, following the aforementioned mosque affair, where anti-Muslim sentiments gained momentum, which was the first time that such sentiments emerged from the local context in Iceland, instead being imported from foreign media, mainly from other

Nordic countries. These discourses formed negative stereotypes about Muslims and Islam, images that contradicted the identities and sense of self of the Muslims themselves, which could be seen as a battle of identities and identity politics. Therefore, this dissertation looks in important ways at identities of Muslims in Iceland and their struggle to be able to be who they are and how they see themselves, instead of being stigmatised by others. This is positioned in a political and historical context, where Orientalist undertones of "us" and "them" are always close, and it looks at the diverse manner in which that dynamic operates and the complex relations of Muslims in Iceland, both internal and external, to the society "out there". These relations are complex on multiple levels, and not always negative, but the underlying suspicion toward Muslims and Islam is never far from the surface, as the so-called mosque affair demonstrated. This research is meant to shed light on the community of Muslims in Iceland, their relations with and position in Icelandic society, and to contribute to improving the relations between the various and diverse groups who inhabit Iceland, the island in the middle of the Atlantic.

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Last, but not least, this thesis would never have seen the light of day without my participants among the Muslim community in Iceland, many of whom became my friends and were ultimately my teachers and guiding spirits in the field, while having to tolerate my presence and strange inquiries with patience, kindness and hospitality. I can never thank them well enough, but I hope I will be able to work with them again in the future, Insha'Allah.

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1 Introduction

When I started this doctoral research on the Muslim community in Iceland, which I knew little about, and which had been mostly unknown for most Icelanders at the time, it was partly out of curiosity and partly related to my interest in the politics of prejudice, discrimination and human rights. Many years ago, I lived in Copenhagen in the neighbourhood of Nørrebro, known for being inhabited by many immigrants, where some of my neighbours and colleges came from Muslim-majority countries. At that time, they were identified by the majority society as persons, they had names, they came from a particular countries, had jobs and families, just like the Danes who they lived among. In short, they had discernible and distinct identities. By the time I was moving from Copenhagen a new political figure stepped into the public arena, who started talking about "the Muslims" and "Islam", as something that was opposed and antagonistic to "Danish culture" and "Danish values", something the Danes themselves were not quite sure of what was and was framed as a threat. This political figure was the right-wing politician Pia Kjærsgaard, who, along with others, came to transform the discourses and perceptions of immigrants, and Muslims in particular, in Denmark for the worse, until it reached the point where xenophobia, racism and Islamophobia were normalised in the public discourse and framed as a culture-war between Islam and Danish cultural values (Hervik, 2014). The Muslims I knew were gradually being stripped of their complex and diverse identities and were forced into monolithic stereotypes and images, which were imbued with negative attributes, antagonism and danger. Gradually, it seemed like official Denmark had declared a rhetorical war on its Muslim citizens. This development was also gaining momentum in other European countries, with the attacks of 9/11 cementing and deepening these sentiments. At the time of this writing in 2021, right-wing nationalists and white supremacists are making strong headway towards political power in Europe and North America, where the prime object of aversion is immigration, especially that of Muslims (Kristín Loftsdóttir, 2020; Lorenz and Anders, 2021).

Thus, my position in this research project is both personal and political. My approach is therefore rooted in my own personal experience of witnessing the emergence of anti-Muslim sentiments in my locality at that time, affecting people I knew and liked, in a detrimental manner. I remember the disgust I felt when seeing which way the wind was blowing. I started the preparations for my research shortly after I moved to Iceland after having lived in a few different cities abroad. When I started my research in 2008, I realised that the same anti-Muslim views were present in Iceland – albeit in a more covert way – as in Denmark, even though the scale and quantity was much smaller, the characteristics were essentially the same in Iceland. An important turning point in this was the Danish Cartoons affair in 2005, which received much publicity and, along with 9/11 (Eriksen, 2007; Hervik,

2011), helped establish anti-Muslim sentiments in Iceland, like in most of the West (Auður Jónsdóttir and Óttar M. Norðfjörð, 2008). The Icelandic context of this is discussed in more detail in chapter eight. I have, during my work on this thesis, come across Islamophobia in many day-to-day contexts in Iceland, in daily conversations among friends and family, and even in academia, amongst ordinarily open-minded and tolerant people. It seems that Islamophobia was the last frontier in what was deemed as acceptable bigotry. It has shown me that these sentiments run deep, that they remain in collective memories, old and new. I also know that these views rest on prejudice (pre-judgement), misinformation and ignorance.

In this study, I provide space to the diverse and multifaceted Muslim voices in Iceland while also placing them in a larger global and historical context. Therefore, my broader goal with this dissertation is to shed light on and increase understanding – not only on Icelandic Muslims – but on the whole discourse on Muslims and Islam, especially in the West, that has cast collective perceptions of Muslims and Islam in a negative light. The thesis addresses the Icelandic context of being Muslim, in relation with the majority society and its dominant discourses, as well as the internal dynamics of the Icelandic Muslim community itself. Also, it describes the transition of the Muslim community in Iceland from being more or less a small invisible group to being thrust forcefully onto the front pages of the press, where underlying xenophobic and anti-Muslim sentiments eventually surfaced, following the provision of a plot for mosque building for one of the Muslim associations.

Therefore, this dissertation contributes to an understanding of the Icelandic Muslim community, especially to seeing its members as the complex and diverse social group it is. This comprehension is not possible without knowing the wider historical, political and global contexts of colonialism, imperialism and the present military operations of Western powers that have shaped the so-called Muslim world for a long time (Kazi, 2019; Kumar, 2012; Said, 1978). Iceland is and has been part of these global, geopolitical relations of colonial and neo-colonial contexts for a long time (Kristín Loftsdóttir, 2019; Kristín Loftsdóttir and Unnur D. Skaptadóttir, 2020). Thus, one primary argument is that this has influenced the complexities of Muslim identities, what it means to be a Muslim in today's world and the reflective relationship with the West, Iceland included, with "us".

1.1 The approach

The main approaches I apply in this thesis consist primarily of theories concerned with social and cultural diversity and identity (Baumann, 1996; Baumann and Gingrich, 2004; Modood, 2007, 2010), as well as theories of othering and Orientalism (Asad, 1993, 2003; Bauman, 2004; Kumar, 2012; Said, 1978) and theories concerning practice and agency (Bourdieu, 1977, 1992; Mahmood, 2001, 2005). In seeking to define complex and diverse social contexts, Gerd Baumann (1996) has differentiated between the categorisations of community and social group, which applies partly to Muslims in Iceland, who can be seen as a social group comprised of several smaller communities who unite in particular contexts. Additionally, Baumann differentiates between social groups and social categories. Nadia

Jeldtoft (2009) has similarly distinguished between these definitions, where categories indicate stereotypical picture of a given group, whereas social groups point to diverse and different social configurations and identities. These identities, social, cultural, religious and national, intersect in a fluid, contextual manner, where some become temporarily mute as others become more prominent. Yet, according to most of my participants, the one identity overlapping all others is Islam and the concept of the ummah, the overriding imagined meta-community of the Muslim faithful around the globe. These identities interact with the dominant discourse of the majority society (Baumann, 1996), which labels ethnic minorities, mainly immigrants, as specific categories, often using the term ethnic communities, in an essentialising manner, where this defining is boundary-making and where community as a category is a social construct. The prevailing categorisation of the dominant discourse regarding an imagined and uniform cultural group contradicts the fact that there are many different communities, ethnic groups and cultures within this category, despite being simply termed immigrants or ethnic communities, frequently presumed to have a distinct culture. In this context, it is important to distinguish between the cultural and the social, because minority groups are not homogeneous, and do not speak with one voice (Eriksen, 2007, p. 1067).

Another important theoretical approach in this dissertation is Edward Said's (1978, 1985) notion of Orientalism, which examines the asymmetrical relations and perceptions between what is termed the West and that which is called the Orient. These relations, or discourses, encompass images, ideas and perceptions framing the Orient in a stereotypical manner, where Western (white) supremacy is implied, with racist undertones. Even if Said stated that the book, *Orientalism* (1978), was an analysis of certain historical periods, he maintained that it also referred to culture, ideas, history and power, not the Orient per se, and he emphasised its relevance for "the tumultuous dynamics of contemporary history" (Said, 2003/1978, p. xvii). Thus, Said´s approach analyses asymmetrical power formations, their history and their relevance, as well as their continued importance for looking at relations between diverse groups of people, whether national, ethnic or religious. In this way, Said sought inspiration from the thinking of Michel Foucault about formations of historical sediments and discourses, what he called the archaeology of knowledge (see his book with the same title, Foucault, 1969). Therefore, as a way to analyse the relations of Muslims in Iceland with the majority society, I find his writings on Orientalism useful, important and relevant.

Related to these ideas are the writings of Talal Asad (1993) who has examined historical discourses relating to the perceived opposition between the West and the Orient, or "us" as opposed to "them". Not only has the West constructed diverse images of the Other through Orientalist practice, but equally it has written the history of these relations, based on its own ethnocentric premisses. This means that most of the discourses pertaining to these relations take place from the position of the West (Asad, 1993, pp. 1-24). Thus, by digging for (as in archaeology) formations of ideas and discourses from the Enlightenment, through the colonial period and onward to the geopolitics of the present, the analyses of Foucault (1972),

Said (1978) and Asad (1993) have demonstrated the dimensions of diverse asymmetrical relations of power that underline the relations of the West with the Orient, or more precisely, the Muslim world, a world which the Muslim community in Iceland is a part of.

1.2 The method

The main research method applied for this dissertation was ethnographic fieldwork, entailing participant observation, together with semi-structured interviews with over thirty participants and participation in casual conversations with participants in the field. The fieldwork started at the beginning of 2009 and finished formally in late 2012, with continued, informal contacts over a number of subsequent years. Much of the participant observation was characterised by "slow-hanging-out" and conversing with participants, as well as taking part in diverse social occasions and events. After ending my formal fieldwork, I continued to be in touch with some of my participants, visiting the mosques and keeping track on their situation. The main site of fieldwork were the two mosques operating at the time of my fieldwork. At the outset of my research, I found a gatekeeper, a person who became my main contact to the Muslim community, but eventually I came to know an increasing number of Muslims, who I developed good relationships with. I participated twice during the month of Ramadan, where I joined the fasting and participated in the prayer rituals, which enhanced and deepened my relations with the participants. In addition, I analysed media discourses on Muslims and Islam, particularly following the allotment of a ground for mosque building in 2013 to the Muslim Association of Iceland, and the consequent rise of Islamophobia in the country.

When conducting qualitative research among social groups, the ethical aspect is always important, avoiding inflicting harm to the community being the most important. With a community like the Muslims in Iceland, this factor was quite prominent, taking into considerations the general sentiments towards Muslims in the West, due to the geopolitical situation of the present time, connected to Western military operations in Muslim countries and related violent activities by militant Islamist groups. This was evident at the start of my fieldwork, where many of the Muslims were quite wary of my presence and some questioned my intensions. As time passed, and I became more involved with the group, these sentiments faded away. But because of the overall sensibilities mentioned above, I was aware of the need to be discrete and hide real identities of my participants. All names in the dissertation are pseudonyms. Yet, because of the smallness of the Muslim community, it was obvious that the real identities of some of the leaders of the associations were difficult to conceal when discussing their positions or activities.

The main participants in my research were Muslims who were linked to the mosques, the majority of who were affiliated to the Muslim Association of Iceland, where I spent the majority if my time, but I also spent considerable time at the Islamic Cultural Centre of Iceland, which was a more recent association. I conducted thirty-four open-ended interviews with both men and women, both Muslim immigrants from many diverse countries, with majority being men, as well as Icelandic converts, with the majority being women. Most of

these interviews were conducted in people´s homes, and some in the mosques. And, as already mentioned, I participated in countless informal conversations with a wide variety of people. Thus, my method was a mixture of formal and informal communications and participatory fieldwork. The methodological dimension is discussed in more detail in chapter three.

1.3 The organisation of the thesis

The thesis is roughly organised into three main parts. The first concerns theoretical and methodological aspects, where the main theoretical approaches are introduced and discussed, as well as methodological aspects used in the research, and the major theoretical underpinnings of these methods. Also, the methodological section addresses the position and relations of the researcher to the field, and to the participants. The second part provides descriptions, discussions and analysis of the subject at hand, the Muslim community in Iceland; the organisations of the Muslim associations and social and religious activities and practices. It focuses on questions of identity – religious, cultural and national identity – and belonging, where the question of Muslim identity is central, as it works as the unifying factor for the social group, which is characterised by diverse intersecting identities, backgrounds and belonging, as well as culture and language. The third part looks at the images and stereotypes of Muslims and Islam produced and processed in the Icelandic context, by diverse public figures and the media, and especially in connection to the so-called Mosque affair (2013-2015), discussed in chapter eight, where latent xenophobia and anti-Muslim sentiments came to head. This part analyses various discourses taking place in Icelandic media and among some public figures, and a comparison with similar situations in neighbouring countries is made, as most of the stereotypical images processed where imported from abroad. Thus, the thesis seeks to contextualise diverse aspects of being Muslim in Iceland, in local and global contexts, emphasising identity and identification (othering) of Muslims as a religious minority group in a secular/Christian society, implying asymmetrical power relations.

1.4 The overview of the chapters

Following this introduction, the second chapter presents the main theoretical approaches used in the thesis to frame its subject matter. These theories address complex social relations among and between social actors and groups, addressing asymmetrical power relations, in inter- and intra-group contexts. Accordingly, theories concerned with the processes of othering are applied, where the writings of Edward Said on Orientalism (1978) are seen as underlining these processes in a general sense. The social group who has had to endure othering in a marked manner in recent times are Muslims, who have had to suffer negative stereotyping in Western discourses, in a denigrating and racist manner. I address this predicament of othering and anti-Muslim sentiments throughout the thesis, particularly in chapter eight. In introducing the organisation of the chapters below, I present the main theoretical approaches relevant to each chapter.

Chapter Three lays out the methodological approaches applied in the research, as well as discussing some theoretical underpinnings of these methods. The main method was the so-called ethnographic method, based mainly on participant observation (partly a contradiction, as discussed in the chapter), semi-structured interviews as well as informal conversations with diverse participants in the field. Also, I viewed and analysed public discourses, in the media and among public figures, as well as monitoring informal discussions with and among people I met and talked to, such as colleagues, friends, and others. Thus, both formal and informal (as the public mood) data was used to gather information. Finally, in this chapter, I address the various ethical questions which a research of this kind raises. Addressing ethnographic practice, Harry Wolcott (1999) talks of experience and enquiry in doing ethnographic research, where the former has to do with participant observation and casual conversations, while the latter relates to structured or semi-structured interviews (Wolcott, 1999, pp. 46-47). With the ethnographic method implying observing and participating, Paul Rabinow (1977) has argued that when referring to observation and participation, observation is most often invariably in the driving seat. It is important to be aware of one's relational positioning in the field, and it was clear in my study that I was never "one of them," but an outsider, even if I could identify with the marginal status many of the participants had in relation to Icelandic society and culture – so in a strange way I felt both as belonging and not belonging. Consequently, when pondering one's way of being, specifically while conducting fieldwork in an alien environment, Bourdieu's concept of habitus is a useful way of conceptualising this condition (Bourdieu, 1977), especially when participating. It can be thought as a way of being, as well as a way of thinking and perceiving, as embodiment and as a state of mind. Using the sensual faculties during fieldwork is equally important, hearing as well as observing. The emphasis on ethnographic fieldwork as mostly participant observation (acting, seeing, watching) has been questioned, with the importance of listening being emphasised as equally important to the ethnographic project as seeing, or observing visually (Forsey, 2010). Thus, what Forsey (2010) terms engaged listening is equally meaningful in ethnographic work, where the ethnographer is equally participant listener as observer. Even if it is actually fruitless to separate the senses, particularly during intensive focusing as when doing fieldwork, Forsey (2010) argues that the visual bias in the Western scientific tradition has partly enabled the emphasis on observing over listening. Therefore, ethnographic fieldwork implies both objective and subjective dimensions, where cognitive and sensual faculties are equally important in gathering and processing the data gathered among one´s participants – or as Malinowski (1922/1978, p. 14) put it, to perceive the "ponderabilia of actual life".

Chapter Four, which leads to the second part of the thesis, focuses on the general context of the Muslim community in Iceland, its organisation and the relations within the community and between the associations. I present a short historical context concerning relations of Muslims and Iceland, as to underline the importance of historical sediments and collective memory. I address the relations and co-operation of the Muslim community in Iceland with

important state institutions, secular and religious, which demonstrates how the Muslim community is connected in various ways to Icelandic society and its institutions.

Chapter Five focuses on the question of Muslim identity and its formations, what it means to be a Muslim, and to be a Muslim in Iceland. Some definitional questions are addressed, both external ones and ideas of the Muslims themselves concerning what it means to them to be a Muslim, revealing that these self-identifications of being Muslim are quite diverse and complex – even if most of them declared themselves to be "just Muslims". Yet, despite the complexity of these identifications, being Muslim, and Islam itself, helped transcend the cultural and national diversity characterising the Muslim community in Iceland. Thus, being Muslim seems to be the central identity of this social group, with the practice of living Islam at its core. When addressing definitions of social groups, in particular minority groups such as Muslims, Nadia Jeldtoft (2009, pp. 9-14), suggests a double definition: categorisation and group(s). Categorisation is an empirical, analytical tool accounting for the phenomenon (concept) Muslim, while the latter represents a more diverse and complex conceptualisation of minority groups, composed of individuals with complex identities. Categorisation in this sense can be seen as objectification of an essentialised figure, Muslim(s) (Werbner, 2005), while the term group, which suggests the self-identification of the people themselves, as Muslims, to be more subjective. Therefore, some Muslims seek to define themselves in opposition to the identification by the majority, implicating negative formations of identity. Identification from outside denies Muslims their complex and diverse identities and ways of being Muslims and living Islam and therefore entails symbolic and cultural violence (Bauman, 2004; Bourdieu, 1998; Galtung, 1990). Othering of Muslims in the West is well known and addressed in this dissertation, but similar identifications take place within Muslim communities, implicating shifting, contextual relations between diverse groups, often based on national and ethnic identities. An example is the common notion among some of my participants that the Indonesians are "milder" Muslims than others, with the same applying to the Bosnians and Kosovans, that they are more secular than the average Muslims. Interestingly, such dynamic could be found between some North-Africans and West-Asians, who for the most part identify as Arabs.

Chapter Six looks at diverse religious discourses concerning Islam and practices of Muslims, and it gives ethnographic examples of important religious practices of Muslims in Iceland. The chapter addresses some theoretical aspect and discourses linked to Islam as well as demonstrating various sides of religious rituals and practice among the community, such as the religious rituals and ideas of Ramadan and the Pilgrimage to Mecca, from an Icelandic perspective. Also, concepts of religious authority are discussed, how best to practice the messaging of "correct" Islam and of how to practice Islamic rituals in the "right" manner – and who has the authority involved in that. The question of religious authority is put to the test by presenting an ethnographic example of two widely different visits from abroad to the Muslim community in Iceland. This example put the question of religious authority in focus, and also demonstrated the most common attitude of Muslims in Iceland to what it means to be a Muslim, and also, what kind of Muslim was preferable. When addressing religion of

Islam, Talal Asad (1993), argued that Islam, as a faith, or doctrine, must be studied as embedded in social and cultural contexts, and also that the theological side of Islam should not be disregarded. Accordingly, when studying Islam as an anthropologist, one should start "… as Muslims do, from the concepts of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the hadith. Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artefacts, customs, and morals. It is a tradition" (Asad, 1986, p. 14). Therefore, an anthropology of Islam and Muslims should focus on the historical dynamics underlining and conditioning the discursive traditions by which the practitioners adapt their religious compass and practice. As Asad put it: "An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present. Clearly, not everything Muslims say and do belongs to an Islamic discursive tradition" (Asad, 1986, p. 14). During conversation with my participants, the notion of one Islam versus many islams often came up, with most of them stating the case for one Islam, albeit not to be mixed with cultural habits. This has been contested among scholars (Varisco, 2005), and the Egyptian anthropologist Abdul el-Zein (1977) talked of Islam as many islams, contextualised in local practices and customs, and accordingly, the theological tenets should not be over-emphasised. Thus, there is no uniform consensus on this notion, neither among scholars nor ordinary, practicing Muslims. However, despite diverse local and cultural approaches to Islamic practise, on must note the universalistic Islamic rituals, which make up an important ritual cycle in Islam around the world. By concentrating on ethnographic fieldwork, it will more likely lead to knowledge of how the discursive tradition (Asad, 1986) becomes embodied in daily practice and rituals. Thus, the emic perspective of the Muslim subject becomes more important than the etic perspective of Islamic doctrine. Thus, Islam remains a living discursive tradition, by trickling through the practitioners. Likewise, the Finnish anthropologist Samuli Schielke (2010), stated that there is "too much Islam in the anthropology of Islam" (p. 1). By this he meant that over-theorising about Islam can easily miss the mark when it comes to understanding the complex and ambiguous lives of Muslims, which most of the time entails many other aspects.

Chapter seven examines the process of becoming a Muslim and focuses particularly on Icelandic converts to Islam and the formation of a new religious, social and cultural identity. Conversion usually implies important changes to the lifestyle of the convert, indicating acquiring new modes of daily practice and new habits (or habitus). I discuss the process of converting and different ways of how conversions take place. Conversions often create temporary tensions with friends and family, tensions that most often subside with time. This chapter also takes a look at a women's group at one of the mosques, both converts and born Muslims immigrants, who hold regular meetings, discussing both religious and mundane, secular matters. The stereotypical figure of the Muslim woman is also addressed in this chapter, highlighting the women's own thoughts and opinions as contested figures. The conversion of Westerners to Islam is a process that intersects national, ethnic, and religious identities, activating oppositions and/or dialectics of Islam and the West. Apparently, these

conflicting identities intersect within the same individual. Converts see themselves sometimes as “different” and the “other”’ at the same time, but also as “different” from the “other” (Jensen, 2008). Often, there is a tendency to perceive converts as a possible threat against the cultural and racial integrity of the nation and the national culture (Bagge and Jensen, 2015; Werbner, 2005). Thus, the formative process of conversion involves a dialogue between the similar and the different, creating tensions and contradictions in the mind of the convert. Addressing the situation of converts, it is important to look at the different approaches to religious practice and ideas of converts as opposed to born Muslims. As converts are “different” Muslims, they have easier access to conceptual freedom, with conversion being a choice, with an open mind, consequently downplaying doxa (common belief and opinion) and often critical to orthodox religious viewpoints (Østergaard, 2007, 2009).

Chapter Eight comprises the third part of the thesis and focuses on the production of stereotypical images of Muslims and Islam in Western and Icelandic context. I look at public discourses and media expressions of Muslims and Islam, locally and globally, and show how much of that discourse is framed in anti-Muslim constructs, manifesting itself in speech, utterances and acts. I analyse media discourses in Icelandic newspapers and social media where these Islamophobic sentiments stand out, and I use the well published Mosque affair in Reykjavík (2013-2015) as an ethnographic example around which the emergence of these sentiments revolved. I place these discourses in a comparative context to some neighbouring countries, from where some of the discourses used in Iceland were imported from. I return to the question of contested identities, or identity politics, characterising this whole discourse and a question that ties the whole thesis together. This was the first issue my Muslim participants initially wanted to discuss with me, and it continued throughout my fieldwork and is therefore to be seen as one of the most important themes emerging in the thesis. When the planned mosque construction in Reykjavík in 2013 became known to the public, moral panic (Cohen, 2002) broke out among some certain groups and in some sections of the media. What followed were obvious signs of anti-Muslim sentiments and xenophobia. It was interesting that most of the anti-Muslim sentiments uttered by the opponents of the mosque were imported from foreign media and online sources (Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson, 2017), recycling well-known stereotypes about Muslims and Islam. The anthropologist Junaid Rana (2007) has deliberated the conception of the figure of the Muslim, arguing that this figure is based on racism where cultural identifications of nation, religion, ethnicity, and gender intersect. What might be called Islamophobic racism is, according to Rana (2007), a reflexion based on reciprocal narratives involving the violence and transgression of colonial empires as well as systematic oppression and abuse. Accordingly, Islamophobia is a form of covering over racism, which reduces complex groups into a uniform category, Muslims. One serious aspect of Islamophobia is that it prevents Muslims to be Muslims, covert and overt, which was evident from many of my participants, who found it afflicting, always having to emphasise what they are not, having to fight negative identity. Accordingly, Sayyid (2014) points out that Islamophobia hinders Muslims

from living and expressing their identity as Muslims in a meaningful way, that is, being Muslims. Because the concept is ambiguous, it can be defined by presenting examples of utterances, actions, practices, and attitudes as they actually manifest as Islamophobic. Many examples can be found in mainstream press and on social outlets (Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson, 2017), where they form clusters of utterings and actions, with dominating themes being derogatory discourses and actions against Muslims and Islam. Following the allotment of the plot for a mosque in Reykjavík in 2013, activities of people behind the Group 1627 (named after the year of the so-called Turkish raid in Iceland) and the Islamophobic Facebook group, Mótmælum mosku á Íslandi, came to the fore. Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson (2017) argued that one should categorise the activities of the actors promoting Islamophobia in Iceland as an organised activism, inspired by and using material from global Islamophobic organisations, revealing the global extent of these activities.

To summarise, this Introduction presents the main aspects of the present dissertation, and the main theoretical and methodological approaches applied to the research on the Muslim community in Iceland, its organisations and internal relations, as well as relations with the dominant society and some state institutions. In chapters four to seven, I focus on the internal, subjective side of the Muslim community, its Icelandic context, its religious practices, religious authority (or lack of) and diverse discourses on Islam and Muslim identity. I show that Muslim identity and Islam functions as a unifying factor among complex cultural and national identities among Muslims in Iceland, who are also spatially dispersed. When addressing Icelandic converts, I focus on the formation of new identities which conversion implies and the fundamental social and cultural changes that take place. Following the accounts of the internal perspectives among the Muslim community, I turn to some external approaches, expressed mainly in the public domain and diverse media outlets, where anti-Muslim sentiments were published in connection to the donation of land for a building site for a mosque. I seek to explain and account for the position and the context of Muslims in Iceland by demonstrating the connections and relations of this community to the dominant society, showing, among other things, close relations and cooperation on many levels. I have predominantly focused on the internal position of the Muslim community in Iceland, while considering some negative external identifications by voices of the dominant society. In this sense, the thesis examines identity politics, the asymmetrical effect of identification, of being identified in some ways contrary to one´s own sense of identity and being. An important aspect in this thesis is therefore to paint a picture of the Muslim community in Iceland by describing and analysing its diverse relations, internal and external, and its positions in the context of Icelandic society and to demonstrate both diversity and unity. It shows how Islam and Muslim identity, as well as the smallness of this complex community helps unite the group despite periodical political tensions and disagreements, which inevitably surface among people with widely different origins and cultures, with one participant formulating it by saying the “Islam is what brings us together”.

2 Theoretical considerations and the state of knowledge

Introduction

The community of Muslims in Iceland is, in a way, a reflection of the complex cultural diversity, characterising the 1.7 billion Muslims in the world and demonstrating that Islam is in no way a monolithic religion and that Muslims are a heterogeneous group with a wide cultural and social spectrum, diverse histories and religious interpretations. Therefore, it is important to discuss theories that address diversity and complex social relations when studying the community of Muslims in Iceland. This is a minority multicultural community of immigrants and converts positioned on the margins of Icelandic society, thus creating a complex situation of identity formations and negotiations in relation to the majority society and culture, as well as within the Muslim community itself (Al-Azmeh and Fokas, 2007; Baumann, 1996, 2004; Eriksen, 2007; Rytter, 2019; Schmidt, 2004).

The main theoretical approaches in this thesis concern questions of diversity and relations among and between diverse social actors and groups, where asymmetrical power relations are sometimes evident (Baumann, 1996, 2004; Levey and Modood, 2009; Rytter, 2019; Said, 1985). This applies equally to historical and geopolitical relations, relations of Muslims to the majority society as to intergroup dynamics among the Muslims themselves. The historical and geopolitical relations between the West as the centre of political and economic power, and the Other, i.e., the populations in the less powerful parts of the world for the last few centuries, form an undercurrent in the narratives of these relations and were frequently present in discussions with Muslim participants in Iceland concerning their identity as Muslims in the West (Asad, 2002; Cesari, 2009; Goody, 2004; Kristín Loftsdóttir, 2018; Kumar, 2012; Leonard, 2009). In the context of this thesis, this Other is the Orient, in particular the so-called Middle East, both as a historical and geographical space, but more importantly as an ideological and political imaginary and narrative[1]. Most Muslims in Iceland originate from the so-called MENA (Middle East and North Africa), which, apart from being a topographic entity, is also a historical, colonial, and neo-colonial narrative, tying its populations to an imagined cultural and religious ideoscape (as conceptualised by Appadurai, 1996) of Islam, even if the majority of the world's Muslims live outside this area. Because of these historical and political sediments, it is useful to look to the work of Edward Said (1978, 1985) on the West's creative depiction of the Orient and Orientalism, where the West conceptualises the Orient, especially the Middle East and its people, in a denigrating

[1] The "Middle East" is a contested term – "middle" related to what? The West? It could equally be termed West-Asia, but for clarity, Middle East will be used here.

and ultimately a racist manner. This depiction entails generalising and essentialising the people of the Orient, in particular Muslims, as backwards and primitive, and in recent times, dangerous, as a consequence of the diverse military operations of the West in Muslim countries. This image construction addressed by Said (1978), which is based on asymmetrical power relations, is also the underlying dynamics of what today is called Islamophobia (Beydoun, 2018; Kumar, 2012; Lean, 2012; Rana, 2007). In the first section of this chapter, I address the theoretical approaches related to the question of diversity in in the context of the social group of Muslims in Iceland. Then I move on to the context of Orientalism as an important theoretical frame for addressing the asymmetrical relations between Muslim communities in the West with the majority societies in the West. I present diverse scholarly studies from different Western contexts implicit in these relations, and finally I contextualise/ place my study within the existing literature on Muslims in other Western and primarily European context.

2.1 The question of diversity

Gerd Baumann's (2004) ideas concerning self/other, diversity and identity are useful when examining interrelations among the Muslim community in Iceland. I use these theoretical models for framing the complex intersections within the Muslim community, where various groups and groupings relate to each other in numerous ways. Baumann (2004) used a threefold analytical model when analysing questions of identity and alterity, inspired from well-known paradigms in the anthropological literature. The first model was inspired from Said's, *Orientalism* (1978), indicating self/other as negative imaging, entailing movement from binary classification to reverse mirror-imaging. This is addressed in the following section. The second part of Baumann's model is from Evans-Pritchard's *The Nuer* (1940), where he presented the segmentary system of social organisation, implying context dependent, sliding scales of selfing/othering. The third part of his model is derived from Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (1980), presenting encompassment: hierarchical sub-inclusion. The grammar[2] of orientalism can imply self-critique, even if implicating a self-invented other. Selfing and othering condition each other: positive images mirror negative images. This grammar can be applied in situations where there are debates or disputes between the dominant discourse (Baumann, 1996, 2004) and minority groups, for example where cultural, religious, or racist ideas are used in a degrading manner towards minority communities, even if some degree of exoticizing is involved. Accordingly, racist and Islamophobic discourses seem to fit with this grammar, and I find it useful in examining the context of the relations of the Muslim community to the majority society, as well as when discussing the relationships within the Muslim community itself.

[2] According to Baumann, the word grammar "seems to echo so well with the most varied forms of our desire to see 'sense' or 'order' in people's capacities and failures to deal with their world … We use the word as a simple shorthand for certain simple classificatory structures … that can be recognised in a vast variety of processes concerned with defining identity and alterity" (Baumann, 2004, p. ix).

The segmentary grammar of identity determines identities and alterities, according to a context comprising segmentary systems of fission and fusion. The social grammar of the segmentary system is a logic of fission or enmity at a lower level of segmentation, overcome by a logic of fusion or neutralisation of conflict at a higher level of segmentation. It entails contextual awareness: identity and alterity are thus a matter of context, and contexts are ranked according to classificatory levels – fission/fusion and identity/difference. Contextual segmentary identities imply asking "who am I at this moment?", according to the contextually appropriate, classificatory level (Baumann, 2004, pp. x-xi). This grammar is useful when examining the general relations between individuals and groupings within the Muslim community in Iceland, where these relations demonstrate contextually relative horizontality, flexibility, and exchangeability, and where the primary fusion is the meta-community of Muslims, the ummah.

Encompassment is, according to Baumann, an act of selfing by appropriating, adopting, or co-opting selected kinds of otherness. This grammar is based on distinguishing levels, much like the grammar of segmentation. Rather than conceptualising difference by recognising multifaceted levels, this grammar works on two levels only. In this grammar, a subordinate category is adopted, subsumed or co-opted into identity and defined and, as it were, owned by those who do the encompassing. This grammar is thus always hierarchical: it needs the higher caste/level/field to encompass the lower (Baumann, 2004, pp. x-xi). It highlights the process of identity formation of converts and where they seek to become subsumed within the adopted identity as a Muslim. This applies similarly to other newcomers who seek to integrate and adopt the values and customs of the host society (Rytter, 2019), or who face forced assimilation from the state. It is crucial that the same social situation of selfing and othering can make use of several grammars at the same time.

It is possible and convenient to switch from one grammar to another according to the context at hand, both in internal relations between different national, ethnic and cultural groups within the Muslim community, and external, when dealing with actors of the majority society. In addition, Baumann (2004) introduces the interesting concept of ternary aspect, challenging the apparent binary grammar of identity/alterity or self/other. Bisecting in this way will raise the question of what lies in the middle. Binarism raises the possibility of tripartition, of a third, mediating space or phase that negates the binary configuration (Lévi-Strauss, 1962). Between two poles in a binary set-up the liminal phase/state is often invoked (Turner, 1967, 1995). But, when the third part is not liminal, it can receive an equal status: us, you and them. The ternary part is not partner within the segmentary grammar or the encompassing grammar – it is the one that is outside, according to the context. For example, Sikhs are Hindus, implies that Muslims are not and are excluded as partners in this dialogue (or monologue) (Baumann, 1996). In the orientalising grammar the ternary can be used to play one group against another, for example, old immigrants against new immigrants vis-à-vis the native. In the Icelandic context, as will be shown, the grammars of orientalising and encompassment seem to characterise the external relations of the Muslim community with the majority society, while the segmentary grammar seems to be for the most part

applicable to the internal relations, between the various groups and segments within the Muslim community.

Tina G. Jensen (2008), applying Baumann's (2004) concepts, argues that in the discourse on Muslims in Denmark, two grammars of identity stand out: the orientalising grammar and the grammar of encompassment. The first indicates a dichotomy or opposition between "us" and "them", or Danish national values and Islam. The second grammar, that of encompassment, is hierarchically structured and supports assimilation, where the "other" is supposed to become like "us". The dominant discourse emphasises the Lutheran-Protestant nature of Danish society and, at the same time, Danish society or nation as indigenous and secular (see also Rytter, 2019; Sinclair, 2022), which is comparable to the situation in Iceland (Hanna Ragnarsdóttir, Elsa S. Jónsdóttir and Magnús Þ. Bernharðsson, 2007; Kristín Loftsdóttir, 2011; Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir, 2004, 2009). Paradoxically, both the grammars discussed above are used in opposition to Islam and Muslims. As Jensen (2008) indicates, it is ironic that in this orientalist debate, secularism is used against Islam, yet it underlines the ties between state and church, which is financed by the state, with the queen, the head of state being the protector of the church.

The binary aspect of the two aforementioned grammars is obvious (us/them), but the ternary factor is not. Converts to Islam can be seen as this ternary because when one of "us" becomes one of "them", he or she becomes the "other", a person with contradictory identities in this regard (Bagge and Jensen, 2015; Jensen, 2007). According to Jensen (2008), this polarised construction, national "self" versus Muslim "other", becomes contested and paves the way for reformulation of identities. Similar configurations seem to apply to the Icelandic context when it comes to the relations between Muslims and the majority society, especially where the dominant discourse emphasises the role of Christianity, mainly Lutheranism, in shaping Icelandic history and Icelandic culture. At the same time, it underlines the secular foundations of the liberal, democratic Icelandic state (Pétur Pétursson, 2011). A similar dynamic can be seen in the case of German converts to Islam, who move from being "us" to being "them" in some contexts but become the "other" in other contexts (Özyürek, 2015).

While these two grammars of identity, orientalising ("us" versus "them") and encompassment (assimilation) seem straightforward in their contexts, the third grammar of segmentation operates especially at the level of social interaction within the Muslim community itself. This is especially relevant in the case of converts, who embark on attaining new lifestyles and attitudes, creating new social ties, based, for the most part on equality, fission and fusion. Thus, distance and hierarchy are no longer prevalent where they as players enter the field (Bourdieu, 1991) and start negotiating diverse forms of capital as horizontal actors. In this process, having acquired new agency, formation of a new habitus comes into being. In this context, the converts might play an important role in mediating between different cultural parameters due to their old and forming symbolic capital (as in the trickster/liminal parameter) (Jensen, 2008). This mediation is mostly informal and not in

the public political arena, and it relates to the subtle identity of converts as mediators, aligned with the trickster, a figure of transformation and cultural critique (see Jensen, 2008). Interaction among new Muslims entails new forms of communication and lifestyles that contradict the prevalent grammar of orientalising and encompassing and instead engage in grammar of segmentation with its flowing contextualisation (Baumann, 2004). In an equal sense, the general interactions between people within the Muslim community, especially in a religious and ritual context, are frequently based on the segmentary grammar, where ideas of equality are found in the main tenants of Islam, which preach equality and justice, independent of origin, ethnic affiliations or racial notions. The idea of equality and justice is for example expressed in the Qur'an and[3] is most strongly expressed during the Pilgrimage to Mecca, the hajj.

Bourdieu's theory of practice, social field, and symbolic capital (1977, 1991, 1998) and its fundamental concepts are quite useful in analysing certain aspects of relations among the Muslim community in Iceland. It is particularly relevant to the context of converts and their formation of new social, cultural, and religious identities. Bourdieu's approach is concerned with what social actors or individuals do in social contexts, operating across overlapping social levels, or fields, while practice involves producing and controlling capital and self-interest, which is conditioned by their habitus (inclinations, dispositions, taste). Social fields, according to Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), are spaces and arenas of competition and struggle over symbolic capital, having to do with interests and values, such as education and knowledge, politics and power, and religion.

The Muslim community in Iceland can therefore be conceptualised as a social and religious field encompassed by the wider field of the majority society in which different actors negotiate their positions, making up fields within fields. Within this socio-religious field, different agents manage their positions at the same time as the whole community situates itself within Icelandic society – socially, culturally, and religiously--which entails competition, vying for space (capital) in the social arena (field), as well as competing for members, implying competition for economic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1991). As will be shown, social practice and habitus are particularly something the Icelandic converts are concerned with in the process of becoming "true" or "correct" Muslims. They strive towards that goal by imitating born Muslims through their daily social practice where they try to incorporate their new and becoming habitus through social and religious behaviour and practice through prayers, by the way they dress and talk, and generally how they conduct themselves as

[3] "O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware" (Qur'an 49:13).

And in a hadith, Prophet Muhammad said:

"O mankind, your Lord is One and your father is one. You all descended from Adam, and Adam was created from earth. He is most honoured among you in the sight of God who is most upright. No Arab is superior to a non-Arab, no coloured person to a white person, or a white person to a coloured person except by Taqwa (piety)." [Ahmad and At-Tirmithi] (Islamweb.net).

Muslims (Jensen, 2006; Østergaard, 2007, 2009). In this process, they also seek to gain symbolic capital by accumulating knowledge of the religious texts, i.e., symbolic/cultural capital, mainly from the Qur'an and the hadith, and general competence in religious ritual or Islamic habitus. By using Bourdieu's practice theory (Bourdieu, 1992), I relate to a model where the overarching social and cultural field is the Muslim world and Islam, in general, as an ideological and cultural background, which can be conceptualised as underlining the formations of identities among Icelandic Muslims, implicating the discursive tradition Talal Asad talked about (1986). This is examined in more detail in chapter six.

According to Bourdieu´s practice theory, society constitutes intersections of different spaces or fields, where competition for various forms of capital, its production and reproduction takes place among individual actors and groups (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Rey, 2007). Additionally, society is where a field is conceptualised as a structured place of social forces, as a "[…] field of struggles, within which agents confront each other, with different means and ends according to their position in the structure of the field." (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 32). In the case of Icelandic Muslims, there are diverse levels of religious knowledge (symbolic capital) and social positions, just as there is competition between the Islamic associations, not only for souls, but also for economic resources. The individual, or the social agent, occupies certain positions in different fields in the collective, where capital, or power, is sought and obtained by the social agent. Social fields are relational networks of competition over capital production, where individuals make their strategic moves in the pursuit of their personal interest, thus constituting an arena of relations of power. According to this way of thinking, the field, regardless of it social, religious, or other affiliation consists of relationality, struggle and competition, where issues of symbolic power are vital (Bourdieu, 1998, pp. 31-34). This theoretical model is especially interesting in the case of Icelandic converts to Islam, which is discussed in chapter seven, who by forming their new Islamic identity, must navigate different fields of symbolic and social capital to find balance between their old self and relational models and their new mode of thinking, behaving, relating, and believing. In many ways, the navigation and strategies of the converts is a more complex and fluid process than in the case of born Muslims, whose cultural and social identities are still more or less rooted in their original, old sedimentary way of life and their parental background. This applies maybe in a lesser sense to the younger generation of Muslims who have either come to Iceland as young children or are born in Iceland and who are shaped by the cultural and social environment of Icelandic society from young age.

2.2 Orientalism, the Other and asymmetrical formations

Edward Said (1978) showed that the West's definition of the Other implicated the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), mainly Arabs and Muslims, in a discourse of asymmetrical perceptions and relations, culturally, as well as politically. According to Said (1978, p. 3, 1985), Orientalism was a European construct and discursive formation. In the Foucaultian sense this has the meaning of discourse as "a group of verbal performances" (Foucault, 1980, p. 120), exerting hegemonic structural power over Western political and pedagogical

institutions and shaped the intellectual landscape of the West (Said, 1978, pp. 6-7). He criticised Western scholars, writers and artists for framing their studies and presentations about West Asia and North Africa and its people with a discourse of othering, which he referred to as Orientalism. According to Said (1978, p. 23), Western academics, writers, and scholars, among them anthropologists, transformed Muslims and Arabs into the image of the Other and by doing so, they positioned Muslims and Arabs and Islam in a political, historical, and cultural opposition to Europe, or the so-called West. This Orientalist othering of Muslims has additionally been kept alive in popular culture, movies, and TV series (Alsultany, 2012; Shaheen, 2000).

According to Asad (1993) and Rana (2007), implicit in this discourse is the historical situation and ethnocentric notion of the Other not having gone through or having had a stake in historical events and formative processes like the European Enlightenment, and consequently, having not evolved socially like the so-called West and thus being seen and defined as having lagged behind, relative to "us". Also, implicit is the idea of the need for "our" guidance, an idea embedded in the whole colonial project, based on the concept of social evolutionism, white supremacy, exceptionalism and racism (Hervik, 2019; Kristín Loftsdóttir, 2019; Kristín Loftsdóttir and Jensen, 2021), which, among other things, engendered the academic subject of anthropology (Asad, 1973, 1993; Asch, 2015; Said, 1978). Discussing these historical and generative processes of knowledge construction, Said (1978, p. 9) makes a distinction between what he calls pure and political knowledge and asks if pure knowledge can be political and if political knowledge can be pure. In that regard he states that all knowledge production—especially that concerned with contentious areas of study, such as areas embedded in the colonial and/or post/neo colonial project, or other historically and political sensitive issues—is embedded in one way or another in the historical, social and political circumstances of its making. Accordingly, there is thus a connection between the political importance of knowledge production and its economic dimension, and it has to be kept in mind when considering Western scholarly research and writings about Islam and the "Muslim world". Said states: "… no production of knowledge in the human sciences can ever ignore or disclaim its author's involvement as a human subject in his own circumstances …" (1978, p. 11). Therefore, the Western scholar confronting or involved with the Orient is always a Westerner first, and an individual second, implicating that the Western scholar always belongs to a power with political and economic interests in the Orient, going back to "time of Homer" (1978, p. 11). Instead of being a passive instrument of oppression, Orientalism is, accordingly, an emanation of geopolitical ideas and structures into "… aesthetic, scholarly, economic, sociological, historical, and philological texts … it is a certain will or intention … to control, manipulate … what is inherently a different world" (Said, 1978, p. 12). Accordingly, Orientalism is a discourse existing in the context of asymmetrical exchange and uneven balance of power, a discourse, according to Foucault, informing multiple related scholarly interests (Said, 1978, p. 22).

Said (1978) discussed Orientalism as a dynamic interplay between individual authors and the wider political and imperial structures of Western empires, especially Britain, France and

United States. He saw these authors as being conditioned by the historical and political narratives of those empires and their relations with the Orient, especially Islam, Muslims and Arabs, which stretched back to at least the seventeenth century (Kumar, 2012). This asymmetrical relationship implicates what Said (1978, p. 19, 1985, 1997) terms "intellectual authority," which Western Orientalism holds over the Orient within Western cultural ideas, indicating that knowledge production of a particular group of people somehow takes possession of that group and defines what it is or is not. This authority is neither natural nor mysterious but is formed, instrumental, has status and conditions "taste and value" (p. 19). This Orientalist text and its language must be analysed, especially its surface representations and expressions, rather than some implicit truth. Thus, Orientalism is made to make sense because Western representations of the Orient rely on diverse Western institutional structures and cultural/historical codes – but not upon the Orient itself.

One dimension of Said's writings on Orientalism that has been critiqued is that his conceptualisations of the West and the Orient, tend to be essentialised and ambiguous (Ahmad, 1992; Clifford, 1988). Accordingly, he categorises the West and the East as unchanging, timeless and monolithic in some sense, with the West inherently power hungry and the East as the innocent, suffering party (al-Azm, 1981). James Clifford (1988) points to the fact that in the 1950s, many people from the "Rest" started to talk and fight back against this hegemony, asserting their independence. Another critique of Said's work is that there is no room for agency of different subaltern groups (Ahmed, 1992). During colonial times there was resistance from diverse native organisations against the colonial powers in many locations, such as the Islamic forces in Algeria. Thus, Said was criticised for missing or ignoring the agency and existence of various liberating, counter-hegemonic forces in the Orient, which might seem curious, as his being a Palestinian should possess acute awareness of the importance of counter-colonial and counter-hegemonic forces in the colonies, or the Orient. However, in defence of Said, in his Preface to the 2003 reprint of *Orientalism* (1978/1994), he regrets how his text had been interpreted. He states that early in the book, he did insist that there was no stable reality, referring to Foucault's discourse analysis, where knowledge of reality is formed by particular discourses shaping the perception of "reality", stating that he has "… no 'real' Orient to argue for" (Said, 2003, p. xviii). Accordingly, he writes that "…neither the term Orient nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability" (Said, 2003, p. xvii). It is important to have these conceptualisations in mind, as this thesis is, among other things, a negation of essentialism, monolithism, and social or cultural generalisations, emphasising diversity and heterogeneity.

2.3 Muslim societies in The West – literature review

Even if the history of Muslim presence in Iceland is relatively short, compared to most Western countries, it should be placed firmly in the comparative context of Muslim communities in Western countries. In this section, I present and review some studies concerned with Muslim communities in the West, focusing mostly on research in two Nordic countries – Denmark and Norway, as well as France, Britain, and the United States. Then I

review literature concerning converts to Islam. The issues covered in the studies reviewed correlate to the comparative situation concerning the Muslim community in Iceland examined in this thesis. As an example, in chapter four I demonstrate the relations between the Muslim associations with secular state institutions in Iceland, as well as showing the interrelations between different religious entities and their collective relationships to state institutions. Also, as is addressed in these studies, the ethnic and national diversity of Muslims in Iceland mirrors the same diversity in most Western countries. Similarly, questions concerned with Muslim identity, of being Muslim as a minority in the secular and Christian societies of the West, which the studies reviewed here cover, are questions that I address in the thesis, both in connection with immigrants and converts to Islam (see chapter five). Importantly, anti-Muslim sentiments in several European countries, as well as in the United States, are addressed, demonstrating clear similarities with the situation in Iceland. This is discussed in more detail in chapter eight.

2.3.1 Transnational Islam

One important side of these studies is the relations, both historical and present, between Muslims and Christians in Europe (Goody, 2004; Mitri, 2007), and the question whether there is something like European Islam (Nielsen, 2007; Ramadan, 2004; Sayyid, 2009). In these studies, questions of the diversity of Muslim identities are central (Cesari, 2007). The transnational aspect of Islam and Muslim communities in Europe is an important factor, both the transnationality of social and cultural aspects, like religious ideas and practices (Al-Azmeh and Fokas, 2007). Important in these studies are questions regarding integration and discrimination of Muslims in Europe, as well as the intersection of secularism, religion, democracy, citizenship, and human rights (Levey, 2009; Nielsen, 2007). These studies counter generalizations of Muslims and Islam in Europe by demonstrating the diversity among Muslim communities in Europe. Even if Islam is a shared identity among European Muslims, the social and cultural complexity and diversity negate common stereotypes of Muslims. These studies demonstrate that identity is never one dimensional but is constantly changing and reforming and must always be contextualized in time and space. One important study of integration of Muslims is Jacobsen´s (2011) study of the religious engagement of young Muslim immigrants in Norway. This study focuses on questions of identity, religion and culture, as well as the reproduction of Muslim identities and practices in the context of migration and globalization. These questions of identity formations and religious practice of the young Muslims are vital elements in their debates and studies within their Islamic organizations. In this context, Jacobsen emphasises the multivocal nature of the representations of Islam and of what it means to be a young Muslim in Norway. During these processes of identity reformations among the young Muslims, there evidently arise tensions between the traditions of their elders and the challenges of the social and cultural environment of Norwegian society, where the youngsters, among other things, look to the original religious sources of Islam for navigating these waters.

Some studies, such as those of Cesari (2007), Levey and Modood (2009) and Nielsen (2007), are primarily concerned with the relations of secularism and religion in a multicultural context, as well as religious equality in secular societies (Al-Azmeh and Fokas, 2007; Sayyid, 2009). The main focus is on the situation of Muslims in the West and their participation in European societies in the context of liberal democracy, multicultural citizenship, as well as the issue of freedom of expression, issues exemplified by the Danish cartoon controversy in 2005, studied by Eriksen (2007) and Hervik (2011). Important events like the Danish cartoon affair and the attacks on 9/11 shed light on the so-called Muslim question and the intersection of religion, secularism, democracy, citizenship and nationhood. The studies mentioned here situate the predicament of Muslims in Europe in relation to these factors, as well as contextualise nationalism and national belonging, promoting broader thinking concerning the nature of multicultural liberal democracies (Bowen, 2010; Levey and Modood, 2009; Saunders, 2009).

Arguing for different types of international relations between Muslim communities and societies, Karen Leonard (2009) has examined the way in which Islam and Muslims have, through time, implicated a certain world system, crossing multiple political and cultural boundaries and borders long before the formation of the first nation state took place and long before the concept of transnationalism was born. She argues that the transnationalism of Islam has gradually been transforming into more cosmopolitan forms, and, accordingly, one now talks of Euro-Islam, Danish-Islam, American-Islam, etc., even if such categorisations are often contested by Muslims. Whether one can talk of Icelandic-Islam is unlikely, at least according to the results presented in this study (see chapter five). According to Leonard (2009), transnational Islam refers to religious relations to a home country of origin, where religious ideas and customs are aligned between the diaspora and home. Cosmopolitan relations refer more to religious organisations, operations and ideas that are more open to change and external influences, both social/cultural and religious, with weaker links to a homeland. Leonard (2009) gives as examples a few Islamic religious organisations, which she characterises as either transnational (Ahmadiyya, Tablighi Jamaat) or cosmopolitan (the Gülen movement, Nizari Ismaili). Thus, international Islam transcends the transnational and becomes cosmopolitan instead. In chapter six I examine two visits to Iceland of representatives from two widely different Muslim affiliations, one transnational (Tablighi Jama'at) and the other cosmopolitan (the Gülen movement). One transnational Islamic organisation, the Ahmadiyya, have representatives posted in Iceland, but because of their small number, they have not been able to register as an official religious association with formal relations with the Icelandic state. What this demonstrates is that, despite the relative newness and smallness of the Muslim community in Iceland, various important transnational and global movements have influenced this community in various ways.

Addressing transnational and global Islam, Bowen (2004) states that it constitutes a global public space with normative frames of references and debates, which transcends migratory factors and transnational religious movements. Therefore, transnational and global Islam possesses legitimacy based on its historical, global and public space of more or less

universalised frame of reference and discourses which cannot be reduced solely to migrational factors. Bowen (2004, p. 880) argues that transnational Islam implies "democratic movements, transnational religious institutions, and the field of Islamic references and debate", which recently have been enhanced by electronic media and digital communications, as demonstrated by Bunt (2000, 2004). In Muslim Travellers (Eickelman and Piscatory, 1990), Eickelman discusses the importance of travel and migrations in shaping Islam and Muslim practices, invoking symbolic nodes and spiritual centres across continents, reforming transnational notions of belonging, identity, and religious practices, unifying the ummah across ethnic sentiments, space and time, adjusting to diverse contexts. The Gülen Movement seeks to build bridges between secular and religious institutions and to establish dialogue-oriented practices. Also, the movement runs educational institutions in many countries, as well as operating international trading, based on the concept of hizmet ("rendering service") (Bilici, 2006). The Félag Horizon in Iceland is strongly influenced by the ideas of the Gülen Movement, albeit not officially as a part of it. Because of its wide-ranging operations, described above, the Gülen Movement can be categorised as a cosmopolitan organisation, according to Leonard (2009), because it transcends national borders and boundaries in multiple ways.

At the opposite end of the Islamic spectrum, there are transnational Salafi organisations, promoting a puritanical version of Sunni Islam, who are also active in the West (Mårtensson, 2014; Olsson, 2014). These organisations, such as Tablighi Jama'at, send travelling missionaries to work for the cause around the world, like. A number of such Salafi groups operate in Europe, and an important aspect of their vision is to deculturize and decontextualize Islam and make it pure and correct, referring it to an imagined past (Olsson, 2014). According to Olsson (2014, p. 178), the Swedish Al-Risala Scandinavian Foundation (which owns the Ýmir house in Reykjavík, the present home of The Islamic Foundation of Iceland), is one of these Salafist dawa societies.

2.3.2 Islamophobia and othering

Anti-Muslim sentiments, or Islamophobia, both in the global and local context in Iceland, are addressed in this study. Thus, it is important to examine and understand this phenomenon in a wider, global, and historical context. These sentiments are examined in more details in chapter eight of this thesis, but here I review a few studies of Islamophobia in the West to place the Icelandic situation into a wider context. Jack Goody (2004) has contextualised the historical and political relations of Europe and the Muslim world, and he pointed to the long and reciprocal nature of these relations. By doing this, he also depicted how these relations became increasingly asymmetrical, especially during the colonial period, something Edward Said (1978) demonstrated in his study of Orientalism. Similarly, Deepa Kumar (2012) examined anti-Muslim sentiments and Islamophobia in a historical and geopolitical context, illustrating the major historical contacts and relations, from Al-Andalus, the Crusades and the Ottomans, showing how these relations developed in the colonial period and continued to the present day. Kumar described this continuation, from mainly British and French

colonial contexts to American imperialism and neo-colonialism, where she demonstrated how anti-Muslim sentiments developed, forming and cementing Islamophobic stereotypes into being circulated today. By demonstrating the correlation between the global and the local, she linked Islamophobia and domestic politics, as manifested in the growing oppression and surveillance of Muslims in the West, post-9/11 (Kumar, 2012). In what follows, I address how anti-Muslim sentiments are manifested in different Western countries. This is relevant for the present thesis, as most Islamophobic tropes used against Muslims in Iceland have been imported from abroad.

Examining the transformation of the immigrant, or guest-worker, into the Muslim in Europe, Stefano Allievi (2005) argued that the 20th century could be called the Age of the Other, the age of otherness. The idea of the Other is central to anthropology, and to acknowledge the Other is to acknowledge diversity. This Other is usually some minority group: Jews, Roma, Muslims, gays; it is typically an ethnic or religious minority, culturally different from "us" or the dominant majority. Today, the Other is primarily a migrant, a refugee or persons seeking international protection, as well as being tied to economic factors, as potential labour force or as an economic burden on the "host" society. As a labour force, the immigrant, and the Muslim, gradually came to be seen as persons with needs, opinions, family, children, faith, etc., and became a part of society, with the same needs, requests, rights and obligations as other members of the same society. Thus, this labour force changed from a faceless, economic labourer into a complex social being. Attention turned to cultural and social mixing and dynamics, except when the labour force was Muslim; then, it was often seen as an unchangeable factor, essentialised and was thought to be unable to become part of society. The Muslims were perceived as naturally different, as the essential Other (Allievi, 2005; Kristín Loftsdóttir, 2016). Allievi (2005, pp. 3-4) asks why religious categories became so important when studying immigrants, especially Muslims, and argues that due to geopolitical forces and military operations of Western powers in Muslim countries, the image of the Muslim was being negatively transformed for political use (see also Kumar, 2012 and Mamdani, 2004). Tensions between Islam on the one hand and secularism and/or Christianity on the other became increasingly prominent, especially following the September 11th attacks on New York and the Pentagon in 2001, with the "clash of civilizations" thesis (Huntington, 1993) being instrumentalised in the service of geopolitical interests and influencing in turn local approaches to Muslims and Islam. Part of this process was the reduction of the immigrant, who was being changed into "the Muslim" without considerations about the job or profession, family or education of the people concerned, or any other identity factors of importance. According to Allievi (2005), this transformational process has led to increased xenophobia, racism and Islamophobia in the West. Placing this in an Icelandic context, Helga Tryggvadóttir and Kristín Loftsdóttir (2020), have examined the racial context of asylum seekers in Iceland, showing how racism affects the predicament of the people concerned. One study focused on the "otherness" of female refugees from West Asia, who consequently experienced isolation and loneliness in their new environment (Erla S. Kristjánsdóttir and Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir, 2018), while another study revealed the

conditions of immigrants, and Muslims in particular, when applying for jobs in Icelandic companies, showing that having a Muslim name had negative effects on being employed (Kristín Loftsdóttir, Margrét S. Sigurðardóttir and Kári Kristinsson, 2016).

Focusing on the Danish context of relations of immigrants and Muslim Others and the discordance implied within these relations, Mikkel Rytter (2019) has examined the concept of immigration, its uses and abuses, promoting specific conceptuality of Danish society, revealing asymmetric relations between "host" and "guest", and the question of belonging. Rytter wants to write against immigration as a particular problematisation of the social imaginary of Danes, especially when it comes to Muslims. He also wants to critique common discourses on the nation, the nation-state and on the welfare state in relation to immigrants. These discourses are underlined by asymmetrical relations between minorities and majorities, "hosts" and "guests," "us" and "them." Immigration discourse is related to imaginaries of culture, religion and race, of nationality and belonging, or not belonging, especially concerning Muslim immigrants, who are perceived as suspect and/or a threat to Danish values and integrity. Integration, according to Rytter, has different meanings in different countries and is ultimately part of discourses on the nation-state, religion, culture and race, and in Denmark, includes ideas about Lutheranism versus Islam. This is also a discourse on welfare reciprocity, who deserves welfare, the idea of hosts and guests and Danes as an indigenous people in a very reductive nationalistic sense (Rytter, 2019).

In a similar vein as Rytter, Kristine Sinclair (2021), examines the discrepancy between the official policies and government initiatives in Denmark and the actual normalisation of Muslims in Denmark. Accordingly, most political projects are occupied with values and motives of naturalisation and national identity, which does not align with simultaneous development among young Muslims in Denmark. Thus, the situation of most young Danish Muslims contrast to a great extent with mainstream political discourses in Denmark. Sinclair (2021) also shows that most of what Danish politicians present as Danish values is more or less general factors such as liberal democracy, human rights and freedom, nothing of which is specific to Denmark (see also Hervik [2014] on cultural war of values). Thus, there seems to be a clear rupture between official policies and the realities on the ground when it comes to the situation of young Danish Muslims. The continued negative representation of Muslims in Denmark by the government and the media has led to the use of the concept of "crimmigrants," as punctuating the universality of the category of citizenship – a governmentality of exclusion and separation, surveillance and stigmatisation of immigrants, mainly Muslims, who are seen as the "crimmigrant others" (Aas, 2011), being unproportionally kept under transnational surveillance[4].

The relevance of these studies concerning the asymmetrical relations – imagined or real – for the present thesis is important, and these relations are mainly discussed in chapter eight,

[4] The term 'crimmigration' was coined by Juliet Stumpf (2006), referring to the complex nexus of immigration policy and policing that emerged in the U.S. after 1980.

where the focus is on the images and stereotypes of Muslims in Iceland, as presented by public discourses, in media and on online platforms. Like the studies referred to above, an important standpoint is a stated fault line between the Other and "us", mostly meaning the Muslim. As Sinclair (2021) shows, the real asymmetry between "them" and "us" is not particularly problematic, but rather it is the projection of fear of and prejudice against the foreign and strange, often dressed in the discourse of "host" and "guest" (Rytter, 2019), with the latter often being portraited as a suspect with dishonest motives. How this discourse has developed in Iceland is addressed in chapter eight.

The Danish anthropologist Peter Hervik (2011) has highlighted through three case studies how structural racism, Islamophobia, and what he calls the politicization of the media, engineered a growing anti-Muslim atmosphere in Denmark. The first of his case studies was on an aggressive media campaign against immigrants and refugees, helping to launch fierce nationalism, or neo-nationalism in Denmark, which was promoted by the media and by right-wing politicians in the name of free speech. The second case concerned young Danish Muslim political activists who were attacked by the media and accused of having links to terrorist organisations, which ultimately destroyed their prospective political careers. The third case was the much-published Muhammed cartoon affair in Denmark. The affair was dressed up as part of defending freedom of expression, as well as defending Danish national and Christian values, the affair being dressed in the term "cultural war of values" (Hervik, 2014). According to Hervik, these three cases were emblematic of increased Islamophobia in Denmark, grounded in growing neo-nationalism, neo-racism and populism, where anti-Muslim sentiments and expressions had become widely accepted and had "passed the dinner table test" (Allen, 2013; Batty, 2011).

In Norway, in the wake of the terrorist attacks by Anders Breivik in 2011, the Norwegian anthropologist Sindre Bangstad (2014) examined the rise of racism, xenophobia and Islamophobia in Norway. Just as in Denmark in relation to the Cartoon affair, the politicalized media in Norway played a crucial part, together with some politicians, in paving the way for someone like the terrorist Anders Breivik to murder 77 people in Oslo and Utøy in Norway in 2011. Breivik wanted to stem the immigration of people he saw as threatening the national and Christian values of Norway (Bangstad and Helland, 2019). At the centre of his hateful approach were Muslims, Muslim immigrants and Islam, which he saw as danger to the national integrity of Norway. Similar to Hervik (2011), Bangstad demonstrated the alignment of politics and media and the politicisation of most of the media in instrumentalising anti-Muslim hatred and Islamophobia. The case of Breivik is a clear example of how relentless hate-speech can transform into hate-crime and terror. Bangstad and Helland (2019) examined the role the Norwegian writer Hege Storhaug, who is a staunch Islamophobe, had in promoting anti-Muslim hate in Norway, especially in her book *Islam – the Eleventh Plague* (2015), which was translated into Icelandic by a former parliamentarian Magnús Þór Hafsteinsson and published in Iceland (*Þjóðarplágan íslam*). According to Bangstad and Helland, few actors in Norway have had such decisive impact on the framing of Muslims in Norway as Storhaug, who has been financed by government funds as well as

by corporate billionaire money (Bangstad and Helland, 2019, p. 2230). This demonstrates the interlinking of similar sentiments on transnational levels with the same goal, that is to belittle Muslims and form an image of them as a threat to nationalistic values and racial purity (Rana, 2007, Werbner, 2005, 2013).

These sentiments similarly appear when the Other has been integrated into the local structures. Bangstad (2013) has in that regard examined the media environment in Norway, its notion of freedom of expression and the state of Norwegian media as part and parcel of hegemonic power instead of being a corrective to power. In this atmosphere, freedom of expression has become infused with "with or against" absolutism. Bangstad states that freedom of expression has developed into "nationalization of liberal values" (p. 356). Within this environment, some Muslims active in the media are included, while others are excluded, as in "good Muslims" versus "bad Muslims" (cf. Mamdani, 2004). Muslims who toe the same line as hegemonic media are included, but Muslims who are critical of the ruling hegemonic power, guarded by the media, are excluded. Thus, in the liberal, public space, where freedom of expression is experienced as being sacred, the political and ideological standpoint of Muslims in the media is policed by inclusion and exclusion. This can only be seen as a subtle form of anti-Muslim approach, where the hegemonic mainstream mediascape defines who is a good and welcome Muslim, and who is a bad and therefore excluded Muslim (Bangstad, 2013).

The difficult relationship of the French state with its Muslim subjects is often said to be caused by the violent and oppressive history of French colonialism in North and West Africa, as well as its strict adherence to secular norms (*laïcité*) and rejection of multiculturalism (Cesari, 2021; Roy, 2004, 2006). Bowen (2007) has examined the debates in France about religious symbols in the public arena in France, focusing mainly on the head coverings of Muslim women (hijab) and the laws banning this attire primarily from the point of view of the French public, intellectuals and media, and the tensions between French secularism (*laïcité*) and religious freedom. Bowen´s main focus has been the intersection of religion (especially Islam), secularism and citizenship, and the difficulty France has with dealing with diverse ethnic, cultural and religious groups within its borders (Bowen, 2007, 2010). Bowen's research has shown that the French system - the legal, the political and the media - stresses strict separation of religion and the state, as well as being intent on avoiding the forming of multicultural society. At the same time, he has shown that despite this, French Muslims have been seeking to adjust their communities to the requirements of the French state (Bowen, 2007, 2010). Joan Scott (2007) examined the so-called veil affair in France, its legal and social underpinnings and consequences. In 2004, the French state banned Muslim women and girls from wearing the hijab in public settings. This was done, according to the French authorities, to protect the integrity of the secular French state, and its central constitutional concept, *laïcité*. This situation intersected the concepts of secularism, religion, liberal modernity, religious freedom, multiculturalism, as well as the notions of citizenship and national belonging, i.e., who could be French, and what is it to be French. Scott argues that this whole affair is symptomatic of the unwillingness and/or failure of the French state

to accept and embrace its colonial subjects, as full French subjects, or citizens. Scott sees this as racist policies creating its own "clash of civilizations" within French society.

In the context of the above studies concerning relations of Western secular states to Muslim minorities and cultural diversity, John R. Bowen (2008, 2010) has focused on how Muslims in France react to being Muslim and on Islam in secular France (Bowen, 2010). He asks how Muslims are integrated in French society and how French Muslims think of Islam in the French context. Bowen examines how French Muslims form and run new Islamic institutions and new forms of teaching and approaching Islam. This entails specific French manners of thinking and being Muslim, seeking to integrate Islam and common French approaches to religious norms and the strong secular norms (*laïcité*) in France. This novel approach has engendered strong responses, both from French society and Islamic institutions abroad, underlining the transnational context. The pressures from secular France have pushed Muslims in France to develop new and pragmatic manners of living religiously in French secular society resulting in the relationship between the French state and Muslim institutions degenerating, especially during the presidency of President Emmanuel Macron, where the state has closed down a large number of mosques and other Muslim organizations, such as NGOs (Cossé, 2021).

Comparing the French context to a different approach to multiculturalism, Bowen has studied the history and current practices of Islamic so-called *Shari'a* councils in British cities (2016). These councils are concerned with familial matters, especially divorce and inheritance disputes. These institutions are particular for Britain, where they operate side by side with civil courts and the judicial system. For many Muslims, not least women, these councils are seen as helpful in solving difficult disputes linked to divorce and inheritance, but they have been criticised by secular society as anachronistic and un-British. Yet, these *Shari'a* councils balance between Islamic legal traditions and British civil law, which will always override the councils in case of discrepancy. Bowen demonstrates a unique British way of integration and adjustment of divergent legal customs and practices, underlining the multicultural policies in Britain, which contrast with the policies in France, where the state rejects ideas of "communitarianism" (Bowen, 2008, 2010; see also Scott, 2007). These studies of the Muslim contexts in the neighbouring countries of France (Bowen, 2008, 2010) and Britain (2016) demonstrate clearly the different policies concerning multiculturalism and the relations of religion and secularism, with the French policies strictly assimilatory, while integration and tolerance towards differences and multiculturalism characterises the British context. This also shows that there is no consensus on how to manage the intersection of religion and secularism in the West.

Nathan Lean (2012) has examined how the fear of Muslims was created in the United States, not least via diverse media outlets, conventional, mainstream press and online platforms. He talks of "Broadcasting Anti-Muslim Madness" (p. 66) in describing these operations and the Christian (Zionist) Right in this promotion of anti-Muslim hate and fear. The American Christian Right has aligned itself with the Zionist Right in Israel and the pro-Israel/Zionist

Right in Europe (the so-called Zionist lobby). Lean shows how these sentiments have become government policies in the United States, as well as in Europe, especially in France, Norway and Denmark, the Netherlands and Britain. Khaled Beydoun (2018), also examining islamophobia in the United States, argues that it is not a temporary or passing current but an enduring structural construct. In the United States, as in other Western countries, Islam is a clear marker of otherness, of the Other being pushed to the forefront of public consciousness post-9/11 and the following the so-called War on Terror (see also Mamdani, 2004, concerning the context of The War on Terror and Islamophobia). Thus, Islam is viewed not only as a religion but also as a political identity engendering suspicion and fear. This sentiment therefore helps causing discriminations against Muslims and Islamophobia in the United States. Beydoun (2018) talks of "private Islamophobia" (p. 32) and "structural Islamophobia" (p. 36), the former manifesting in everyday, private relations, while the latter being part of government policy, public discourses, as a structural and systemic phenomenon. These sentiments are tied to foreign policy and military operations in Muslim countries, thus connecting local and global structures and policies, framed by the "War on Terror" (Beydoun, 2018, p. 86; Kumar, 2012; Mamdani, 2004). The mainstream media, together with the so-called "Islamophobia Industry" (Ali et al, 2011; Lean, 2012), has played this role in promoting and maintaining these Islamophobic sentiments in the West, both in America as well as in Europe.

2.3.3 Identity formation

In chapter seven of this thesis, I examine the situation of Icelandic converts to Islam and the formation of new identities that follows this change. This process has been examined by Rambo (1993) and Roald (2004, 2012), as implicating profound social and cultural change, effecting identity formations, feelings of belonging and national sentiments. When it comes to Muslim converts, they have engendered many new approaches in relation to ideas and practices of Islam in Scandinavia, despite their minority position within Muslims in Scandinavia (Bagge and Jensen, 2015). According to Roald (2004, 2012), Bagge and Jensen (2015) and Jensen (2007), among others, immigrants have initiated diverse cultural changes, which has forced social scientists to rethink their views on many cultural factors, questions of identity formation and belonging (Østergaard, 2007, 2009, Østergaard and Jensen, 2009). Roald (2004) talked about "creolization" of culture as a good metaphor for the cultural blend taking place between immigrants and the majority society, where converts often act as a liminal third part (cf. Baumann, 2004). Thus, the social and cultural changes that take place between Muslims and Islam and the majority form new social and cultural forms for all involved and can work as catalyst for diverse changes (Jensen, 2007). Bagge and Jensen (2015) interviewed several Danish women who had converted to Islam about their experience following the conversions. The women in their research talked of three main phases following conversion to Islam. First, there is a period of love of the new religion, where they became passionate and even radical in their feelings and approaches, taking the faith very seriously. The second phase is characterised by disappointment, as the converts had expected Islam to be one path, then discovering the complexity and cultural diversity of

the religion. During this phase, the converts realised the difference between Islam and what Muslims practice, and they started to separate diverse cultural customs from the religion itself. Usually, according to the women, a Danish-Muslim identity emerges during this stage. Following conversion, and comprising the third stage of this process, the women experience themselves as being the Other, often with negative reactions from the social environment, family, friends, and other people. As time passed, the women said they were proud to be both Danish and Muslims, appealing to freedom of religion, and accepting their new and ambiguous identity. In some respects, the women became links between different worlds as cultural translators and interpreters, yet they were all concerned with the growing Islamophobia in Denmark (Bagge and Jensen, 2015).

In a similar vein, the anthropologist Gudrun T. Jensen (2007) argues that New Muslims represent the formation of new national and religious identities. In that sense, they are liminal and can mediate between different cultural worlds and between Muslim and non-Muslim identities, and she examines to what degree these individuals can be catalysts for change of public and national identities. Jensen uses Baumann's (2004) concept of "grammars of identity", as a model of the formation of identities related to "us" and "them", juxtaposing the idea of sameness, which is important in the Danish context in connection with the relations between "us" and "them". The nationalistic consensus implied in the idea of sameness causes unease towards that which is "different" and difficulty in accepting the unknown. Jensen talks of two types of grammars of identity: the grammar of orientalism and the grammar of encompassment (Baumann, 2004, p. 18-31). The former refers to the opposition between "Danish culture" and "Muslim culture" and implies distance and opposition to the unknown. The latter refers to cultural and social hierarchy, implying the notion and demand for "assimilation," where Danes are superior to the Other who cannot be a "real Dane." Yet, Jensen argues that the Muslim converts act as catalysts for change when it comes to national identity in Denmark, even if their experience is negative because of their new religion (Jensen, 2007).

2.4 Conclusion

I began the discussion in this chapter by focusing on macro theories concerned with historical and political relations between the West and the so-called Orient (Islam/Muslims). These relations have been characterised by colonial and neo-colonial narratives and experiences, which have affected the identities and positions of Muslims in the West and are therefore relevant to the present study. Citing Said (1978), I see the Orient not only as a geographical definition but also as an ideoscape (Appadurai, 1996), a trope and an imagery for othering. Therefore, the Orient has imaginary power, which is still active and effective when it comes to Muslim identity (especially in the West), as well as to the identification of Muslims and Islam from the viewpoint of the West. The depiction implicit in Orientalism is ultimately degrading and racist, and its affective power has a strong hold Muslim identity in the West and the West's attitude to Muslims and Islam.

As a continuation of Said's thesis, I addressed the ideas of the anthropologist Talal Asad (1993, 2003), who, like the former author, examined these West/Orient dynamics from a historical and geopolitical perspective, while emphasising the role of religion (Islam) in this narrative and the formation of Western imaginaries of Muslims. This process is still going strong today. The arguments of both Said and Asad concern asymmetrical power relations and symbolic violence, oppression and cultural denigration, which, as an example, is visible today as legal processes in some Western countries (Bowen, 2006; Scott, 2007) where the state legislates on Muslim dress, especially for Muslim women. Asad underlines the role religion has played in essentialising Muslims as a backward, monolithic entity, something Muslims must continually counter. Asad states that anthropologists have shifted the perception of the religions of "primitive" people by demonstrating the social, cultural and political nature of their religions and religious practices, seeing them as parts of larger historical narratives (Asad, 1993). This applies equally to "tribal" religions as to a universal religion like Islam. The de-colonialization of Islam has been important for the formation of Muslim identities in being diverse, complex and heterogenous and in reflecting the huge cultural diversity of the world's Muslims.

After discussing these general theoretical approaches, I turned to theories of social and cultural diversity and difference. I addressed the theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1986, 1991), where the emphasis is on the interplay of social fields, competition for symbolic capital and habitus, especially in the case of converts, and I related these concepts to the social relations among the Muslim community in Iceland and their relations to the majority society and the Icelandic state. I find the concept of grammars of identity/alterity presented by Baumann (2004) useful for analysing the internal relations among the Muslim community and the dynamics that entails. Following this, I presented scholarly writings on the situation of Muslims in the West, mainly in Europe and the Nordic countries, as well as on converts and anti-Muslim sentiments in various Western countries. This demonstrates the great diversity characterising Muslim communities in the West, mirroring the diversity of the Muslim community in Iceland. Thus, the theoretical approaches discussed in this chapter focus primarily on diversity, cultural complexity, asymmetrical relations of power, as well as on the importance of the historical, colonial/neo-colonial, and geopolitical narratives of which Muslims in the West are an integral part and which shapes the positions and identities of Muslims in the West and the community of Muslims in Iceland. In this way, I have shown how the local context relates to the global situation, linking a "small place to large issues" (see Eriksen, 2015). In the next chapter I account for my methodological approaches and my own position among the Muslim community during my fieldwork.

3 Methodological approaches

Introduction

In this chapter I explain the main methodological approaches applied in my research, as well as some theoretical contexts related to the methods. The study was conducted over six years and can thus be seen as a longitudinal study where I was able to follow the changes taking place among the Muslim community in Iceland, where it became transformed from a small group into a vibrant community of three thousand people from all over the world. The fieldwork started at the beginning of 2009 and finished formally in the autumn of 2012, yet I have kept in touch with some of the participants since the end of formal fieldwork.

The main method I used was participant observation, with observation being more pronounced, and together with that I conducted semi-structured interviews as well as participating in casual conversations. I also used information and data from the news media, especially in connection with the so-called mosque affair (see chapter eight). In the years 2013 to 2015, I analysed media discussions concerning the situation of Icelandic Muslims, which gained momentum following the allocation of a plot of land to the Muslim Association of Iceland to build a mosque in 2013. Addressing ethnographic methods, Harry Wolcott talks of experience and enquiry in doing ethnographic study. The former links to participant observation and casual conversations, while the latter pertains to structures or semi-structured interviews (Wolcott, 1999, pp. 46-47). Interviews are an important and integral part of fieldwork, as a compliment to participant observation. Participant observation is an experiential process, while interviewing is a manner of enquiring (p. 51). The relative weight of experiencing and enquiring depends on the nature of the field setting itself. Informal conversations are important as a source of information and it underlines the casual, everyday feel of doing fieldwork. According to Wolcott (1999, p. 212), "common sense" is a sensible approach when conducting casual conversations in the field. One way of testing common sense, according to Wolcott, is "… to think how your grandmother might have gone about finding things out". Also, Wolcott advises against "… [being] too business-like in dress or manner … [as it sets] the wrong tone for fostering natural dialogue" (p. 212). Kvale (2009, pp. 302-303) talk about "conversational knowledge" produced in casual conversations in the field, as a mode of knowing emerging in conversations between persons. Thus, the importance of casual conversations a part of participant observation cannot be underestimated as part of the overall research method of ethnography.

In addition to formal research, informal exchanges of opinions and ideas with non-Muslim people (including friends and family) about Islam and Muslims, and the diverse sentiments involved, were part of the field and of the data, however informal and speculative. Many of these situations seemed to me to reflect "the public mood". I consider

this informal information to be part of the ethnographic data in in this research. In the next section I address conducting ethnographic fieldwork and my own position in the field. Then I discuss the main methodological approaches applied and finally I talk about important ethical aspect inherent in ethnographic research.

3.1 Conducting fieldwork

The ethnographic method has always been an integral part of anthropological research, both as a methodological tool and as a theoretical approach (Nader, 2013). Ethnography is concerned with how the researcher navigates and acts in and through the field and how his or her relations with the objects of study, his or her participants, and others who share time and space with the researcher during fieldwork. This concerns the method itself as a qualitative method, comprising mostly of in-depth interviews, informal talk and discussions and prolonged participation and observation among the people concerned. In addition, the ethnographic method consists of working with the data collected in the field, of analysing the data and finally transferring it into a text (Clifford & Marcus, 1986; Ingold, 2014; Wolcott, 1999). When I had chosen the object and the field of study for ethnographic research, the first step was to gain access to the group, community or society concerned, which involved finding a "gatekeeper", an individual or individuals, who could "open the gate" for me. This is the first step of many in the field, according to Steffen Dalsgaard (2013), who has argued that the field is marked by temporal phases and turning points which can be seen as milestones in the educational and learning process that fieldwork inevitably is, often paved by unforeseeable occurrences. Another important thing is to find out how best to go about the work, which methods to use and not least the application of the methods. In organising ethnographic fieldwork, Wolcott (1999, pp. 46-47) talked of experiencing, enquiring and examining, with first hand experiencing coming through the senses, by observing, seeing and hearing. Enquiring entails talking to, conversing and interviewing participants, as actively asking. Examining involves primarily focusing on what others have produced in the form of written sources, as for example archival research and the media. In this chapter I will describe how I applied these methodological approaches in my research.

Paul Rabinow (1977) argued, referring to the predicament of observation and participation, that the tension between these approaches defined the "space of anthropology" (p. 79), with observation always in the driving seat, situating the practice of the anthropologist. As he put it: "No matter how far "participation" may push the anthropologist in the direction of "Not-Otherness", the context is still ultimately dictated by observation and externality (p. 80). Rabinow conceives of this dialectical relationship as saying that participation changes and evolves and affects or forms the anthropologist and brings him or her to new observations, which imprints new views on him or her and which in turn affects his or her participation. But, Rabinow (1977) has argued that this dialectic is governed by observation, which is usually the starting point. Thus, Rabinow conceives of participation and observation as a twofold, or dual-dialectical, approach, but still difficult to unite or synchronise.

I was conscious of this dilemma during my fieldwork, since there were limits to my participation, for example as I do not speak or understand Arabic, and also because most of the fieldwork took place in the mosques. Therefore, as Rabinow points out, observation tends to weigh heavier than participation in the field. Similarly, Wolcott (1999, pp. 44-46) stresses the ambivalence of participant observation as posing problems for the researcher, making it difficult to define, as it can refer to everything the researcher grapples within the field. Walcott uses the term "non-participant participant observer" when researchers do not try to conceal what they are doing or denying their presence, thus limiting their participant observation as active practice (pp. 48-49). This implies the question of involvement and the balancing of passive and active roles in the field.

In the beginning, I had my notebook in the field, but soon found it inconvenient, even uncomfortable, drawing too much attention to the act of writing notes, also, I felt it disturbed my communication and presence among the participants. Instead, I decided to drop the notebook until after leaving the site, and to write the notes as soon afterwards as possible. This required relying on my memory of what went on, of what I saw and what I heard. Remembering is not always so straightforward and there is still much we do not know about memory, how it works, and what kind of a process it is, but one way is to see it as a "… socially accomplished realm of activity" (Prus, 2007, p. 382). Tamara Kohn (2010) discusses the part memory plays in doing fieldwork, saying that memories are experienced and borrowed (someone else's memory) in a social engagement, in a dynamic and constructive process, a process which engenders and constructs social and cultural knowledge, influenced by various established interests, places and events and as Kohn (2010, p. 186) puts it: "If memory itself moves things about, and the serendipitous moments in the life course move the anthropologist and her subjects through time within and between places, then the study of anthropology is always the study of movement" (original emphasis). Thus, memory has a significant role to play in the process, personal and collective, of constructing knowledge and forming "reality" or "truth". Thus, the role of the dialogical correspondence between the student and the studied in constructing cultural and social knowledge and importantly the role in this process of memory, both (and equally) of the researcher and the participants, is vital. Therefore, special attention should be paid to the selective nature of memory, consciously and unconsciously. During my fieldwork, I tried to keep all this in mind, and I succeeded in convincing myself that by "training" my memory, I would hopefully remember well enough what had taken place to be able to make reliable notes, which I did as soon as I was on my own. So, I left my notebook out of sight in the field, but at the same time I took many photographs on a regular basis, which was accepted to the degree that I was made a photographer for the mosque from time to time.

The emphasis on ethnographic fieldwork, or ethnography, as first and foremost participant observation (acting, seeing, watching) has been challenged, where the importance of listening has instead been emphasised as being equally integral to the ethnographic project as "seeing", or observing visually (Forsey, 2010). Accordingly, what Forsey (2010) terms "engaged listening" is equally significant ethnographic undertaking and no less aural than

visual, and often the ethnographer is more participant listener than observer. Even if it is difficult and actually futile to separate the senses, especially during intensive attending as in fieldwork, Forsey (2010) argues that the visual bias in the Western scientific tradition and thought has partly caused this emphasis on observing over listening. Ethnography is therefore not only participant observation, but also formal and informal talk and dialogue, with additionally means applied, such as video, photos, statistics, archives, the internet, and so on. Engaged listening means that the ethnographer has to listen deeply and observe closely all possible aspects of the field, aural and ocular, in trying to acquire deep cultural knowledge and understanding, which of course is also dependent on the language competence of the researcher. Forsey (2010), therefore, argues that listening is just as important to ethnographic fieldwork as observing and that listening and talking, and engaging in dialogue is equally important for the ethnographic report. Linguistic communication is, after all, a fundamental aspect of being human, of being social, which underlines and facilitates knowledge production, reality formation and perception, and notably, the space where important meaning is established (and of course, one should not underestimate embodiment and bodily expressions).

After having found a gatekeeper, I proceeded with taking the first steps towards the world which I was going to be in close contact with for the next few years. Initially, one particular person became my main gatekeeper, but gradually I found a few others to act as contact-makers in the field. While finding my way, I was met with polite goodwill but also caution, sometimes bordering on suspicion which, considering the political atmosphere towards Muslims and Islam at the time, seemed to me quite understandable and I was aware that many of those I met were watching me closely. It needs to be remembered that an integral part of the ethnographic method is the two-way manner of observation, which means that not only is the researcher observing the people under study, but they are equally observing him/her attentively to find out if he/she has any suspicious intent, or just out of plain human curiosity. My initial position in the field was coloured by this atmosphere and I realised that the most sensible plan of action was to be patient, in line with ethnographic work sometimes categorised as slow science.

My first communication and relations with my participants were therefore informal conversations, since they were initially not very eager to open up too much. I was being watched and studied and even questioned about my stand on religion and my own religious position. Most of the Muslims presumed that I was a Christian, and therefore one of the "people of the Book", as the Prophet called Jews, Christians, and Muslims, constituting the original ummah, and since I am not, I had to try and explain the position of being "agnostic" or a sceptic, but with a strong interest in religion. Most of the Muslims were indifferent, but some concluded that I was a "closet Muslim", and that I would "revert" to Islam in due time. But there were a few who questioned my presence in the mosques, yet without confronting me directly, but told to me by other participants, who said that I was always welcome in the mosques. The imams, as well as many others, stressed this repeatedly, calling me "brother".

Some of the Muslims encouraged me to participate in the prayers, while others were not as enthusiastic about that. I was often asked if (or when) I would embrace Islam, and I usually responded by saying that I was not yet ready for it, but that you could never know. I was informed of the Islamic concept of fitra, which postulates that every human being is born with an inherent spiritual quality, or essence, which is either conscious or not, and which can be conceived of as a "primal human nature". For some of the Muslims, this quality was apparently not active in me, so far. For others, it was not important, and my presence gradually became habitual, and I became like a "part of the furniture", even if there were a few individuals who were not completely comfortable with my presence, eying me with some suspicion, at least in the beginning, wondering what my "real" work among them was.

It was obvious that what was most important at this stage was to gain trust and for that process I thought it important to give of myself, reveal things about my own life and background and use my experience to find some common ground shared by me and my participants, since the researcher needs to bring himself/herself into the field, because the only thing that can connect the student to the participants is the student himself/ herself, his/her experience, and life. The student has, as Bourdieu (2003) argued, to objectify him/herself to connect in a meaningful way to the field. When people discover common ground, the forming of contacts and relationships opens up and it becomes easier to build trust between the two parts. I think my age as a middle-aged male, as well as the fact that I have lived in many different countries and have had diverse social identities and experienced marginality in numerous ways, did facilitate my connection with the Muslims, most of whom are immigrants and marginalised in various ways. Even though being a "ethnic" Icelander, I have always had ambivalent feelings towards my own nationality and my sense of belonging, and consequently I thought that might help me to empathise with my participants. But I was in no way "one of them", always the outsider, even if I felt I could identify with the marginal positions many of them had in relation to Icelandic society and culture – so in a strange way I felt both alien and as (in a limited way) one of them. Yet, being a white middle-aged male, working in academia, I realised that relative to many of my participants, I was somehow in a privileged position as such, and also by being native to the place of research.

When considering one's "way of being", generally, and specifically as during fieldwork in a "alien" environment, Bourdieu's concept of habitus is a useful way of framing this condition (Bourdieu, 1977). It can be seen as a way of being and also as a way of thinking and perceiving, as state of the body and the state of mind (Clark, 2004). Clark (2004) sees fieldwork practice as habitus, both in the sense that the ethnographer enters the field with "habitual" pre-learning and theoretical knowledge, which is bound to influence his/her interaction with the research participants. When entering the field, accommodation to the new place/space cannot be anticipated beforehand, even if the fieldworker has certain expectations of adapting and acquiring "new" habitus. Even if the ethnographer has been "pre-programmed", the field will show itself to be full of serendipitous surprises (Dalsgaard, 2013).

From the outset, I frequented the MAI mosque and later to the ICCI, therefore the mosques became the focal points of my fieldwork. I will account for these locations in more detail in chapter four (or five), when discussing the Muslim community and the Icelandic context. The first few times in the mosque, it took some time to decide where I should be positioned in the praying room during prayer, while I was met with the probing eyes of those present. I was invited to sit on a chair at the back of the room, beside the semi-enclosure, which served as the women's praying space. Gradually, I was led to sit on the floor alongside the rows of the praying men. This arrangement lasted for some time, and it seemed to be some confusion about where I should be positioned in the prayer room and in the group. Finally, after some time had passed, I was invited to sit on the praying mat among the praying men and that arrangement became permanent, but this process had taken about six months. Having reached this point, I felt that I had become closer to the group, both physically and symbolically, that I had become more a part of this community, even if I had initially not participated in the praying rituals, which I would do later. The way many of the people talked to me (especially the men) seemed gradually to change by this, and some of the men had started calling me "brother" (Muslims frequently address each other as "brothers" and "sisters") and some joked that I had become "some kind of Muslim", or that I was a "closet Muslim", but still some kept their distance from me and I felt that they were still wondering if my motives were sincere and what I was really doing among them. This is not an uncommon experience, especially among groups who are in some ways marginalised and/or politically suspect, as can be said of many Muslim or Islamic groups in the West today. Tayfun Atay (2010), who did fieldwork among a Turkish Islamic Sufi order in London talked about how some members of the group never took him in (even if the leader, the sheik, eventually did) and never trusted his motives and how this caused him unease and pressure (even though he was a (nominal) Muslim and a Turk). He was never quite sure if he was an insider or an outsider, since his Muslim (cultural) background and nationality made himself feel "inside", while his marginal/temporal position made him an "outsider". Interestingly, Atay recounts how his attitude became transformed during his fieldwork, where he initially was quite sceptical (as a left-leaning atheist) of the sect he was about to study, to becoming increasingly sympathetic towards the members of the Sufi sect, even defensive when being enquired by his atheist, leftist friends (Atay, 2010). In my case, I can, to a point, identify with this, as I was always, in fact "outside"; a non-Muslim, an "ethnic" Icelander, yet gradually identifying with the Muslims (for example participating in praying) and their world and taking their side when being inquired by my sceptical friends.

Gradually, my presence in the mosque became accepted and during the month of Ramadan 2009, I participated in the fasting and was present in the mosques almost every evening and into the night, yet still without participating in the praying. I had asked the then imam at the place if I could pray, but he was a bit sceptical, and lectured me about doing ablution (*wudu*), and so on, so I decided to leave it at the time. During this Ramadan, at the end of it, when the funds for the obligatory (for all Muslims) and collective alms, the *zakat*, was being collected I asked the imam if I could contribute and give my share, he told me that this was

a religious duty and practice for all Muslims, and since I was not a Muslim, I was not able to take part. I reasoned that I had participated in Ramadan activities (without praying), and that I had felt like a part of this community during this month and wanted to contribute to a good cause. Due to my insistence, the imam eventually accepted my zakat, and I felt all the better for it. I reasoned that just as nothing forbids non-Muslims to pray with Muslims in the mosque, nothing should forbid non-Muslims from participating in the *zakat*, but the imam wanted to adhere to the rules (which are after all, often quite flexible and subject to interpretations). Maybe the imam was not too certain himself what the exact rules were. This is one example of many, demonstrating how varied Islamic views and interpretations in fact are and of the different approaches Muslims have to the practice of their faith. For me to have participated in the fasting together with the Muslims felt like an important turning point and consequently more people became open towards me, and their attitude became more positive. I felt like I was progressing and slowly being seen as upright in my intentions (and probably harmless). Eventually and gradually, my position changed to the extent that I felt more or less that I was an accepted part of this group which congregated at the Ármúli mosque. Because of my association with the MAI had been longer and "deeper" than with the ICCI, I had in many ways established more stable contacts at the MAI than at the ICCI, even if I was equally welcome there.

Some of the Muslims had started to notice my interest in Islamic theology and scholarship and when they found out that I was reasonably, yet superficially, interested and knowledgeable in Islamic theology, they sought my company to discuss these matters and enlighten me more about the faith. For example, I had some interesting discussions about Islamic concepts with a guest imam from Saudi Arabia, who was conducting the religious ceremonies during Ramadan of 2009 for the Islamic Cultural Centre of Iceland (ICCI), who enlightened me about the basic tenants of Islam. Another Islamic scholar, who later became the regular imam for the ICCI, and educated at the prestigious Al Azhar University in Cairo, frequently wanted to discuss Islamic matters with me, since, as he said jokingly, I knew more about Islam than most of the Muslims in the mosque. I took that as a compliment, and during my fieldwork we had many discussions where he acted as a teacher to me, which I think we both enjoyed. The reason I mention this is to demonstrate how my position became transformed as my fieldwork progressed, how it changed from being an unknown non-Muslim from the outside, seen (by some) as having unclear motives, to having scholarly discussions about Islamic theology and history with Arabic Islamic scholars, even to the point where some of the participants thought that I had become a Muslim, and started relating to me accordingly. One example was an incident during *fajr* (dawn) prayer, where only a few men were present, where one Muslim started talking to me as if I was a Muslim (I participated in the praying), and another participant, who knew me well, intervened and told him that I (still) had not converted. Participating in the prayer rituals and the social activities connected to them had brought me closer to more participants than before.

During the month of Ramadan 2012, I took full part in the praying sessions, which are much more intense than during regular times, where I divided my time bi-weekly between the two

mosques. Besides participating in praying, I read the Qur'an (some Muslims read the Qur'an more than once during Ramadan) and had many discussions with some of the Muslims about various religious dimensions of Islamic teachings and about the meaning and significance of Ramadan. On the cusp of this month, I went to the ICCI mosque and met the Imam. I told him I was going to participate in the Ramadan fast and that I wanted to participate in the praying rituals. The imam said he thought it was a good idea and that I was welcome. We discussed the Qur'an, something he was always eager to do with me. During this Ramadan, I participated in the tarawih prayers (which are not obligatory) and I really enjoyed the experience, even if it was somehow physically taxing. These prayers are not obligatory but are considered very beneficial. They are performed in pairs of two, and commonly by 8, 12 or 20 *raka'at*, with a pause after every four *raka'ah*[5] . During these prayers, the whole Qur'an is recited (for this purpose, it is divided into 30 *juz*, one for each tarawih). Participating in these prayers was physically testing but emotionally gratifying, and even if I did not understand the (Arabic) words, the recitation affected me strongly, and in a positive and calming manner. There were two variations of performing this ritual between the two mosques. In the MAI mosque, each round, or *raka'ah*, was followed by chanting the names of God (dhikr), from Sufi tradition, where in the ICCI mosque, there was no dhikr chanting. According to a few of my participants, there were various types of tarawih rituals, one participant said that the Prophet had often changed some rituals, so that they would not become strict Sunna (prescriptions of conducts). The tarawih prayers are performed after the *isha* (night-time) prayers, which is the last of the five daily prayers. Participating in these rituals, I experienced a powerful sense of unity (brotherhood) as well as tranquillity. The spirituality of these rituals touched me to a certain degree, demonstrating the unifying, spiritual power of ritual. As before, by participating in Ramadan, the community became more open and positive towards me, especially by participating in the prayers. I had become a part of a small group that met in the MAI mosque between two and three in the morning to perform the *fajr* prayers (dawn prayers). This group consisted of three to four men, and I was told that these prayers were especially powerful, in part because of the time of day (or night) they were offered. These moments were very peaceful and serene. I was told that the fajr prayers were the favourite prayers of the Prophet.

At this point, I felt I had come as close to the object of my study as possible without being a Muslim. Most of the members of the community knew by then why I was there and what I was doing, but still there were a few who thought that I had converted to Islam and took me as such. What I have recounted here shows first and foremost how ethnographic fieldwork constitutes a temporal and spatial, processes of formation and reformation of positions, identities and habitus. In relation to space and place, the situation can be seen as consisting of two locations/places/spaces, but contrary to the traditional image of yesteryear of the village/locations/place as a localised society and culturally bounded (Gupta & Ferguson,

[5] A rakat, or rakʿah; plural: raka'at, is the prescribed movements and words performed by Muslims while offering prayers. It also refers to a single unit of Islamic prayers.

1997), the inhabitants of these two "villages" (the two mosques) stem from a multitude of countries, with very different cultural backgrounds and complex globalised connections across the world.

3.2 Interviews

I had many informal conversations with participants while observing, listening, and participating, as well as conducting thirty-six "in-depth", semi-structured interviews (see Walcott, 1999, pp. 52-54). This communication was based on relatively open-ended questions, making the participants to a certain degree shape the trajectory of the interview. These semi-structured interviews were between one and two hours long. They were recorded and transcribed in the language they were conducted (English or Icelandic). Most of the interviews were conducted in people's homes, some in one of the mosques, and a few at the University of Iceland. Of the 34 formal, in-depth interviews I conducted, 24 of them were with men, and 10 with women, 12 interviews were with converts, while 22 were conducted with Muslims who had immigrated to Iceland from many different countries, and two were visitors from abroad. The interviewees were between thirty and sixty years old. The participants who had migrated to Iceland came from ten countries in West Asia, North Africa, and the Balkans. They had at the time of the study, been in Iceland from three to forty-five years. In addition to the semi-structured interviews, I had informal and casual conversations with my participants while in the field, as referred to before, which were not recorded, but written as fieldnotes (Walcott, 1999, pp. 47-52). In addition to this, I conducted one interview with a policeman who worked as a contact person to the immigrant community, and who had good relationships with the Muslim community. Also, I interviewed a theologian and religious scholar who is similarly involved with working with religious organisations of immigrants on a regular basis, to obtain some insight into their knowledge of the Muslim community, as outsiders to it.

Semi-structured interviews, which I likewise applied in my research, are also integral to ethnographic research. This mode of enquiry is characterised by an open-ended quality, shaped by the interaction between participant and researcher. According to Wolcott (1999, p. 213), the researcher must be aware that he or she is there (in the field), how the participants make sense of their world. If participants cannot answer the questions, the researcher is not talking about their world. "The real art called for here, as in all ethnographic interviewing, is to get people to talk without having to ask a lot of direct questions, and to frame the questions that you ask in ways that make sense locally. This is the essence of the semi-structured interview" (p. 213). Semi-structured interviews are usually conducted with written open-ended questions, structuring the main course and flow of the interview. The questions should facilitate the flow of the conversation, stimulate thematic subjects, yet letting the participant influence the course of the interview (Kvale, 2009, pp. 130-131).

The methodology referred to above, that is participant observation and semi-structured interviews, characterised the first phase of my research, but the latter part, which took place after my main fieldwork, consisted to a large degree of following diverse media

discourses and analysing their contents. This was especially important when the prospect of a new mosque building in 2013 was being discussed in the press and generally in the public arena in Iceland.

3.3 Media analysis

During the so-called mosque affair, from, 2013-2015, following the allotment of a ground to the Muslim Association of Iceland for building a mosque, I scrutinised the Icelandic media, mainly newspapers and their online editions. I apply content analysis in addressing the diverse media contents (Julien, 2008; MaCnamara, 2005) to analyse the discourses that emerged during this period. Content analysis categorises textual data into clusters of themes, or conceptual categories to identify recurring patterns and relationships between themes. It is helpful in identifying "why" questions and pinpoint and analyse perceptions (Julien, 2008). Media content analysis is a systematic method of studying mass media, and it posits that "… verbal behaviour is a form of human behaviour, that the flow of symbols is part of the flow of events, and that the communication process is an aspect of the historical process …" (Lasswell and Pool, in MaCnamara, 2005).

Before the time of the mosque affair, there had been almost no public interest or media attention towards the Muslim community in Iceland, the only discussions about Muslims and Islam in Icelandic media were imported from diverse foreign outlets, most often portraying Muslims in negative contexts, concerned with immigrants in neighbouring countries or terrorist violence. When the discussions about Muslims in Iceland emerged during the mosque affair, they took place on various outlets. Printed media as well as the online platforms were the main sites for the discussions and debates, but also radio and TV. Social media sites had a prominent role in these discourses, where one particular Facebook site was very active in publishing anti-Muslim rhetoric, and interestingly, another Facebook site was established in opposition to the former. This will be discussed and analysed in more detail in chapter eight.

3.4 The participants

The participants in my project were Muslims who in the beginning were affiliated with the mosque in Ármúli, run by the Muslim Association of Iceland (MAI), and later, people linked to the Islamic Cultural Centre of Iceland (ICCI), which had split from the MAI in late 2008. Members of the Muslim community originate from many different countries, mainly from West Asia and North Africa, and the largest groups are from Morocco and the Balkans. There is also a small group of Icelandic converts. Due to the geographical distribution of my participants in the Reykjavík area (where most of them live), the mosques were inevitably the main points of reference during my research, even if I was, every once in a while, a guest in people's homes. Some members of the Muslim community were willing to participate in formal interviews, but equally, many would rather not, even people I otherwise had good

relations with. During the time of my fieldwork, it was usually the same group of people who were open to my (often annoying) enquires, while others politely shied away from being questioned or interviewed, where the communication never went beyond superficial chat (supposedly demonstrating that some of the Muslims continued to be wary in my presence). This meant that in such a small group as the Muslims in Iceland is, my access was ultimately somehow limited. There were some groups that I could not reach, such as the small group of Indonesians, living mainly in the Reykjanesbær area, and the gradually growing group of young Africans, who were becoming more visible around the time I had concluded my fieldwork, some of them students or refugees/asylum seekers. One group who I did not manage to participate with were the non-practicing, or so-called "cultural", or nominal Muslims, who evidently do not frequent the mosques or socialise much with the practicing community of "the faithful". I knew, for example, of a group of non-religious Iranians studying in one of the universities, and others who had little or no contact with the Muslims who attended the mosques. These groups are not part of this thesis.

As has become clear, the main locus of my fieldwork was the mosque environments and the people who frequented the mosques. Most of my participant observations took place there as these were the only places where the Muslim community came together for religious and social occasions. An interesting diversion to this was when I took part in teaching sessions at the Ármúli mosque where the then leader of the Muslim Association in Iceland (MAI) taught Arabic to a group of non-Arabic speakers, most of them Muslims (yet not all of them), and at the same time I taught Icelandic to a group of young Muslims who could not afford to pay for official language courses. This double position presented me to some people I had not seen before and where I experienced different shades concerning relations between the genders, where these relations seemed much more relaxed and informal than during religious events and I realised that it was mostly during prayers in the mosque that gendered relations were more formal and that this formality rarely extended beyond the prayer room during prayers, that is, beyond ritual context. One thing I noticed though was that there were noticeable cultural variations in these relations outside the ritual frame of the prayer room, as there was in most other relational patterns within the Muslim community.

Among the pupils was a group of young women, who did not frequent the mosque regularly for ritual purposes, at least I had not seen most of them before. Suddenly, here was a new group of Muslims and they were to be my co-pupils during the Arabic lessons, and afterwards my students in Icelandic. Most of the women put on some type of head covering when entering the mosque and I thought I could see who among them covered regularly and who did not by the way they managed the cloth. The Arabic lessons were first in line, then the Icelandic ones. The first evening, the women were from Egypt, Pakistan, Bosnia, Poland (a Muslim) and Iceland. A young man from Turkey, one Palestinian, and two from Morocco, one Bosnian and one Icelandic man were also present. The women seemed more open and enthusiastic than the men, and, as already mentioned, it was obvious that gender relations were different in this secular setting than during prayers. When this first lesson was over, I felt I had experienced a new side to the community. These sessions went on for a few weeks,

until I had to leave Iceland for my other residence (Moscow), and when I returned to Iceland these sessions were no longer active. I only met few of this group outside this context and did not have access to them on a regular basis, as they did not frequent the mosque regularly, and some of them never (some members of the Muslim community in Iceland practice their religious rituals at home). This made me recognise the limitation of the field and of my access to it, as the focal point was the mosques and the people who regularly were in attendance. But it showed me that there were different relational modes among the Muslims than what one experienced on the mosque level.

3.5 Ethical issues

When conducting ethnographic fieldwork, or other types of qualitative social research, ethical issues unavoidably present themselves, since this work always indicates close personal encounters, often in sensitive social contexts. One of the main guidelines when it comes to ethical questions during qualitative work is to avoid at any cost to harm the participants in any way, to compromise his or her position or create tensions within the social group one is working with. According to the American Anthropological Association [AAA] (1998), the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth [ASA] (1999), the European Commission's Research Ethics in Ethnography/Anthropology (2013) and the Code of Ethics of the Social Science Research Institute of the University of Iceland [Háskóli Íslands: Siðareglur Félagsvísindastofnunar HÍ] (2014), there are fundamental ethical codes, which all researchers agree on. One fundamental principle is avoiding doing harm to the participants, and to respect and protect the dignity and wellbeing of research participants. Because ethnographic and anthropological research implies intrusion into the daily lives of the people under study, there must be a credible reason for doing the research. In that respect, I handed out copies to the participants, explaining my intent, reasons, and the ethical and academic implications of my research. A principal issue here is trust between the researcher and his or her participants, since without trust, the projects fall apart, underlining the need for informed consent between researcher and participant, even if it is near impossible to get this from all participants, as it was in my case. Another important ethical side to ethnographic and anthropological research is the manner of presenting the outcome and whether the publication benefits the group being studied or if it might have harmful effects. Even if rules and guidelines have been drafted to help researchers with their job, it must be born in mind that complex and unforeseeable situations in the field during fieldwork can blur the application of those rules (AAA, 1998; ASA, 1999).

An important way of protecting the integrity of the participants is to use pseudonyms and try to conceal their identities in any way possible, such as changing the age, or even the gender of persons, if needed. However, when a prominent person, like for example the chairman of the MAI, or the imam at the ICCI, is involved in the discussion, it is, for obvious reasons, near impossible to conceal their identity. It happened frequently that some participants denied this need, saying that using their real name was fine. In this study I do not use participants´ names. The researcher must emphasise that it is impossible to know if

or when the overt identity of participants might compromise them, also using pseudonyms is a standard procedure in qualitative, ethnographic work. During my research, I encountered this situation regularly, where a participant almost insisted on his real name to be used, or said it was “no problem”, where I had to explain the importance of the concealment of the identities of participants. This concealment is especially needed where the community in question is as small as the Muslim community in Iceland, where most people know, or know of each other.

During the initial stages of my fieldwork, a serious schism within the Muslim community took place, resulting in a split in the Muslim Association and the founding of a new association. This resulted in crisis in relations between some members of the community. This conflict came to a head at the time when I was gradually forming my relations with the same persons that were the main actors in the schism, which placed me in an awkward situation. During this time, most discussions were dominated by this turn of events, with anger and resentment involved. I had to make it clear to my informants that as I was an impartial researcher and observer, that I was and would remain impartial, and that I would not in any way transmit information from one camp to the other. When I had made this position clear, it met acceptance, and I managed to move between the two associations without any problems.

3.6 Conclusions

In this chapter I have accounted for my main methodological approach, the ethnographic method of participant observation and semi-structured interviews, examining how observation and participation can be problematic, where the researcher is always in some ways an outsider, looking in. This “looking in” entails the use of the senses; of hearing, seeing and feeling, which comprises both subjectivity and objectivity, and the blurring of any limits implicated in these relations. Besides sensory factors as hearing (listening), seeing (observing) and feeling (as participation), the role of memory is important, and, as discussed in the chapter, memory as a collective, social process. All this points to the complex nature of conducting fieldwork, where the boundaries of subject and object become fuzzy (Bourdieu, 2003).

A vital aspect of doing fieldwork is the access to the group under study, a process of entering, being accepted and becoming part of the group, as far as that is possible. This is a process of initiation, which in my case was when I first participated in the Ramadan rituals of fasting and praying, which removed certain barriers between me and the participants. Initially, one must gain access with the help of a “gate keeper”, a person who introduces one to the group, followed by a process of gradually becoming accepted, often through an initiation process, as mentioned above. The closing phase at the end of fieldwork, following what came before, resembles the ritual characteristics set out by van Gennep (1960), and adopted by Turner (1995), of separation, transition/liminality and integration (in this case, into one´s own, former social context).

Most of the fieldwork took place in the mosques, while the bulk of the interviews were conducted in the homes of the participants, a few in one of the mosques and at the University of Iceland. The semi-structured interviews were relatively open, where the participant was allowed to influence the course of the interview, yet within a certain thematic framework. An important part of participation in the field were many informal, casual discussions about a wide variety of issues relevant to the situation of the Muslim community in Iceland.

Another important set of data for this project, which followed the actual fieldwork, is the analysis of media discourses and other public utterings, linked to Muslims and Islam, in Iceland and in the wider world. This part of the data became particularly relevant around 2013 and continued to 2015, but in 2013 the City of Reykjavík allotted a building plot to the Muslim Association of Iceland for a mosque. Following that decision, debates and discussions concerning Muslims and Islam emerged with considerable force, in mainstream media and particularly on diverse social media platforms. I refer to and analyse these discourses in more detail in Chapter Eight. In the next chapter I discuss my entry into the field of study and my position therein, giving a more informal view of the social field under study and my passing through the field as a process of learning, where I present some theoretical discussions related to ethnographic fieldwork.

4 The Muslim organisations and the Icelandic context

Introduction

In this chapter I describe the general context of Muslims in Iceland, both those who have moved to Iceland and those who are born in the country (irrespective of nationality), and their organisations (Kristján Þór Sigurðsson, 2015, 2016; Larson and Kristján Þór Sigurðsson, 2014). As for the use of a representative term to characterise the social group of this study, I use Muslims in Iceland. Some of the participants in the study who have established themselves in Icelandic society, many of them with Icelandic citizenship, called themselves Icelandic Muslims, along with the Icelandic converts. The term Icelandic Muslims points to nationality and/or citizenship, while Muslims in Iceland refers to all Muslims in the country. As the former is part of the latter, I will use the term Muslims in Iceland in this thesis. To begin with I present a brief historical overview of the relations of Muslims, and the Muslim world with Iceland, to place those relations in some historical context. Then, I address the general Muslim organisations in Iceland, the Muslim associations, which form the unifying framework for the Icelandic Muslim community, which were the main locus of my research. I discuss the Muslim community itself, who the Muslims are, where they come from and how they constitute themselves as Muslims and is therefore strongly concerned with cultural, national, and religious identity. This implies for example the question of identifying as a Muslim in general, and especially as a Muslim in Iceland, and the role of the Muslim associations in forming and supporting that process. This implies, among other things, the question of religious authority, where diverse religious trajectories compete for attention and relevance, which will be described in the discussion of two different foreign visitors to Iceland, as well as some different emphasis formulated during religious sermons taking place at the two main associations. This leads to discussions about diversity and unity, of diverse views and voices within the Muslim community and how it shapes the identities of Muslims in Iceland. After that, I address the relations of these organizations with two important institutions, the Forum for Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation and the Police Department. The Muslim community has had longstanding cooperation with other religious organisations in Iceland, the National Church, and diverse Christian denominations, as well as the Buddhist and Pagan associations, through the work of the Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation. The diverse religious societies meet regularly on a formal basis to strengthen their cooperation. The relationship of the Muslim community with the Police Department similarly has a relatively long history, and this cooperation has been mostly positive and constructive, where the interests of both have been embedded in creating and developing trust between the Muslim community and the police. These relations show that the Muslim community in Iceland is not isolated from Icelandic society, or the state, and that it actively seeks to maintain these constructive relations, benefitting all involved.

4.1 Short History of Muslim–Iceland contacts and relations

It is difficult to know when the first encounter between Muslims and Icelanders took place, but there were contacts between Arabic traders and envoys and Nordic people from the 9th century onward. It is possible that some Icelanders might have encountered Arab Muslims in earlier times. There is a story in Hákonar saga Hákonarson, (written by the Icelandic, Sturla Þórðarsson, as part of Konungasögur, or Kings' Sagas) about the arrival of embassies from the Muslim sultan of Tunis in Norway in the 1260s, after King Hákon Hákonarson had sent envoys to the Sultan with gifts. Icelanders were staying at the Norwegian courts in those days, often as poets, and the fact that the chroniclers of the history of the Nordic chieftains and kings were Icelandic, it is not unlikely that the connection is there. According to available historical records and folklore traditions, the first recorded contact Iceland had with Muslims goes back to the summer of 1627, when a group of so-called "Turkish pirates", or Barbary corsairs raided the Icelandic south coast. The perpetrators were not Turks but an international conglomerate of mercenaries doing lucrative business abducting people and demanding ramson payments. Some of the mercenaries were North European, while others were North African, and the skipper was Dutch. The corsairs who hit Iceland had sailed from North Africa (Algiers and Salé, belonging to the Ottoman Empire, hence "Turks"), raided settlements on the south-west coast, the Westman Islands (Vestmannaeyjar) and the eastern fjords (see e.g., Ólafur Egilsson, 1969; Þorsteinn Helgason, 1996, 2013). This episode is of some importance for the situation of the Muslim community in Iceland today, it is significant because it is the first recorded Icelandic contact with Islam and Muslim, and as a traumatic historical event, it has been remembered and utilised in nationalist and anti-Muslim discourses, not least in relation to the so-called mosque affair 2013-2015 (see chapter eight). These corsairs operated from Morocco and Algeria and were an international, among them many Europeans, mercenary enterprise, common at the time. Some of the enslaved Icelanders remained in North Africa and became Muslims. There are rich contemporary sources from this event (Steinunn Jóhannesdóttir, 2010[6]; Úlfar Þormóðsson[7], 2003, 2004; Þorsteinn Helgason, 1996, 2013), which has established itself as a major nationalistic narrative, as mentioned above, being recycled whenever required.

4.2 The Muslim community in Iceland

One of the concepts applied in this study is community, as in Muslim community. The concept of community is contested by many scholars (Crow and Mah, 2012), especially in the light of global contexts, transnationalism and digital communications, transcending locality and national boundaries. Usually, community has positive connotations, as a unifying factor, but some have pointed to equally dark sides of community, implying exclusion, inequality, oppression and social division. Also, community is sometimes linked to social problems and problem populations (Crow and Mah, 2012), as in ethnic communities.

[6] This is a historical novel, based on contemporary sources from the time of the raids.

[7] This source is similarly two historical novels.

According to Crow and Mah (2012), this concept is primarily contested as there are different approaches to the meaning of the concept and fuzzy limits implied in it. Yet, although debated, community is a useful social concept, both in academia and in common, public discourses, as in The European Community [EU], the scientific community, the local community, community spirit, and so on, and here the Muslim community. Anthony Cohen (1985) argued that this concept, like culture, myth, ritual and symbol, is being used (and misused) in many ways, making its meaning fuzzy. Cohen (1985) suggested that the most convenient way to use the concept is to look at how it is applied. He suggests defining community as members of a group who have something in common, setting them apart from other groups, connoting similarity and difference. Accordingly, a community involves relational qualities, in drawing boundaries between "us" and "them" (see e.g., Barth, 1969). The quality of such boundaries suggest community as a symbolic construction, creating symbolic togetherness and shared values, feelings of belonging that transcend the family, but without embracing the larger systems of the state bureaucracy or nationalistic feelings (Hamilton, in Cohen, 1985). Accordingly, the community of Muslims in Iceland, or Icelandic Muslims, should be seen as a symbolic group sharing collective values, ideas and practices, which manifest periodically during religious ceremonies and other social events, where shared, symbolic values are confirmed, but also where boundary making occasionally occurs. Having said that, I want to introduce a voice of one participant from the Muslim community in Iceland, reminiscing about beginnings, quoting from an interview with one of the participants in this study, describing what is in many ways typical of the trajectory of many of the Muslims who found their way to Iceland from the 1970s and to the next decades.

> I started out [from the Levant] in 1971 with eight pounds in my pocket, a dose of optimism and a few books … I had decided to make a stopover in Iceland … and then travel to America with Loftleiðir (Icelandair), I had planned to find work for three months and then continue west. I found work, and I never got to America … and I do not regret that … as I was very lucky to land here (in Iceland). I got married after four years, went to university to study, had diverse jobs – as a fisherman, in fishing factories, construction jobs … this was brilliant (A Muslim immigrant).

Some were aiming farther to the west, while others were visiting a brother or joining a sweetheart. The situation of Muslims who emigrated to Iceland was dissimilar to the norm in many other European countries, where Muslims from West and South Asia and North Africa came to Europe as low paid workers, which in many cases came to live in concentrated areas and neighbourhoods in cities, where tightly knit communities were established along ethnic and religious lines (Allievi, 2005). This has never been the situation in Iceland, where the main reasons for Muslims settling have mostly been of a personal nature, visiting a relative or because of romantic relations. It is only recently that Muslims have come to Iceland as refugees and applicants for international protection. Another example is of a man from West Asia who has lived in Iceland for over thirty years, who told of how he came to

Iceland to visit a relative, who had moved to Iceland after having met an Icelandic partner. He stayed and raised a family together with his wife.

> …yes, the first time I came to visit my brother here, in the summer of 1989. He moved to Iceland in 1980 and had an Icelandic wife and two children. I came to visit him and he showed me all of Iceland during the summer. I asked him if I could get a job here … I started looking for a job and I got one at Grandi, working in a fish factory. My wife came two years later and now we have three kids.

This man is one of the founders and leaders in one of the Muslims associations. He has, as a token of wanting to integrate, given his children Icelandic names together with Arabic ones. Another participant, an immigrant from North Africa, who served as a religious leader for a period had a different path to Iceland, which also was in some ways typical of the personal and serendipitous nature for most Muslims of coming to Iceland at the end of the last century.

> Yea, the first time I came to Iceland I came like a tourist, I used to work in Berlin, you know as a head chef and a manager, it was kind of like a luxury place, you know, it was like a palace. I was taking care of the whole thing there, then the consul of Iceland was a kind of friend of us, because he used to come to our place. To tell you the truth this was the first time I heard about Iceland, I would say by the end of 1999, he was talking and bringing some magazines and then I just got the idea, it was time for me to get some vacation, so I came here [to Iceland], just to see how it is, and so it was kind of curiosity you know, it was in June '99. I came here and the weather was nice, so to tell you the truth I liked it very much, I liked the people then. I can see the difference between them then and now, I mean, just in my point of view they were like more … (pause) … more welcoming and everything, so I liked everything here when I came, so that's why I just decided to come back, the weather was nice and I was travelling a bit around Iceland, and I saw many nice things, so I decided to come back and live here, you know.

These three excerpts from interviews with Muslims who moved to Iceland for personal reasons, because of relatives or for being introduced to Iceland abroad, are but a few examples of why many Muslims decided to try their luck in Iceland. There are other such stories, and a few of them involve romantic entanglements. But, as commented above, an increasing number of Muslims have arrived in Iceland as refugees and asylum seekers following the recent war in Syria and the surrounding area in West Asia.

The number of Muslims in Iceland was quite small until relatively recently, or just a few individuals. They started to arrive in Iceland in small numbers in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Gradually, their number grew, and a year after the establishment of the Muslim Association of Iceland (MAI), which was founded in 1997, its members were 74 (Statistics

Iceland, n.d.). When I started my research in 2009, the estimated number of Muslims in Iceland was around one thousand, in 2015 at the end of my research period, the number was 1200-1300, but in 2019-2020 it was estimated to be just under three thousand (this increase is in part due to the arrival of refugees since 2015). There are no official data, as religion is not registered in the National register (not all Muslims have been or are members of the associations), but the estimation is made from information about people living in Iceland born in Muslim majority countries, taken from Statistic Iceland, see the table below. The number of members of the Muslim associations from 2009 to 2020 can also be seen in the table. Not every Muslim is registered into the different Muslim associations and the numbers of members of associations shown in table only shows those who are formally registered into one of them.

Persons in Iceland born in Muslim majority countries*	2009	2015	2020
Afghanistan	4	13	143
Albania	39	45	232
Algeria	25	40	68
Bangladesh	1	4	27
Bosnia-Herzegovina	140	150	277
Egypt	26	29	57
Indonesia	106	129	163
Iraq	52	57	279
Iran	37	63	190
Jordan	12	13	26
Kazakhstan	18	21	35
Lebanon	30	30	54
Malaysia	28	35	47
Morocco	153	166	258
Pakistan	33	38	99
Palestine	0	6	42
Senegal	13	21	29
Somalia	1	2	56
Syria	20	35	331
Tunisia	16	28	42
Turkey	68	73	108
Total*	818	998	2.563
*There are Muslims in Iceland from 39 countries			
This table is for countries with > 20 persons in 2020			
Total number =	855	1.256	2.936
Muslims = 0,8% of Icelandic population			

Muslim associations**	2009	2015	2020
Muslim Association of Iceland	404	486	623
Islamic Cultural Centre of Iceland	0	389	377
Islamic Foundation of Iceland	0	0	281
Total	404	875	1.281

Thus, as the table shows, Muslims in Iceland come from all corners of the world, with the largest groups being Bosnians and other Balkans, from Kosovo and Albania, and Moroccans and other North-Africans, with a sizable number from West Asia, and an increasing number from Sub-Saharan Africa, as well as from South Asia and South-East Asia. Most of the Muslims live in the capital area, but there is a group of Indonesian Muslims who lived in Reykjanesbær, to the southwest of the capital when I was doing my fieldwork, with most of

them having moved later to the capital area. The labour situation of the Muslims in quite diverse, many have low-salary, manual jobs, such as cleaners, restaurant workers, running pizzerias, working as security guards, while some work within white-collar sector. This situation is mostly premised on the educational status of people, where most of the low-salary Muslims do not have higher education, even if there are some with good education who work in low paid jobs. Muslims who work in the white-collar sector are educated, and importantly, have lived in Iceland for a relatively long time and are Icelandic citizens.

Most Muslims in Iceland are Sunni, with a small group of Shias, but this distinction does not seem to be an issue in Iceland, as some of my participants said that there were sufficient problems among this small community, that there was no need to add this division to it. In addition, there is a small group of Ahmadiyya Muslims in Reykjavík, who because of their small size is not registered as a religious association. Finally, there are some so-called cultural Muslims, or non-practising, who are not part of this study, since they were not part of the community centred around the mosques. When discussing the development of the Icelandic Muslim community, a participant who has been involved in the MAI from the beginning recounted that:

> [When the MAI was founded] … yes, we were … when I came to Iceland (in the 70s), there were only seven Muslims here, but the number has increased lately. There was a group of around 20-30 friends, and that number increased, around 1990 … so, number of Muslims increased from about 100 in 20 years … and today we are approximately 1500. [W]e realised that we needed to be able to practice our religion, and this is a social thing, just like for the Christians and others in the country … people die, they have children, get married … these are things that must be taken care of. It is vital to have facilities to practice the religion and other social practices connected to the main events in people´s lives (and death)… and the goals of the association are quite clear … it´s laws … is to make it easier for Muslims to practice their faith in peace with other groups in [Icelandic] society, and to educate Icelanders about what Islam is, and what it can contribute to society.

As has become clear, it is impossible to know the exact number of Muslims currently in Iceland, but according to people I have talked to among the Muslims, some estimate that they are close to 2000 persons, others that they are closer to 3000 (in 2019-2020). They are not registered as Muslims in the national statistics, as religious affiliation is not included in the Icelandic national statistics. Based on numbers from Statistic Iceland, of people born in Muslim majority countries living in Iceland, as shown in the table 1, it is possible to estimate the approximate number of Muslims in Iceland. Table 2 shows the evolution of membership of the Muslim associations.

4.3 The Muslim organisations

Until recently, there were two recognised organisations that promote Muslim interests, the Muslim Association of Iceland (MAI)[8] and the Islamic Cultural Centre in Iceland (ICCI)[9] . The former, was established in 1997 by a Palestinian immigrant. The Islamic Cultural Centre of Iceland (ICCI) was established in late 2008, as a splinter group from the MAI, and moved into a locale in an office building. In 2013, it moved into another building, called the Ýmir house, which was converted to a mosque. Later a splinter group from the ICCI was founded, the Islamic Foundation of Iceland (IFI)[10] . The members of the associations count for approximately 50% of the total number of Muslims in Iceland. In addition, there is a small group of Ahmadiyya Muslims in Reykjavík, which has a limited, if fractious relationship with the other Muslim societies, as many Muslims (Sunni and Shia) see Ahmadiyya as heretics (Newby, 2002, p. 22). The Muslim Association of Iceland (MAI), the Islamic Cultural Centre in Iceland (ICCI) and the Islamic Foundation of Iceland (IFI) have their own houses of worship, with regular evening prayer meetings and weekly Friday prayers that each attract a core group of approximately 30-50. The number of members of the Muslim associations in Iceland can be seen in table 2. In the next section I describe and address the various Muslim organisations, their short history, characteristics, relations, and differences, but these associations support and organise most of the Muslim community in Iceland, both socially and religiously.

4.3.1 The Muslim Association of Iceland (MAI)

The Muslim Association of Iceland (MAI) is, according to its statutes, primarily for those who profess the Islamic faith and/or agree to the goals of the association, but non-Muslims can be members if they accept the rules of the association. The leadership of the MAI is composed of the Board and the Council of Elders (Öldungaráð), and the Board has the supreme authority in practical matters, such as finances. The Council of elders has religious authority, as well as responsibility for securing that the MAI follows Islamic laws and spirit. The Board consists of five members, elected by members during general meetings. This Association, which was the primary locus of my research, has its place for religious services and social gatherings, is on the third floor of an office building in the east part of the capital. It consists of one medium sized room with a large window, used for praying and other related activities, covered by a green praying carpet. At the back of the room there is a wooden screen (about two meters high) with a window (where one can see out, but not in), demarcating the space where women pray. At the time of my research there were lively debates about the merit of this screen/division, where many women insisted on keeping it, while some others wanted it removed, both men and women. When the plan for a new mosque was discussed among the Muslim community, a clear division appeared as to how

[8] Icelandic: Félag múslíma á Íslandi

[9] Menningarsetur múslíma á Íslandi

[10] Stofnun múslíma á Íslandi

the praying facilities should be arranged. There was talk of having two separate entrances for men and women, an idea that was disputed. The then chairman of the MAI insisted that due to the great cultural and ethnic diversity of the Muslim community in Iceland, one should meet the diverse needs this diversity entailed. He said the then leadership of the MAI had decided that there should be one praying space, for both sexes, with the possibility of creating a moveable separation for those women who preferred to pray separated from the men. One (convert) woman said this was the "perfect solution" and in accordance with the example of the Prophet. Not everybody was in agreement, and others wanted to maintain "traditional" arrangements in the mosque design, meaning gender separation in the mosque. The woman mentioned above insisted on securing the rights of the women in the mosque, as they were during the time of the Prophet, also that in Mecca during hajj, men and women share praying space. This discussion, which became quite personal at times (there was also a leadership contest in the MAI at this time), but the dispute seemed to reflect tensions and differences between different cultural views, as well as generational differences, or, as one discussant said: "between the old and the new". This discussion demonstrated to some extent cultural and ethnic differences among the Muslim women, where most of the Icelandic converts (yet not all of them) were positive for a common prayer space, while a larger number of immigrant women were for a separate space. Some of the women said they were flexible. As the planned mosque has not yet become a reality, this dispute has not been resolved at the time of this writing.

There is a pulpit (*minbar*) connected to a small wooden structure used for the call to prayer (*adhan*) and bookshelves filled with sacred texts, as well as teaching material for the Sunday school. Outside this room there are facilities for ritual washing (*wudu*), which Muslims perform (as a religious act) before they enter the praying room/mosque. Finally, there is a kitchen and a living room with a kitchen table and a sofa and some chairs, which is frequently used for meetings, teaching and general socialising. During most afternoon prayers, the number of worshippers can vary from 10 to 20 and on Fridays the number is usually 30 to 50, sometimes more. Most of the worshippers are men, with a few women participating, mainly on Fridays. During the Eid-al-Fitr festivities signifying the end of Ramadan, the number of people present is over 100, filling the place. This account of the mosque is from my early fieldnotes, describing the scene during a prayer meeting:

> There were around ten to fifteen men, one young woman, dressed in red, and a few small kids. Some of the men were dressed in long gowns, among them two converts, while others were dressed in ordinary dress. Some of the men and women put on special praying gowns, and the women covered their hair (which was uncovered when they arrived). This attire was kept in a cupboard to be taken out during prayer. The men's gowns were of diverse colours, accompanied by small skull caps. Most people left the mosque when the sermon and prayers were over, while a small group remained for some time, congregating in the kitchen for casual chat and tea drinking.

And concerning the religious ritual:

> The prayers are led by a man from Morocco (a layman, not an educated Islamic scholar). First, he speaks Arabic, then English. He referred to texts from the Qur'an concerning the brevity of life, and life as preparation for death. He talked about death and the Day of Reckoning, when the faithful (Muslims) ascend to Heaven and the unfaithful/faithless descend to Hell. This sermon underlined the need to be aware and conscious of life and death, and of the finality of life and of what follows. This implicates the importance of living the "right life" and the "good life" and to cause good. The present, earthly existence is but a preparation for what follows, according to the Imam.

This early observation is somehow typical for the scene at the mosque and the subject of this sermon was as a red thread throughout my time in the field, as the most prevalent theme, the importance of the awareness of the finality of life and of what follows. During my time attending the mosques, the most lasting impression is the feeling of peace and calmness, and the sentiment that the mosque is a place of spiritual contemplation as well a sanctuary from the troubles of the world outside, as well as a place for unification (if only temporary) for people of diverse cultural, ethnic and even religious belongings.

The main activities of the mosque revolve around religious rituals, but it is also a place of socialisation, of relaxing with tea and cakes, and having casual talks about all kinds of everyday matters, which take place in the kitchen/living room. Almost always after prayers, some people (mostly men) gather there, and during my time, there was a group of more or less the same persons who constituted this post-prayer group. Apart from discussing various everyday matters during these after-prayer gatherings, they also discussed issues which concerned them, issues they wanted to share with me, as an outsider, where they often expressed their worries about negative perceptions about Muslims in the media. During one of my initial visits to the mosque, the so-called Danish cartoon affair was still being discussed, together with other anti-Muslim sentiments, even if some years had passed. My participants, who were from Algeria, Jordan, Syria, Morocco and Palestine, found these cartoons "unnecessary", and questioned their purpose, as they thought it was aimed at denigrating Muslims and Islam, and not as practicing "free speech". This cartoon case emerged regularly in my discussions with my participants, especially during the early stages of my research and was one of several issues the Muslims claimed were typical in portraying their religion in a negative light, it being an essential part of their identity and by extension, denigrating them as persons as well as their core values. Thus, the mosque was not only a place of worship, but also a place of social gatherings, of coming together and share stories, news and food, but also a forum for more serious discussions, and issues like the one mentioned here were never far from the surface.

4.3.2 The Islamic Cultural Centre of Iceland (ICCI)

The Islamic Cultural Centre of Iceland (ICCI), after its foundation, used a locale, described above, on the fourth floor of an office building in Grensásvegur, close to the MAI mosque. It was a relatively spacy place, with a large praying space, covered by praying mats, a kitchen

and a living room, as well as facilities for ritual ablution. The praying space for women at this place was a room at the back of the main praying room. There were windows on two sides of the main room. In 2013 (after my fieldwork ended) the ICCI relocated to the Ýmir house, where it had its activities until 2016, when the owners of the house, the Islamic Foundation of Iceland (IFI) (and, by extension, the Al Risala foundation in Sweden), dismissed the ICCI from the premises (showed on live TV), and established their own base there. The Ýmir house was originally built by a male choir and had been used for various activities until the Al Risala became the owner. It is a circular, pyramid-like structure, with large windows on the roof, bringing the daylight into the praying space. There is a pulpit and the facilities for preparing for and conducting prayers and other social activities are very good. Along the walls, on the second floor, overlooking the main praying floor, is a spacy round balcony for the women to pray and socialise, having a good view of the proceedings down below. When the ICCI left the Ýmir house, they found a new locale close to the main commercial harbour in the capital. It is located on the second floor of an office building, with reasonably spacy facilities, a large praying floor, an adjacent room for the women, an office and washing facilities. The number of people attending praying sessions at these two places is similar to the numbers attending sessions at the MAI.

From the website of the ICCI (http://www.icci.is), several points concerning the targets of the association are set out: “The Islamic cultural centre of Iceland is intended primarily to preserve the Islamic identity from loss. To “give the true image about Islam” and its Prophet and sanctities. To “introduce the true Islam” to non-Muslims, as well as caring for new Muslims and strengthening the bonds of brotherhood among them. Also, and importantly, raising Muslim children and teach them in accordance with the tolerant teachings of Islam. To “remove misconceptions about subversive ideas” (emphasis added) and the difference deviant. Linking Muslims with the Mosque, prayer and various religious activities” (https://www.icci.is/about/). Here major emphasis is on “preservation of identity”, “giving true image about Islam”, to “introduce true Islam”, to “remove preconceptions”. This seems to underline considerable puritanical sentiments and the need to protect the image and practice of “true Islam”.

Referring to the links to Al Risala, the imam of the Islamic Cultural Centre made the point that the mosque should be run by local Muslims, Muslims who live in Iceland and work for the community, and also that this has been a bone of contention between the imam and the people who own and wanted to run the place. There had been a period prior to the eviction of the ICCI from the Ýmir house where there was a disagreement concerning a leasing contract, which ended up in court, where the IFI won the case. Since then, there has been some discord between these two organisations, while the relations between the ICCI and the MAI have gradually improved, with increased cooperation to the degree that they

celebrated the Eid al-Fitr in 2018 together and the imam for the ICCI conducted Friday sermons at the MAI mosque in 2017. I was present on both of these occasions[11] .

4.3.3 The Islamic Foundation of Iceland (IFI)

The most recent Muslim organisation in Iceland, The Islamic Foundation of Iceland (IFI) (www.islamicfi.is) was first founded in 2010, and is, as said earlier, a part of the Al Risala foundation in Sweden (risalah.se), which have additional activities in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The Foundation had bought the Ýmir house and converted it to a mosque, which was used by the Islamic Cultural Centre of Iceland (ICCI) from 2013 to 2016. The IFI was registered as a religious association in 2017 and had 98 registered members 1 January 2018, and by that became a member of the Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation, mentioned in the Introduction to this chapter. The IFI says on its website that it wants to form and develop its activities along "Nordic lines". It aims to concentrate on education and active relations with Icelandic society and to promote Islamic and Arabic culture in building inter-cultural and inter-religious bridges. The Foundation also wants to establish a "competitive" educational institution, which can appeal to Muslims in Iceland and help inform non-Muslims in Iceland about Islam and Muslim sentiments. The relationship with the other Muslim associations (MAI and ICCI) is strained at the time of writing.

4.3.4 Society Horizon

A recent association, The Félag Horizon (Society Horizon) (https://www.horizon.is), was founded in October 2013 by Turkish-Danish Muslims, who say that their main inspiration is Fethullah Gülen, the founder and head of the transnational Gülen Movement (www.fgulen.com). On its website it declares that their purpose is to "…create social and human dynamics in society. […] We will make an effort so everybody regardless of colour, ethnicity and background can have a place in this society. As a society we have to work together to make this to a reality. Our association represents dialogue, tolerance and altruism" (https://www.horizon.is/who-are-we-). It has regularly organised regular events, often together with a Lutheran congregation in Reykjavík. It does not define itself as a religious society and is not registered as such. The chairman emphasises that Horizon is neither a Muslim nor a Turkish association, even if many see them as such. He claims it is a non-religious and non-political organisation, with its main objective to contribute to social tolerance and understanding between different groups in Icelandic society. Its main objective is to create a dialogue between different ethnic, religious, political and cultural groups in Iceland and he presents a few key words like universal human values, dialogue, respect, tolerance, neighbourly love, altruism, and so on. The chairman of Horizon is a young Danish man of Turkish descent. Members of Horizon are predominantly of Turkish-Danish origin, but there are also a number of Albanians, Africans and a few Icelanders (non-Muslims). Membership in Horizon is around 50, with 20 active members and it has

[11] After the actual fieldwork was over, I was in frequent contacts to the Muslim community, and visited the mosques regularly, to meet up with old friends and sometimes participate in prayer rituals.

cooperated with a church in Reykjavík, Neskirkja, organising interreligious activities, inviting guests. The chairman in 2015 said that one of their main inspiration was a Danish organisation, based primarily on the ideas of Fethullah Gülen, called Dialog Forum (http://www.dialogin.dk), which operates along the principle of "universal human values", yet Horizon is an independent organisation, working according to Icelandic law. The chairman underlines that the organisation is first and foremost Icelandic, founded in Iceland by people living in Iceland. It seeks to operate within Icelandic society and with Icelandic culture as guiding light (note: it is questionable whether there is anything one can term "Icelandic culture"), where one of the main objectives is to create dialogue between Icelandic society and "its values", and between different religious, cultural and political sections of Icelandic society. This association organises various projects on annual bases, such as "Ashura" (in cooperation with Neskirkja), "iftar", breaking of the fast, where Horizon invites guests for participation. During "Ashura" the guests are around 130-140, and the "iftar" has attracted 40-50 guests.

4.4 Muslim organisations and state institutions.

When casually conversing with Icelanders it was often stated that Muslims are unable to integrate into Icelandic society and it was often assumed that they live in isolated bubbles. This seems to be a common stereotype. My study shows that the Muslim associations in Iceland are in fact not isolated from the rest of Icelandic society or state institutions as they have various contacts and are involved in networking on diverse institutional levels and have been for many years. This section depicts the cooperation and networking between the Muslim societies and other religious societies, as the State Church, and other associations, as well as the police. The Muslim community has also been working with the Icelandic Red Cross, mainly with helping to accommodate refugees and asylum seekers (Personal correspondence from an employee for the Icelandic Red Cross, as well as personal communications with leaders of the Muslim Associations).

4.4.1 The Muslims and the National Evangelical Church

When it comes to the relations of the Icelandic state and the Muslim community in matters of religion, the state provides for and guarantees freedom of religion, but the official religion of Iceland is Lutheranism[12]. It is possible to establish religious associations as long as they do not involve proselytising or practices that are "prejudicial to good morals or public order" (Article 63 of the Constitution of Iceland). According to Article 62 of the Icelandic Constitution, the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the state church. Consequently, the state pays the salaries of the church's clergy, who are employed as public servants under the Ministry of Judicial and Ecclesiastical Affairs. Even though the judicial and economic systems favour the Christian traditions (for example, by observing the days of the Christian calendar

[12] The Constitution of the Republic of Iceland (No. 33, 17 June 1944, as amended 30 May 1984, 31 May 1991, 28 June 1995, and 24 June 1999), http://government.is/constitution/; see especially Articles 62, 63 and 64.

as national holidays) and grant the Lutheran Church a privileged position, most Icelanders are generally not that interested in participating in organised religion outside the main seasonal festivals. Most children are baptised, and people usually marry and hold funerals in churches, but the Lutheran religion is primarily seen as an expression of Icelandic culture (Pétur Pétursson, 2011).

The Icelandic religious scholar, Pétur Pétursson, has discussed the strong, historical link between the Lutheran Church and Icelandic society and culture (Pétur Pétursson, 2011, 2014), where he argues that the connection between the written Icelandic language, the clerical class and pastime readings from the Bible and psalms of the nation for centuries managed to establish the Christian religion as a major factor in the cultural sediment of Icelandic society, even if the old Sagas were always popular as entertainment, and forming an ideal model of what it entails to be Icelandic. Pétur Pétursson (2011, 2014) also shows how these factors played a vital role in the struggle for independence for the Icelandic nation, underlining important values and concerns of the Icelandic people, calling it "Icelandic Civil Religion" (Pétur Pétursson, 2011, p. 199), where these values are regularly expressed publicly by the nation's representatives on important national occasions, such as the National Day (17 June), New Year's Eve, not to mention the procession of the government and parliamentarians from the Reykjavík Cathedral to the Parliament lead by the Bishop and the President, symbolising the intersection of secular and religious authorities inherent in the Icelandic State. When it comes to funerals, the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Iceland operates and takes care of all cemeteries, to which all the recognised religious organisations and traditions have access. The Muslims usually conduct their funerals in churches and/or other public locations and traditional funerary organisers are utilised to organise the funerals. Muslims have a devoted area for their burials in one cemetery in Reykjavik.

Concerning legal aspects of the state vis-à-vis Muslims, Icelandic civil laws rule over all civil and family matters. Polygamy is, for example, prohibited and there are no known cases of so-called Sharia courts or councils of any kind as the imam for the ICCI told me once, as is the case in some Western countries (see for example Bowen, 2016 for Britain). Muslim marriages are conducted according to Islamic traditions, as are other familial ceremonies. But when it comes to legal matters, Icelandic civil law is the only law applied. According to the leaders of the two mosques (personal correspondence), if Islamic legal codes collide with Icelandic civil law, the latter will always overrule the former. One set of laws that might seem to affect Muslims concerns male circumcision[13] . According to Icelandic law, male circumcision is not illegal, but when it comes to circumcising boys (Muslim or Jewish), the Doctors' Association has ruled against it (Þráinn Rósmundsson, 2015). Female circumcision

[13] 31 January 2018, a bill aiming at banning male circumcision was brought before the Icelandic Parliament (Alþingi). The bill has not yet been ratified (https://www.althingi.is/altext/148/s/0183.html). Following this bill, lively debates emerged in the press, and an international seminar was held in Iceland (https://www.hi.is/vidburdir/malthing_um_frumvarp_gegn_umskurdi_drengja).

(which is not an Islamic obligation) is forbidden by Icelandic law. According to the surgeon Þráinn Rósmundsson, since most surgeons do not see male circumcision as a medical necessity, they will rather not perform such an operation.

Another legal issue, which has been contested in a few European countries, is halal meat; it has been on sale in Iceland for some time, and halal slaughtering has been practised at a slaughterhouse in the north of Iceland (Sláturfélag Skagfirðinga) and Icelandic halal lamb (and chicken) is now available in some supermarkets. During the slaughtering season, a few Muslims travel north to Skagafjörður to supervise the halal slaughtering. The mosques store some of this meat for Muslims to buy, and during a period of great tension between the MAI and the ICCI, they cooperated in taking care of the halal business, provisions and distribution.

4.4.2 The Forum for Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation

The Forum for Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation (FIDC) (Samráðsvettvangur trúfélaga) in Iceland was founded in 2006 at the initiative of two religious scholars and two priests, who contacted diverse religious associations and presented their idea of the importance of interreligious dialogue in Iceland. The founding organisations were thirteen; seven different Christian associations, the Muslim Association of Iceland, the Bahá'í Association, the Buddhist Association of Iceland, the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification and the Ásatrú Association. The main goal of the forum is to promote tolerance and broad-mindedness between different worldviews and religions, and to ensure religious freedom and other human rights (Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson, 2008).

My participant, whom I have known for some time (and who was one of the initiators), has, from the beginning, been one of the representatives for the Icelandic National Church (Þjóðkirkjan) at the Forum. The founding associations were most of the larger ones, registered as religious associations by the state, and thus had relations with the state (such as The Roman Catholic Church, the Pagan Society (Ásatrúarfélagið), the Muslim Association of Iceland, and others). The two large associations that were not parties to the founding of the FIDC, were the Icelandic Pentecostal Church and the Free Church in Hafnarfjörður. Siðmennt, or The Icelandic Humanist Association, is not a member of the FIDC, but had at the time applied for registration as a life stance association, without success (it is an atheist association). It wanted a change of the laws for how religious, or "life-view" societies were defined, so that they were regarded equal to the "real" religious associations. My participant argued that every association should be able to define itself on its own terms, even if other members of FIDC do not accept that definition.

The leaders of the Muslim associations have all expressed their appreciation for the work of the FIDC and see it as a positive and constructive arena for inter-religious cooperation and co-existence. It comes with the territory that to find common ground when it comes to making rules and statutes, the members experience diverse complex hurdles, but all involved have said that there is a general agreement to make the forum work. There is also some cooperation between various associations, Muslim and Christian, for example when it

comes to receiving and integrating refugees and asylum seekers. The initial idea was that the forum should be open-ended and work for reciprocal cooperation and networking. It was not aimed at merging any of the associations. Every association should be there on its own terms and should define itself on those terms. The aim was to "listen and understand" the standpoint of the other, whatever the similarities or differences were. An important goal was to reconcile different views, where representatives could agree to disagree, and where the main emphasis was the forming of links and networks, and to facilitate communication venues between the different associations, as well as enhance objective relations and understanding. Reasonable criticism was welcomed. There was no talk of sharing rituals, but decisions had to be based on consensus.

As said earlier, the Muslim Association of Iceland (MAI) was among the founding associations of the FIDC, and its chairman was one of the signatories of the founding document. His condition was that he would not work with associations that were anti Muslims. The MAI continues to be an active member of the FIDC. When the Islamic Cultural Centre in Iceland (ICCI) was founded (2008/2009), as a splinter group from the MAI, it applied for membership of the FIDC, and its representatives became active members from day one. Both the (then) leader of the ICCI and its imam were very positive towards the FIDC and said that it was in the interest of the Muslims to participate in this cooperative forum. Even after the break-up of the MAI, which led to the ICCI, the leaders of the two associations sat together in FIDC meetings, as if nothing had happened. According to my participant, the Muslim associations have very good relations with the other associations of the FIDC. The relationship of the Muslim associations with the National Church, or other Christian groups is unproblematic and positive, for the most part, but the relations between the Muslim associations themselves is more of a problem, due to internal disagreements and political wrangling (the disagreements are not religious). The small Ahmadiyya group has shown great interest in becoming part of the FIDC, but it is deemed to be too small to do so (there is a lower limit for membership). The Horizon society (Félagið Horizon), which is not a registered religious association, and does not define itself as such, but is strongly associated with the MAI, is also a member of the Interfaith Dialogue Forum. Horizon works with the National Church on many fronts, and, as referred to earlier, they have regularly organised events in Neskirkja (a church in Reykjavík) with the congregation there.

According to my participant, the relationship between the different societies of the FIDC was very good. Various issues are discussed within the Forum, and this has encouraged further contacts and relations between some of the associations. The recently founded Islamic Foundation of Iceland (IFI), which split from the ICCI, was not yet registered as a religious association[14] , but it has contacts with some other societies about some issues, with problems concerning refugees and asylum seekers, as an example, which also involves various charities (as the Red Cross). The imam at the ICCI has also been working with the Red Cross, in helping accommodating refugees and asylum seekers. The Pentecostal Church, the

[14] The IFI was registered as a religious association 1. January 2018.

Salvation Army and the National Church all work together with the Muslim associations on many fronts, so the inter-religious cooperation is widespread and active, and it shows that the Muslim Associations are not isolated from the wider Icelandic society, but that they cooperate on many levels (the same applies to the police, which will be discussed later). The Pentecostal Church (not a FIDC member) works closely with the Islamic Foundation of Iceland, where it was the IFI that initiated that contact. My participant says that this cooperation is based on "reciprocal missionizing", each on its own terms, Christian and Muslim, but also based on mutual respect.

The National Church works with the Muslim Association (MAI), the Ahmadiyya group, the ICCI and the Horizon Society. This demonstrates a wide ranging and complex network of many different societies, with the Muslims as very active actors. The leaders of the Pentecostal Church in the capital are very supportive of the Muslim groups, yet many of the smaller Pentecostal congregations (or sects) around the country are rather hostile in their anti-Muslims sentiments (personal correspondent). Also, according to my participant, there are also some sections of the National Church that share that view, even some priests. The most fervent anti-Muslim sentiments come from the fundamentalist Zionist societies, or congregations, of which there are a few (personal correspondent). The participant states that the education level of those people is a decisive factor, the better educated, the less people nurture prejudice against those who are different. The fact that this forum exists, and works, for all intended purposes, shows that inter-faith and inter-cultural relationships and cooperation are quite possible and positive, both for those directly involved and for the wider society, and should be promoted as a positive example of such a cooperation, as being an asset for society as a whole and a showcase for the benefits of multiculturalism, and demonstrating that it can easily work, if there is political will and even courage. This inter-religious forum is not the only state institution where the Muslim associations participate, another important one is the relationship between the Muslim associations and the police, who have cooperated diverse levels, as is shown in the following section.

4.4.3 Cooperation between the Muslim associations and the police

In June 2017, the Icelandic Chief Police Officer (ríkislögreglustjóri) "threw a bomb" into the immigration discourse in Iceland, using "foreigners" as a pretext for weaponization the police (Jóhann B. Kolbeinsson, 2017). The comment was related to the growing number of refugees to Europe from war torn West Asia and North Africa, most of whom are Muslims. Also, connected to this discourse was the then recent terrorist bombings in France and Belgium. The comment from the Chief Police Officer invited suspicion of criminalisation of immigrants, and making them suspect, not least Muslims, in the context of the terror threat in Europe at the time. A participant in my study (a policeman for many years) felt that this approach was unhelpful, as he preferred more dialogue and involvement with immigrant communities, rather than expanding weapon use among the police.

Contacts and cooperation between the police and the Muslim community have been ongoing for some time, mostly informally, serving the interests of both. Recently, some

people within the police wanted to increase and formalise these contacts, because, according to my participant, every study shows that good relations between the police and minority groups benefit all parties and enhances mutual trust, and trust between the police and the public is necessary for constructive cooperation (Eyrún Eyþórsdóttir, 2008; Saarikkomäki et al, 2020). According to my participant, it was not easy to set the necessary structures for better dialogue with the Muslim community in place, and update it from informal to formal, as there was no strong political will from the authorities for it.

One example of an area needing improvement is the use of interpreters, because in many instances, due to the smallness of the Muslim community, the interpreter often knows the person who needs the interpretation. This is a factor some of my participants had mentioned when this issue came up. Most of the interpreters are not professionals. Information from these non-professional interpreters is often said to "leak" out to the community of the person involved, with the risk of compromising the position of that person. People I interviewed claimed that some of these interpreters had thus forfeited their trust and confidence and had been dismissed. Therefore, the use of interpreters who are part of the community in question can be risky, if not dangerous. Formal and organised contacts between the police and the Muslim communities were first established when the participant managed to establish a working relationship among them, by building trust and cooperation, based on personal contacts in the community. Workshops were organised to improve these relations, where I presented two lectures (in 2017) about the Muslim community in Iceland and on Islamophobia for working policemen and students at the School of Police. During this participation I realised the extent of these relations, which I occasionally had heard of from my Muslim participants. I also realised the important scope of this cooperation, which is the reason I account for it here.

It is necessary to keep in mind that many immigrants have different experiences of the police, both in their original home countries as well as the Icelandic police and this is obviously relevant in the case of refugees and asylum seekers. Some have even experienced prejudice from Icelandic policemen and there are stories of how people have negative experience of the police (Eyrún Eyþórsdóttir, 2008, pp. 32, 86-87). By formal and institutionalised contacts between the police and the Muslim community, the aim is to establish permanent relations and trust, which takes time, as this must be built on personal relationships. The three main Muslim societies (MAI, ICCI and IFI) have shown keen interest in cooperation with the police, as has the small Ahmadiyya group. A leader of one association told me that there are ongoing communications between the Muslims and the police in connection with recent newcomers from the war in Syria, to try to identify if there are "suspicious elements" among them, which he said was of the utmost importance. My participant said that people looked to the police in cases linked to refugee and asylum matters, as well as in ordinary criminal cases. Sometimes, if people worry about something in their local community, they call the police, or they just want to inform the police of a running situation, which often is linked with perceived external threats. Cases brought to the police from the Muslim community often concern Islamophobia, hate speech, or hate crime,

threats (for example on social media), even death threats. These examples demonstrate that by improving trust between the Muslim community and the police, members of the community are more willing to contact the police to seek help for their diverse problems.

In case of suspicions of radicalism brewing within the Muslim community, especially connected to newcomers who have arrived as refugees, my participant argues that "security" should be of common concern for all involved, both the Muslim community and the police. One possible concern for a group of young, single and unemployed men, who spend much time in the mosques, is that they tend to become isolated. The participant said that he opposes the criminalisation of Muslims and argues that the terrorism threat is overblown and exaggerated, and it is more important that Muslims in Iceland are provided with protection, rather than being stigmatised without reason. He has not been keen to "bring this terrorism threat to the Muslim's table", yet he has received phone calls concerning suspicion of "radicalisation". He says he does not want to make these cases public but rather work on them in private (keep them from the view of the media).

One issue of concern among the leaders of the Muslim organisations, and the police, is the situation mentioned before, of young, single, and unemployed men, recently arrived in Iceland, where one influential factor is traditional sentiments like honour and shame, the traditional role of the man in some cultures to provide for and protect his family, along with other and important traditional values. Their present situation might possibly contribute to frustration and even shame in the eyes of their fellow Muslims and the community they belong to (see Ewing, 2008). Therefore, it is a common consensus among the community leaders that it is important to attend to these young, isolated, and unemployed men and help them to become better integrated into society before they become too isolated. As one participant expressed it when discussing this situation:

> I know some people who came to the mosque, stayed for ten hours at the mosque, doing nothing, but you can do a lot of things, you can always do a lot of things … and I think this is a lack of understanding of what Islam is … because it´s not only un-Islamic, but it´s anti-Islamic, to do nothing … I think that people should know that the worst thing you can do is to do nothing … (laughs) … this is Islam. The worst thing is to be lazy, do salat [pray], and then …

This participant expressed his concerns about the effects of inactivity in an isolated social context, inactivity that will only cause apathy and said it is the responsibility of the leaders of the associations to be attentive to this situation and help alleviate further social apathy. In my discussions with the leaders of the associations, they said that they were conscious of this situation, and when receiving new members, especially young, single men, they were watchful and often working with the police in monitoring these new arrivals, especially in the context of refugees from the war in Syria.

My participant from the police argued that more effort, funding and political will is needed for the project of police-Muslim cooperation to succeed. There has been too much reaction, where pro-action is needed. The issue of the weaponization of the police, mentioned earlier, is a case in point, and is unhelpful, since dialogue is always better than confrontation. Accordingly, there are, inside the police force, some individuals and groups who have expressed antipathy against immigrants and especially against Muslims, and he states that it is known from police studies that some policemen are often biased in their work with minority groups, where criminalisation of minority groups and immigrants is often prevalent. My participant tells of a young policeman who harboured such sentiments, but when he came to know some of the people he had been biased against, he changed his views. This shows, according to the participant, that when people get to know each other on personal terms, their attitudes change. Therefore, the need for cooperation and communal policing, as well as education is paramount. He says that there are some policemen he knows, who post hate speech on social media, and participate in such discussions on various anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim sites online, where they have been known to distribute anti-Semitic and Islamophobic material.

My participant was worried about growing Islamophobia in Iceland (see ECRI, 2017), worsening hate speech online, which is getting more extreme, and he admits that he himself has received death threats online and be called a Muslim whore. He mentions several actors, such as the Vakur society, which is an extreme-nationalist, racist, Islamophobic group (https://www.facebook.com/vakur.is/), Radio Saga (http://utvarpsaga.is/), several Facebook sites and blogs, and others, who are very active in spreading Islamophobic and racist material in cyberspace. He even suggests that these activities should be categorised as an organised group (akin to the Islamophobia Industry, see Ali et al, 2011; Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson, 2017; Bangstad, 2014; Lean, 2012). He states that the radio station Radio Saga (Útvarp saga), is in contravention of Icelandic law, as to what can be published on radio, and what not, related to the public good (útvarpslög). These issues are examined in more detail in chapter 8. My participant expressed his worries for Muslims in Iceland, with prejudice getting stronger, and mentioned imported anti-Muslim sentiments, where diverse problems in other countries are imported for domestic use in Iceland. One interesting problem, which I have noticed in my research, and which my participant talked about, is that Muslims seem to want to provide a suspiciously positive image of their relations with Icelandic society, as not wanting to compromise their position by complaining. This has been a common theme in my discussions with Muslims, something I have found concerning. To conclude, the Muslims, as well as the police have underlined the importance of these contacts and have expressed the positive effect it has for the situation of the Muslim community in Iceland and its relations to the host society.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have discussed the Muslim community in Iceland (mainly in the capital area), it´s short history and the Muslim associations. The history of Muslim relations with Iceland

can be seen as being the so-called Turkish raid in 1627, where corsairs from Algeria, comprised of multi-national abducted people from diverse location in Iceland and brought them to Algiers. This event has remained in the national memory as some kind of traumatic historical sediment, surfacing occasionally in certain modern contexts in relation to discourses on Muslims and Islam. But the beginning of the arrivals of Muslims in Iceland stem from the late 1960s and 1970s, gradually growing and evolving into a thriving community of around 3000 Muslims in the 2020s. The first Muslim organisation was The Muslim Association of Iceland, founded in 1997, at that time having 74 members. Later two other organisations were founded, mainly because of political rifts between the leaders of the community. Yet, these associations have been a unifying frame for the Muslim community in Iceland, despite its ethnic and cultural diversity, supporting the formation of the identities of its members and fostering the unifying power of religious practice and rituals. The question of religious authority is obviously linked to formal religious organisations, and that applies to the Icelandic ones, but there are no evident or marked religious differences among the organisations, and most of my participants emphasised that they were "just Muslims", underplaying doctrinal differences. The frictions that have occurred between the associations have instead been of political (personal) and organisational nature. Among the various groupings of Muslims, which have been shown to be diverse and complex, there are consequently many different viewpoints, not necessarily religious, but cultural and social, where one can see various expressions of social and cultural values, embedded in the diverse national and ethnic origins of different members of the community.

In addition to focusing on the Muslim organisations and their relations between themselves I have accounted for various relations between the Muslims and state institutions, such as the police and the National Church, as well as other religious denominations in Iceland, who have legal relations to the Icelandic state. This has demonstrated that these relations are quite extensive and shown that the Muslim community is not an isolated social group in the wider context, but actively involved in the social-religious institutions of Icelandic society and the state. In the next chapter, I present an analysis of what it is to be a Muslim, and to be a Muslim in Iceland. By that I seek to deconstruct the stereotypical representation of Muslims and Islam that has been dominant in public discourse, in Iceland and elsewhere.

5 What and who is a Muslim?

Introduction

In the previous chapter I discussed the general social landscape of the Muslim community in Iceland, the associations and their overall relations with Icelandic institutions, both of the state and others. In this section I discuss some definitional aspects of being a Muslim and what this term implies, not least for the Muslims themselves. In her discussion about definitions of social groups, especially minority groups, Nadia Jeldtoft (2009, pp. 9-14), suggests a twofold definition: categorisation and group(s). The former is an empirical, analytical tool for explaining the phenomenon (concept) "Muslim", while the latter allows for a more varied and complex conceptualisation of (minority) groups, "Muslims" (in the West). Categorisation in this sense can be seen as being an objective approach, or objectification, of an essentialised "thing" or "figure", Muslim(s) (Werbner, 2005), whereas the term "group", which refers to the views of the people themselves, called Muslims, can be seen as a more subjective approach. Categorisation by one group by others implicates asymmetrical power relations, where the majority defines the minority from the standpoint of the dominant discourse of society (Baumann, 1996), often contradicting the perception and self-identification of that minority, in this case the Muslims. Therefore, some Muslims seek to define themselves against the objective categorisation of the majority, indicating negative formations of identity. When the "group" approach is applied, it leaves more room for complexity and variations, indicating that Muslims are not "just" Muslims, nor "simply" Muslims, but rather that many different identities intersect – religious, ethnic, national, cultural – contextualised according to the situations at hand, where one can talk of clusters of identity factors (Jeldtoft, 2010; Yuval-Davis, 2010). How Muslims define themselves is equally complex and ambiguous, as they are numerous and diverse, and this self-definition is a subjective, continuous revaluation and reformation, contextualised by historical, cultural, and social formations. These definitions are always based within the religion of Islam, as a discursive tradition (Asad, 1986), which is especially important in a small community as the Muslim community in Iceland, as one participant voiced it:

> There are people who are thinking about it, so you know, I think that in general, I was always saying that diversity is good, not having the same opinion is good, we don´t need a copy/paste from, well … this diversity is good when we are big [many], it's not good when we are few, when we are like a small community, it's not. It's like, they should be working for the same goal. But I hope people will try, later maybe … we were talking about culture. I think for me, I never felt I had a problem of culture when practicing my Islam, I think because Islam is a universal religion, it's an international religion.

For the participants of this study, being a Muslim is a very central part of their identity, as it often transcends nationality, ethnicity, or other identity markers, and this is often independent of whether the person is a practicing or a nominal – "cultural" – Muslim. These conceptions counter the common, simple, and stereotypical images of the term "The Muslim", which are constructed as monolithic, as devoid of nuance and personality, conveniently utilised in anti-Muslim discourses. These categorisations deny Muslims their complex and diverse identities and ways of being Muslims and "living Islam" and are therefore a form of symbolic and cultural violence (Bourdieu, 1998; Galtung, 1990). These contestations of identities and identifications were apparent during my conversations with my participants. In the next section, I present some self-definitions of my participants in Iceland, where they formulate their identity as Muslims – both converts and "born" Muslims.

5.1 Muslim identity

> To be a Muslim is to be a good human being, that is number one. To help others, that is number one. To have a sound and good home, to raise good children. To believe that something Higher exists. That is to be a Muslim. To be a Muslim is to implement God's will. To be a Muslim is a moral thing, one must always consider what´s right and wrong and act accordingly. The faith is to think about the ethical and it is guidance.

This quote from one of the participants in my study portrays Muslim identity in a simplified manner, as a subjective state of being and acting, and not related to complex social and cultural contexts in any obvious manner. The definition of what is a Muslims is more complex than indicated by this participant, which might be because he was a relatively recent convert to Islam. Muslim identity intersects with various other important identities, such as national and ethnic identities, together with diverse cultural markers, underlining the complex heterogeneity of the diverse social and cultural groups identifying themselves as Muslims around the world, and as an extension, in Iceland. One participant pointed to how such identity markers were "graded" in a selective manner:

> It seems to come down to nationality. The Arabs, they share a common language [language of the Qur'an], so they are more related in that way. It's easier for them, for example, for an Egyptian to identify with a Syrian, rather than with a Pakistani. And the West Africans, they are somehow separate. The Syrians and Jordanians, as well as the Palestinians, this all comes down to culture and nationality, even if they are all Muslims.

Many of my participants expressed the opinion that religion and cultural traditions were two different things, and that religion and politics should be kept apart, thus distancing themselves from the idea of political Islam, as well as from strong influences from diverse cultural traditions originating from distant countries. This could be easier said than done, as everyone is formed by these influences to some extent. A participant (a refugee from Syria)

even expanded the political dimension to include the governing of the Muslim associations, saying that "[…] whenever we have someone with a beard and a fez claiming leadership in a mosque, we have a political problem". This opinion might seem extreme, but it implies the perceived danger of power asymmetries based on religious convictions and religious authority. Some of the immigrant Muslims in Iceland have moved from or fled authoritarian regimes of oppression and are aware of these political dynamics. One participant talked about the politization of Islam in its militant form and how Muslims were frequently painted with the same brush:

> I know that Muslims these days are making mistakes, are making a lot of mistakes today, they don't know their religion well enough, and the enemies of Islam are taking this and putting this on the front page and saying: look at Muslims, that's how they are. This has nothing to do with Islam, I mean even the Prophet himself, I will tell you, maybe you will be surprised, like I saw this caricature they were doing in Denmark, [of] the Prophet, the stupid man that was doing this, what gets to me is the discussions, negative discussions of the Muslim, discussions without any knowledge, many call themselves specialists in Islam and Muslims, but they know nothing. This is dangerous.

This quote reflects what many of my participants found frustrating, how the identity marker, or the stereotypical term "Muslim", was constantly being forced upon them. They claimed that most people thought everything they did or did not do was somehow driven by and a consequence of their religion, and they complained that the stereotypes forced on them were hostile, obsessive, burdensome and denied them of their voice (see Rana, 2007; Sayyid, 2014). The Muslims who have lived in Iceland for a certain number of years and who I talked to in this study maintained that they saw themselves as Icelandic (and especially talked about their children as being Icelandic), despite the cultural (and national) diversity within the Muslim community. It is interesting in this regard that most immigrant groups in Iceland seem to define themselves and identify according to their national origins. For example, most immigrants in Iceland seem to identify as Poles, Thais, Filipinos (rather than, for example, as Catholics), but Muslims of this study frequently identify themselves first as Muslims and secondly according to nationality. Yet, it is interesting that when conversing with the participants and talking about other members of the community, many of them referred to others from their respective national origins, implying "internal othering" (see chapter two).

The bounded categorisation of immigrants is frequently used in public discourses, the media, and so on, whereas Poles or Lithuanians are referred to according to their nationality, or as East Europeans. Members of the Muslim community, however, are referred to as "Muslims". As can be seen from my study, most Muslims identify with Islam as a fundamental aspect of their identity, even if they often refer to each other according to their national origins, which incidentally might imply "internal othering". This is an example of the self/other dynamics suggested by Baumann, as examined in chapter two, which shifts between the "orientalist

grammar" of othering and the "segmentary grammar" of contextual segmentation of relations (Baumann, 2004, pp. 18-49). The question of being Muslims or having a nationality (Moroccan, Syrian, and so on) has been made visible during the Multicultural march which takes place every year in Reykjavík (Fjölmenningardagur), where different immigrant groups show off their national flags, dresses and cuisine, underlining and presenting the identity of their original homeland. On these days, the Muslims emphasise their "Muslimness" first, and national origins second, which illustrates the meta-national aspects of Islam (ummah), as shown by the fact of marching as Muslims, rather than demonstrating their diverse national origins. I participated in the Multicultural march in Reykjavík, where I walked with the Muslims, who were the only group not parading a national flag or emphasising national identity in any way. Similarly, at the City Hall, where, following the march, each group offered their national cuisine to visitors, the Muslims had a stall presenting religious literature and copies of the Qur'an, offering it to the visitors and educating them about Islam, as well as offering diverse culinary examples.

Another interesting aspect concerning the interplay of religion and diverse cultural aspects of Muslims, rooted in multiple traditions, is the common notion I observed in my field research that converts are said to be "better Muslims" who practice "purer Islam" (this is discussed in more detail in chapter seven). This notion was often expressed by born Muslims, who say that the converts are free from any complex cultural baggage of their families' backgrounds from old homelands. Therefore, the converts are sometimes said to be better able to express their faith, as well as having more choices in religious matters. I heard this idea expressed numerous times, and it seems to imply the interplay of the faith and the person, who is free of the collective (or culture) but having a subjective access to individual religious practice (Jensen, 2007; Bagge and Jensen, 2015; Özyürek, 2015). The point here is that culture is, by many participants, thought to "pollute" the "pure religion", indicating some tension between the individual, the group and the faith. As one participant (born Muslim) put it:

> […] because you can see in society, I mean, many things, that are Islamic, but people do not behave like that in our countries. If you think why converts are better, because they already have this big, big mass of good ideas, from the society, so you don´t need to purify a lot of things, you know, but even though Muslims purify things until their death, they purify … because society is so complicated, and the culture, there are some really bad things from the culture, the non-organisation and, so I think for this reason, yes, I'm sure that they feel that they [converts] are more attached to Islam than [born] Muslims. And another thing is when you seek the truth and you find it, you are more attached than when someone gives it to you, by genetics.

Nadia Jeldtoft (2009) argues that by trying to define or clarify the category "Muslim", one is seeking to find an empirical platform for researching the complex reality of groups, here Muslims, in an objective manner. Conversely, as mentioned earlier, one can look at the self-

definition of Muslims as a subjective and reflexive process where the identification with several types of identities takes place, positioning it in opposition to external categorisations, which are seen as dominant discourses, as Baumann (1996) called it. Accordingly, these categorisations then form public opinions and political rhetoric (often populist), which in turn tends to feed into public support for those political forces promoting these public opinions. In this way, categorisation and dominant discourses can easily lead to political policies and even legal changes (Hervik, 2011; Lean, 2012; Scott, 2007). Jeldtoft (2009) argues that categorisation inherently implies reification and essentialisation of a proposed "Muslimness", presumed to mean something unique and specifically bounded. But, as countless research has revealed, this is not the case (Baran, 2010; Bowen, 1992, 1998; Gilsenan, 1982; Hirji, 2010; Marranci, 2008). When the self-definitions of the Muslims themselves are considered, it becomes clear that "Muslim identity" is very diverse, flexible, and complex. This was reflected in what one of my participants said that:

> […] central to Islam is the total unity of God and that is something every Muslim has, yet what kind of food they eat, how they worship, or how they dress, I mean, this is just free [a free choice].

Implied in this is that Islam is "one", but that Muslims are diverse, and that Islam should transcend social categories like nationality and ethnicity, and that there is no contradiction between being a Muslim and being Icelandic. An Icelandic, female convert, talking about being Muslim and Icelandic, expressed it this way:

> You know, this is all a beginning here in Iceland. The history of Islam [in Iceland] is short. When I was teaching the kids [in the Sunday school in the mosque], I gave everything for the school, because I wanted them to … if someone is going to do anything for Islam in Iceland, it's them, the kids. They are born here, talk Icelandic, can learn Arabic. They must have the opportunity to, you know, give them the chance to learn Islam from the beginning so that they can form correct identities as Muslims and as Icelanders. So, one can easily be a Muslim and Icelandic, and we, the Icelandic Muslims must exemplify that, take the kids to Þórsmörk (a popular valley in the Icelandic highlands) or to Þingvellir (where the ancient parliament stood), or to have ice cream in Vesturbærinn [The West Side of Reykjavík]. You can always be both Icelandic and Muslim, it's not mutually exclusive.

She continued and argued that it is important for Icelandic Muslims to control their own path, take their matters into their own hands, according to their own needs and situation. Therefore, she claimed it is important for Icelandic Muslims to educate their own religious leaders in line within the contexts of Icelandic society and its values, rather than using foreign imams who have no or limited understanding of Icelandic society. It is vital in her and other participant's opinion that Islam can rest in the society it is practiced in and in the local context. This reflects notions set forward by some scholars concerning the contradictions of

modernity and tradition, of the collective and seeking individualised religious trajectories. This underlines the importance of religious authority, where it comes from and by whom it is exerted, in the context of globalisation and diverse social locations (Jensen, 2006; Mandaville, 2007; Peter, 2006; Turner, 2007). But the participant added that it is not a given that all Muslims in Iceland like each other, even if they identify with each other as Muslims. It is not a given that such a diverse group can stay unified, even if they are all friends on Fridays and during Ramadan. According to her, what is needed is political will and leadership. The short history of relations between the Muslim associations in Iceland has demonstrated this predicament and is referred to in the previous chapter.

5.2 Religion and culture

In the previous section I referred to the thoughts of some participants concerning the relations of religion and culture(s). As Abu-Lughod (1991) argued, the concept of culture can easily lend itself to boundary making and reification of distinct social and cultural groups, based on imagined or real social and cultural differences, and even pit them against each other. Some of my participants were aware of this and wanted to minimalize the effects of cultural traditions on the religious unity of the community. One of the participants explained the intersectional context of identities with these words:

> A Muslim from Ghana in Iceland is a Ghanaian … that's a strong identity for him, but he's also a Muslim from Ghana in Iceland. He's got his Ghanaian identity and his Muslim identity, so why is his Muslim identity seen as a threat, not him being Ghanaian?

This quote indicates the conflation of different identities, national and religious (Ghanaian, Icelandic and Muslim), and by association, different cultural references, where being Muslim, becomes focal. Yet, there are many examples of different Muslim societies where cultural and social contexts and formations seem to dominate the lives of the people, with religion in the background, expressed in diverse ways (Abu-Lughod, 1986; Abdul Khabeer, 2016; Özyürek, 2015). Another participant said the following about this topic:

> Islam is not one culture, I went to the mosque, thinking there was only one way of being Muslim, but soon realised that Muslims have diverse cultures and different identities. The problem is that people always generalise, that Muslims are all the same" (an Icelandic convert).

In a similar vein, one participant from West Africa talked about the intersection of religion and cultural backgrounds, stating that when Muslims from many different backgrounds lived in the same area and were members of the same group, it could lead to problems due to different cultures and traditions, despite having the same faith. He said this showed the complex cultural diversity of Muslims, which sometimes created disunity, whereas the faith and communal religious practices helped create unity. Another participant said that he had never experienced problems with culture and his faith, since Islam is a universal religion, and

as it says in the Qur'an that God told Muhammed that he (God) had sent mercy to the whole world, which means that Islam can adjust to all places and cultures. He sees no conflict in being a Muslim in Iceland and taking full part in Icelandic society. According to this participant, Islam is universal and can function everywhere, but it can become problematic when some Muslims mix specific cultural factors with Islam. However, when they think their culture is Islamic (or Arabic), it never works well: "… it is always bad when religion becomes culturalized", he said.

As I mentioned in chapter two, anthropologists studying Islam and Muslim societies have addressed the question of one Islam versus many islams, its cultural contexts and embeddedness, and how this issue is perceived by Muslims. John R. Bowen (1998) has addressed this issue about whether one should talk about one Islam or many. He discusses a "dual pull" concerning how Muslims perceive Islam and how they want to practice their faith, with one pull working towards practical rituals rooted in (local) particularistic traditions, while the other pull is towards universal, doctrinal identities of the scriptures. One special manifestation of this tension between these two approaches is, for example, the issue of dress or other markers of piety. This brings the question of whether Muslims (especially in the West) should dress like Arabs did in the seventh century C.E. or as modern (Western) men and women, or if men should grow a beard in a particular (religious) manner. In other words, to what degree should one's religion govern one's external appearance and conduct? As one Muslim participant from West Asia expressed when discussing the link between the religion and cultural factors, such as dress and music:

> There are problems about priorities and problems in understanding the main goals of Islam, and, also, I think, to talk about bad behaviour, or what we think is bad behaviour, as in don't look at women or whatever … so, I think the problem still is that some people, scholars, imams, somewhere, are still talking about music, is it halal or not, [or] this centimetre for [the length of trousers]. Look at women, well, it's really so many details and it gives for me such a bad idea so it's many miles from the idea that what Islam is for [why it came], it came to really change everything for the people, to change the mind, activities, wherever they are in society or in other societies.

Thus, instead of focusing on "irrelevant" issues such as appearances or mundane pleasures as music (or glancing at women), the participant maintained that Muslims should cultivate the spiritual side of the faith. With respect to external manifestations of piety, he underlined the importance of the spirituality of life, which he said he felt was sometimes missing in Islam today. He said it was vital to "live the religion", Islam was goal oriented, Muslims had to be the active makers of their own lives, agency was imperative, both on the personal and societal level. He said that by the sincere intensions and agency, the religion would have positive effects, and the importance of contributing to society and leaving a mark, or legacy, was paramount. Islam had come to the world to change things for the better, to liberate people, and to bring justice and equality. This was for him the central theme in Islam, rather

than what he saw as small meaningless and trivial things, stuck in narrow interpretations of the doctrine.

Not all the participants shared this attitude; some had more conservative ideas about how to conduct themselves as Muslims. Some Muslims saw Islam primarily as an ethical compass, while others saw it primarily in normative terms as rules, obligations, and prohibitions to follow, and there were varying shades in between. Among Muslims in Iceland there are similar varieties as elsewhere concerning interpretations and practice and about what constitutes the "straight path". One participant conceptualised Islam and being Muslim in these words:

> See, people are always looking at these rules and norms, but I see it more as framework, it's a specific framework and within it you find much freedom and choice and you see much width when talking to Muslims, people do different things, think differently, especially when you look at diverse cultures. Within this framework, you can do so much, you try not to overstep its boundaries, even if that can sometimes be difficult, but it provides rules and regulates your behaviour accordingly.

This participant visualised Islam as being a wide framework, and within it there were multiple choices and possibilities. It provided room for diverse interpretations and different approaches. She also argued that the texts should be read according to ever-changing contexts; they were not isolated phenomena frozen in time but dependent on social, cultural, and historical contexts, and a too narrow approach to the doctrine could lead to alienation. She said that the Qur'an encouraged people to think, ponder, learn, and to use their rational faculties rather than obey blindly. This was a common theme among the participants and people I met while conducting my study, yet there were some Muslim participants that I conversed with who did not look at their religion with such liberal eyes but were inclined to a more literal approach to the texts. This demonstrates again that there are many diverse ways of being Muslim, of interpreting the scriptures and of "living Islam".

Even if many Muslims want to separate culture and religion, they choose diverse trajectories for living their Islam. The importance of "living Islam" through praxis and agency was a common view among many of my participants, which is actually emphasised in Islam, where intention (*niyyah*) is all important when it comes to practice and acting (Marranci, 2008). This lived Islam can be both a collective ideal and practice and an individual trajectory, independent of group belonging or identity. Nadia Jeldtoft (2010) has looked at lived Islam and religious identity among Muslim minority groups who are not organised in associations of any kind. She utilises a frame of "living religion" as a method to study how Muslims live Islam as individuals in their daily lives. She found that a number of her participants had individualised their religious practice and revalued their approach to religious activities and ideas. Some had designed or accommodated their relationship with their faith around individual needs and quotidian practicalities. Many considered the correct practice as showing them to be good and virtuous, praying regularly, reading the Qur'an, and so on. Others looked at being a Muslim as a specific lifestyle and a choice (e.g., wearing hijab), but

they adjusted to individual needs. This attitude of innovation is especially relevant for converts, who can more easily choose individually than born Muslims. Therefore, it is important to study how individual Muslims perceive, understand, and practice their religion and where and how they obtain their religious capital. This religious dimension will be examined later in this chapter.

5.3 Internal othering – unity in diversity

While the othering of Muslims by majority societies in the West is well known, similar categorisation takes place among the Muslims themselves. This resembles the segmentary system conceptualised by Evans-Pritchard (1940), where different groups, or segments, interact in a fission/fusion manner, a conceptualisation Baumann (2004) used in his model of grammars of identity/alterity, selfing/othering, as addressed in chapter two. This implicates shifting, contextual relations and contacts between different groups according to national and ethnic identities. An example is the common notion among some of my participants that the Indonesians are "milder" Muslims than others or that the Bosnians and Kosovans are more secular than the "average" Muslims. One participant who has lived in Iceland for a few decades expressed this this when he said that:

> […] people from Indonesia, who live in the southwest, they only come to the mosque for Eid [note: Eid al-Fitr after Ramadan, and Eid al-Adha, following the hajj]. The Bosnians and Kosovans, many have left Iceland, they don't show often up in the mosque, I met a lot of them, but they eat pork and some of them drink [alcohol], which is haram for Muslims, and they don't pray much.

Similar opinions exist of some West African Muslims, many of whom come from strong Sufi traditions. There are also contextual categorisations according to national origins. These different identities intersect during communal religious ceremonies, especially during the month of Ramadan and the Eid-al-Fitr, the festival at the end of that month. Outside that context, the interaction between groups varies to different degrees. Thus, as one Muslim said, despite the heterogeneous composition of the Muslim community in Iceland and the various differences, "Islam creates closeness between us", especially expressed and manifest during Ramadan and the Islamic festivals.

As mentioned above, most Muslims in Iceland belong to the Sunni tradition of Islam, yet there are some Shia Muslims, with their number having increased after 2015 due to the wars in West Asia. The difference between Sunni and Shia has not, on the surface at least, seemed to be of any importance and has been downplayed whenever inquired about. It was pointed out by some participants that if these differences were emphasised, it might compromise the unity of the community-- a unity which can be somewhat fragile, where personal and political differences (e.g., concerning how to run the associations, as shown in chapter four) have from time to time created serious tensions within the general Muslim community in Iceland. These tensions have not revolved around religious differences but are rather about

mundane (political) matters of personal positions and prestige, a position most of my participants have maintained and which was my impression during my time in the field.

An example (discussed in chapter four) of the tense intersection of ethnicity/nationality and the generational factor is the schism, which took place within the Muslim Association in Iceland (MAI) in 2008/2009 and which resulted in a group breaking from the MAI who founded their own society, The Islamic Cultural Centre of Iceland (ICCI). The leaders in this process were mostly young men (mainly North African), while the leaders of the MAI were older men (mainly from the Levant). That dispute revolved around personal and political differences, such as how the mosque should be run, and it also underlined to an extent generational differences, as well as diverse cultural and national sentiments and backgrounds. Hence, when talking to members of the community, a common way of addressing or defining others was by using nationality as an identity marker, "…he's from Morocco, they do this their own way…", or "…he's from Senegal, they're all Sufi". Thus, even among the Arabic speakers (who presumably are considered to share some common "Arabic" cultural factors, even if that can likely be contested), there were multiple processes of "othering" and "altering" (Baumann, 2004). This also occurred between and within other groups of the Muslim community, which demonstrates how cultural factors can create divisions and "othering" (Abu-Lughod, 1991). One participant from Africa talked about categorisations of this kind as being racist in a sublime way; he thought some Arabs saw themselves to be superior to e.g., Black Africans, and even to North Africans, who are by some considered mixed (Arabs/Berbers/Tuaregs/Black, etc.).

Thus, even within this small community, which, because of its religion and being comprised (mostly) immigrants, and therefore vulnerable vis-à-vis the host society, processes of "other/alter", "us/them" (Baumann, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 2006, 2010) are ever present, albeit mostly in an indirect and covert manner. This dynamic is mainly apparent in informal, day-to-day settings but is temporarily suspended in the context of the expressions of common religious notions and practices, where the unity and equality of the ummah is expressed. This shows that while different identities are active in the relations between groups within the general Muslim community in Iceland, two key factors, Islam and Iceland, seek to reconcile these differences. From this, it can be concluded that Islam and communal religious practice, such as daily prayers, communal congregations and rituals, such as Ramadan, unify and create common ground among the community, despite its diversity. And, as some participants repeatedly expressed, the Muslim community in Iceland had two important factors in common, helping to unify the community, these factors being Iceland and Islam.

During congregational gatherings, such as Friday sermons (*Jumah*) and other religious rituals, the different groupings unite as Muslims, where Islam and the ritual practices "overrule" the regular national, cultural, ethnic, and to an extent religious difference. This was for example seen when a Shia Muslim prays together with the Sunni, placing his piece of clay [from Karbala in Iraq] on the prayer mat, which he touches with his forehead during

prayer, something which often characterises Shia practice. Incidentally, during the same prayer session, some Sufis (mainly Africans), might perform certain nuanced rituals from Sufi religious practice in a subtle way. All this demonstrates that different identities among Muslims is a complex pattern of identity intersections, taking shape according to the contexts at hand, while it appears not to be an issue for others. The main unifying factors for this Arctic ummah are therefore Islam, Iceland, and the most important collective religious rituals, the fasting month of Ramadan, and the pilgrimage to Mecca, the *hajj*, with the subsequent festivals, Eid-al-Fitr (following Ramadan) and Eid-al-Adha (the feast of sacrifice, concluding the *hajj*). Thus, the ummah can to some extent be defined as an imagined community (Anderson, 2006), as a meta-national and meta-ethnic idea or image of the united community of all faithful Muslims, transcending national, ethnic, racial, and tribal conditions (see discussion on the ummah, chapter two). The most visible and important expression of this imagined community is the *hajj*, or the pilgrimage to Mecca, required by all Muslims to undertake, at least once in a lifetime, if finance and/or health permits. This collective Islamic ritual, comprising several millions of worshippers, is the most powerful confirmation of the ummah, of the meta-identity of Muslims around the world (Bianchi, 2004; Hammoudi, 2006; Turner, 1974). Some Icelandic Muslims have undertaken the *hajj*, but the first organised pilgrimage from Iceland was in 2014, organised by the ICCI, in cooperation with the authorities in Saudi Arabia, where ten people went to Mecca. This will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

One way of expressing "diversity in unity" is by different manners of dress or by variations in beard growth for men (as discussed above) and by different degrees of "veiling" among women, which in many cases expresses different national, ethnic, or cultural belongings. These differences signify different identity expressions and forms of habitus (Bourdieu, 1992) in multiple manners, which might be termed Islamic habitus. It also implicates different layers of accumulating cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), and consequently competitive situations concerning e.g., knowledge of the texts and ritual practice, especially among and between converts, who in many cases strife to become "perfect Muslims". This happens often by overemphasising the Islamic credentials, such as textual knowledge, correct social and religious conduct, appropriate way of dress and/or facial hair for men, or veil/not-veil for women (cf. Jensen, 2006; Kühle, 2009; Roald, 2004, 2012). It is interesting to note that some of these factors have become fashion trends, which shows that religious practices are not completely free from modern, capitalist consumerism (Jones, 2007; Shirazi, 2017). On one occasion, while joining a group of Muslim women at the MAI mosque at their Women's Group event, I witnessed an Icelandic woman convert who had just returned from Cairo bringing a bag full of the latest hijab fashion from Egypt, with new colours and textures. At that moment the woman approached this as fashion items, not religious, and the women present approached this as fashion items, not religious markings. Thus, the symbolic qualities of the "veil", like other identity markers, shift according to the context at hand.

5.4 Conclusions

Above, I have examined some definitional aspects of being Muslim, both external definitions by the majority society and self-definitions expressed by the Muslim participants in this research. By defining what or who someone is, identity becomes central. Among Muslims in Iceland, the question of identity is complex, where diverse identity markers – nationality, ethnicity, culture, age, and religion – intersect in various contexts. Most of the participants insisted that there is only one universal Islam, but culture and tradition bring diversity and potentially conflict. Many of my participants, therefore, emphasised that religion and culture (and politics) should be kept apart. One manifestation of identity intersection is what I call "internal othering", i.e., when the dynamics of othering takes place within the Muslim community itself, often based on national and ethnic backgrounds. Divisions are inevitable in a community as diverse as that of Muslims in Iceland, even if religious differences are habitually downplayed. This community has experienced some pressure from the majority society (see chapter eight), which has made its unity important. Despite the diversity and differences, I maintain that the most important factor in unifying the community is Islam and particularly the communal rituals and gatherings, such as the Friday prayers and Ramadan, during which most differences seem to be put on hold.

6 Islamic religious ideas and ritual practice

Introduction

> To define is to repudiate some things and to endorse others. Defining what is religion is not merely an abstract intellectual exercise; it is not just what anthropologists or other scholars do. The act of defining (or redefining) religion is embedded in passionate disputes; it is connected with anxieties and satisfactions, it is affected by changing conceptions of knowledge and interest, and it is related to institutional disciplines. In the past, colonial administrations used definitions of religion to classify, control, and regulate the practices and identities of subjects (Asad, 2012, p. 39).

When studying Islam or Muslims, awareness of how "religion" has been conceptualised and constructed in Western thinking is necessary. While this concept is integral to the history of Western thought, it should be cautiously applied to ideological and political systems outside of Western historical and conceptual spaces, for example when translating it to Islamic traditions, or to other non-Western or non-Christian traditions (Bergunder, 2014; Pasha, 2017; Lindberg, 2009). Even though "religion" is in many ways a contested concept, Asad (1993, 2012) argued that anthropological approaches to religion in recent times have shifted from evolutionary and "rational" ideas (of religion as "primitive" or outmoded form of "science") towards the point that "… religion is not an archaic mode of scientific thinking, nor of any other secular endeavour we value today; it is, on the contrary, a distinct space of human practice and belief which cannot be reduced to any other" (Asad, 1993, p. 27). Clifford Geertz's (1973) famous definition of religion as a symbolic system, engendering moods and motivations, formulating order, has no references to social or cultural contexts, diverse or otherwise. Asad (1993, 2012) has criticised this universalistic definition as being essentialist, without considerations of historical or social variations. He contrasts the "essence" of religion to the "essence" of science and politics, both seats of power and rationality, and he argues that the post-Reformation separation of religion from secular state power is fundamentally formed and conditioned by the story of the relations of the European Church to power. Rather than religion being "universal" or having an "essence", the historical, social, cultural, and political forms of any period and/or location that condition religious expressions and articulations vary greatly (Asad, 2012; Bourdieu, 1972, 1991, 1998; Bowen, 1992, 1998). Accordingly, the argument against the universal definition of religion not only implies this historical dimension, but importantly, the definition itself is a historical product embedded in discursive formations of power. Part of this definition was the emergence of classifications by missionaries and philosophers, theologians and subsequently anthropologists, of religions into hierarchical systems of higher and lower

religions, in tandem with increased knowledge of other and alien cultures due to growing colonisation of European powers (Asad, 1973, 1993; Dirks, 2004; Said, 1978, 1985, 1989). Along with other classifications serving the colonial project, such as racial theories and cultural evolutionism, religious definitions became an important marker of evolutionary status and stages (Martin and Asad, 2014).

In a similar social-structural context, even if Pierre Bourdieu did not articulate a definite definition of religion as such, he stressed the role of religion and ritual as a structuring force in society and religion's main function to aid people to make sense of their positions in the social order (Rey, 2007, pp.57-66). Thus, his sociological theory of religion, and is theory of practice were related to the religious field being relevant for studies of class and power, religion, race and ethnicity, as well as religion in relation to colonial conquest (Rey, 2007, p. 82). He conceptualised religion as other social factors, in economic terms, where symbolic capital and relations between fields played major roles, as well as religious habitus and he underlined the importance of the competitive nature of the religious fields (Bourdieu, 1991). Bourdieu also emphasised the importance of religion in formulating doxa, or the worldview of people (Rey, 2007, p. 58). Stressing the social context, he stated that religion was primarily relational, as well as being dispositional, as inscribed in the body of agents and in the structure of the contexts at hand, and the relations between them (Bourdieu, 1998, preface).

Thus, instead of looking for religion as a subjective, psychological, spiritual space, one should look at situated, social spaces and practices, in historical contexts, as "discursive traditions" (Asad, 1986), especially in the case of Muslim religious practice. Because of this, to translate a religious concept into another, especially in an anachronistic manner, is problematic. This definitional problem is of importance since more often than not, Muslims, or "the" Muslim, is rigidly identified with Islam in an essentialised manner, moulded into a monolithic form, and reified as such, rather than recognising the wide diversity of Muslims, culturally, socially, and in relations to the interpretations of their religion. Also, translations between Islamic (Arabic) religious concepts and Western, Christian ones are problematic. As an example, "belief" is often referred to as *iman*, but Martin and Asad (2014) argue that it corresponds better with "faith", as in "faithful", implying trust. The Arabic term *din* is often referred to as "religion", but Muslims often state that it corresponds to a way of life, or, as many of my participants talked of as "living Islam". This applies to Muslims everywhere, also in Iceland, and it underlines the importance of perceiving and addressing Muslims as persons, as individuals with opinions, desires, hopes and fears, as is the case with all other humans. These ideas and sentiments underpin my approach in this study.

6.1 Islam: A discursive tradition

In a seminal article, "The Idea of an Anthropology of Islam", where the discursive dimension of religious practice is discussed, Talal Asad (1986, p. 1) asks the question that no one had asked before in a clear manner, "What exactly, is the anthropology of Islam? What is its object of investigation?" Here, Asad discussed the writings of Geertz (1968), el-Zein (1977)

and Gilsenan (1982) on Islam in a critical way. According to him, Islam, as a faith, or doctrine, cannot be disconnected from different social contexts, and importantly as well, the theological side of Islam should not be bypassed. He stated that when studying Islam as an anthropologist, one should start "… as Muslims do, from the concepts of a discursive tradition that includes and relates itself to the founding texts of the Qur'an and the hadith. Islam is neither a distinctive social structure nor a heterogeneous collection of beliefs, artefacts, customs, and morals. It is a tradition" (Asad, 1986, p. 14). Tradition, according to Asad, is discourse that guides practitioner to and on the correct path of their practice, grounded in historical sediments, encompassing the past, the present and the future; therefore, erasing any essential difference between "classic" and "modern" Islam. Therefore, an anthropology of Islam should aim at understanding the historical dynamics underlining and conditioning the discursive traditions by which the practitioners adjust their religious compass and practice. As Asad put it: "An Islamic discursive tradition is simply a tradition of Muslim discourse that addresses itself to conceptions of the Islamic past and future, with reference to a particular Islamic practice in the present. Clearly, not everything Muslims say and do belongs to an Islamic discursive tradition" (Asad, 1986, p. 14).

As discussed in the previous chapter, being "Muslim" is a very diverse and heterogenous state and Muslim religious practices likewise are affected by diverse cultural factors, making these practices ambivalent and open to multiple cultural influences – what can be termed traditions. And, as Schielke (2010) states, religion might not always be the dominant factor in the lives of Muslims, and therefore, there is often too much Islam in the anthropology of Islam, implying that in the everyday life of ordinary Muslims, there are multiple other important things to see to. Therefore, commenting on Asad´s thesis of Islam as a discursive tradition, different Muslim societies have different traditions and interpretations of their faith (Schielke, 2010; see also Bowen, 1992), as they "live Islam" as many of my participants expressed their religious practice. Thus, Islam is integral to most Muslims' lives, as integral part of their whole existence and identity, their history, and their diverse traditions, demonstrating that Asad's thesis of Islam is very useful as an underlying conceptual base, in a directive sense.

Some of my participants emphasised that there was only one Islam, with diverse interpretations and cultural contexts and that different cultural approaches and traditions influenced the religious practice. Contesting this common idea, the Muslim anthropologist el-Zein (1977) insisted that these diverse cultural and local contexts constituted "many islams", rather than one. Similar differences exist among Islamic scholars, as can be shown by comparing the views of an imam working in Iceland and a well-known Islamic scholar and professor in sociology, who I met during his visit to Iceland a few years ago. The imam maintained that the Muslim community in Iceland needed religious education, where the Muslims learned the "true" Islam. According to him, only scholars can teach Islam, not people without the required education, people who "talk about things that have nothing to do with Islam". He emphasised religious authority, based on doctrinal knowledge and religious orthodoxy. When it comes to converts, he stated that it was of vital importance to

teach them "correct" Islam and make them practice "real" Islam. He argued that the role of the teacher/scholar/imam towards the converts is similar to the relations of the Prophet to his Companions, who learned how to become Muslims from him. Contrary to the imam, a Turkish-American scholar and sociologist, who visited Iceland and whom I met and interviewed, emphasised that proselyting Islam, let alone a specific, "correct" version of Islam, was not very sensible and bound to be unsuccessful. According to him, no one should interfere with how others conduct themselves, what they believe or do not believe, rather a person should cultivate him/herself based on Islamic values and conduct him/herself as a good example, i.e., to "live Islam" as an exemplary praxis. This example demonstrates the different approaches to Islam and being a Muslim and these differences exist equally among religious scholars (ulama) as among laypeople, the so called "ordinary" Muslims. Thus, being a Muslim and having/forming/reforming Muslim identity is quite a complex and contextual process, which has become increasingly complex among Muslims living in the West (Allievi, 2005; Cesari, 2009; Nielsen, 2007; Roald, 2004). The term "Muslim" does therefore not refer to any standardised or homogeneous phenomena, but rather to ongoing reformation of complex identities formed by their diverse social and cultural contexts.

6.2 Muslim religious practice and rituals

As has become clear in this chapter, the main emphasis concerning religion is on religious practice, and its social and cultural context. In this and the next sections I address various aspects of Muslim ritual practice and religious concepts, where I give some ethnographic examples from my participation among the Muslim community in Iceland. The main religious practices of observant Muslims consist of praying five times a day (*salat*), fasting during the month of Ramadan (*sawm*) and offering the pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*), as well as the obligatory alms (*zakat*) and performing of the feast of sacrifice (Eid al adha). These tenets are more or less uniform for Muslims across the world, yet sometimes with regional and local variations (see Bowen, 1992). In Iceland, the ritual form conforms to this model, with slight cultural differences reflected in the diverse origins of Muslim practitioners in Iceland, but any particular Icelandic variety of Muslim ritual is non-existent.

The study of ritual has always been one of the main occupations of anthropologists (Turner, 1995; Asad, 1993; Bourdieu, 1972; Bowen, 1989; Mahmood, 2001). Ritual has generally been seen as "symbolic activity as opposed to the instrumental behaviour of everyday life" (Asad, 1993, p. 55), and as "[having] formal and rule-governed character … which anthropologists have juxtaposed with informal and spontaneous activity" (Mahmood, 2001, p. 827). Anthropologists have disagreed whether ritual constitutes a type of human behaviour or an aspect of diverse human practices, but there seems to be a general agreement that ritual practice is conventional and socially prescribed, a characteristic that sets it apart from mundane activities (Bell, 1992). When it came to Islamic rituals, their studies have mostly focused on local practices, as of marabouts and mullahs, shrines of saints, and so on, where the study of the main rituals has been of less interest (Bowen, 1992; Marranci, 2008), even if they comprise the most important aspects of Muslim religious worship. Anthropologists

like John R. Bowen (1989, 1992), Fadwa El Guindi (2008) and Saba Mahmood (2001, 2005) have done detailed research on the regular religious ritual of Muslims, the five times a day prayer (salat), where they have shown that even if this ritual appears to be uniform among all Muslims, there are diverse social and cultural nuances.

When it comes to these practices in the Icelandic context, trying to discern any form of what could be termed Icelandic Islam does not seem to bear any fruit. During salat in the local mosques in Reykjavík, one notices some minor differences in bodily performances, which seems to be based on the different cultural backgrounds of the worshippers. As I mentioned earlier, when asked about the likelihood of the formation of an Icelandic Islam, my participants responded negatively. Instead, the uniform nature of the salat can be seen as unifying worshippers from various cultural, social and national backgrounds, underlining the sentiment of the ummah, and by which they aim at committing to the Islamic tradition. Through the concept of the ummah, the salat (as prescribed by the Prophet) functions as a social leveller, where people of diverse social standings and class, with different ideological outlooks, unite in common action, the prayer, which is also manifest physically by the worshippers standing close to each other in direct lines, with their feet touching. During *salat* in the Reykjavik mosques, worshippers were dressed in all kinds; in suits, thobes (traditional "Islamic" gown), working clothes, wool jumpers, sport dress, and so on. During the prayer, these differences fated into the background, and everyone was equal to the next person. Most of the Friday sermons addressed some ethical and religious issues and concepts, and ideas concerning the meaning of life and death, and to be prepared for the final hour, were quite common, and can even be seen as the most important theme of the Friday sermons. Sometimes the sermons were political, but that was almost the exception. Here I describe my first *Jumah* of my research, a ceremony where many of the main themes in this thesis were addressed:

It was a Friday, just after noon in chilly Reykjavík at the end of February and it was time for the Jumah, the Friday prayer and sermon, the most important weekly communal activity of Muslims around the world. This was my first Friday prayer meeting. Between thirty and forty people had gathered at the mosque, where the Muslim Association of Iceland conducts its religious and social activities. The ethnic and national composition of the congregation was very mixed, with people from practically all corners of the world. This mosque is like countless others in the West, located in a semi-industrial/commercial building, and it is not a "real" mosque in the strict architectural sense but in a religious and social sense it is a mosque. This time, a foreign guest had been invited to conduct the *khutba*, the main sermon before the actual praying ritual. This guest was an American Islamic scholar of Syrian origin, Mohamad Bashar Arafat[15] , who had been the main speaker at a seminar at the University

[15] Dr. Mohamad Bashar Arafat has worked as an imam in Baltimore, Maryland and he founded the An-Nur Institute for Islamic Studies and Arabic Language in Baltimore. He is the president of The Islamic Affairs Council of Maryland. He has been involved in interfaith work on an international level. He is the founder and president of the Civilizations Exchange and Cooperation Foundation (CECF).

of Iceland the day before, which had been on interreligious cooperation and peaceful coexistence between different cultural and religious groups in the world. In his sermon, the scholar emphasised the importance of peace, justice and equality, as well as the pressing necessity for building bridges and conducting one´s life in a "civilised" manner. He urged the Muslims who were present to strive towards being honest and decent members of their society. He told them that religion should not create borders between people and cultures and that religion should not lead to discrimination in societies. As I came to realise during my fieldwork, these themes seemed to surface quite frequently in my discussions and interviews with my Muslim participants, where they repeatedly emphasised the concepts of peace and justice, which they said were central to the message of the Prophet Mohammad. In his sermon, Arafat reiterated the importance of countering the common Western stereotype attached to Muslims and Islam, that of aggression, terrorism, and the like, and the need for Muslims to negate this stereotype by positive and civilised behaviour and by their general conduct and manners in the society where they happen to be living. In addition, he reminded the congregation that according to the tenets of Islam, Muslims should adhere to the laws of the countries they were living in, especially if they were living in countries outside the "Muslim world" (*dar-al-islam*)[16] . In accordance with the message communicated in his sermon, the scholar referred to Sura 49, verse 13 in the Qur'an, sura al-hujurat (The Dwellings):

> O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware (translated, Muhammad Asad, 2008)[17] .

Then the communal praying began in earnest with its standardised ritual practice. The American scholar led the prayer and his recitation of the text sounded beautifully. The initial phase in the communal prayer is the recitation of the first Sura of the Qur'an, The Opening (al-fatiha), which is the single most important prayer for Muslims, and it is said that it encompasses the central thesis of Islam:

> In the name of God, The Most Gracious, The Dispenser of Grace: [1] - All praise is due to God alone, the Sustainer of all the worlds [2], The Most Gracious, the Dispenser of Grace [3], Lord of the Day of Judgment! [4] Thee alone do we worship; and unto Thee alone do we turn for aid. [5] - Guide us the straight way [6]. The way of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed Thy blessings, not of those who have been condemned

[16] In Islam, the division of habitation is conceived as different "abodes" (dar: abode, house, place, land, etc.). The major divisions are dar-al-islam (abode of Islam: Muslim lands), dar-al-harb (abode of enmity/war) and dar-al-amn (abode of safety). Other, definitions are dar-al-hudna (abode of calm), dar-al-'ahd (abode of truce) and dar-al-sulh (abode of treaty). These categorisations have important legal, political and historical implications and the last two terms are relevant for Muslims who have migrated from the Muslim world (dar-al-islam).

[17] All quotes from the Qur'an are from Asad, M (2008).

> [by Thee], nor of those who go astray! [7]. (English translation Muhammed Asad, 1980).

An important aspect present in this scholar´s talk is the importance of working against the negative stereotyping of Muslims and Islam in the West, in the media, in common and public discourse and in political propaganda. This is a theme that emerged repeatedly and continually in my discussions with the people I encountered in my field research and often the tone was worrying and defensive. People frequently pointed to the texts of the Qur'an and the hadith (the records of the sayings and actions of the Prophet) to show that the fundamental ideas of Islam promote peace and justice for all mankind. So, the American Syrian scholar, who was visiting Iceland for a few days, touched on many themes which are of concern for Muslims in Iceland and as will become clear later, seems to sum up roughly the common predicament of Muslims who happen to live in the West.

6.3 Ramadan in Iceland: A spiritual and social journey

Ramadan is the ninth month in the Islamic calendar (which is lunar). During this month Muslims fast from dawn to sundown and religious practices and communal rituals are more intense than usually. One participant talks in the quote from an interview below about some important dimensions relevant to the holy month of Ramadan, while enduring the fasting one fine afternoon in August:

> Well, I´ve been doing Ramadan for a long time now, well, but this is my first Ramadan in Iceland…it´s my longest Ramadan ever (Laughs, we both laugh) … well, Ramadan is always a very good moment [time]. For two main things, for me, one for sure is the spiritual thing, that you feel that you are really charging, for me I always think I say that Ramadan, that you are [doing] formatting (Laughs). I´m now installing a new Microsoft or Mac, if you want, starting Ramadan is like you´re really going to format yourself, because it´s a station, it´s like I´m taking a look at myself, as to clean it after eleven months, a month for cleaning it a little bit.

This man emphasises the importance of the spiritual regeneration during Ramadan and underlines the importance of the period for "formatting" oneself, and to "charge the batteries" (as he put it in the interview) for the next year, and work on one's self-control and discipline. He also pinpoints the most important aspect of Ramadan, which is the spirituality of the month providing opportunities to come closer to God. He continued:

> […] this spiritual side, the physical and medical, the health we are feeling, and also, I think … we should mention, that there is the social side. It´s the moment [time] for everybody to feel, it´s a period of equality, rich, poor, everybody´s doing the same, nobody is eating, and it´s a moment [time] for the rich people to feel, to feel with the poor people, how they suffer. I think there are people who are fasting every day because they don´t have money to eat.

Here he underlines the vital, social aspect of Ramadan, of bringing families and communities together, and reminding the worshippers of those who are less fortunate, emphasising and reiterating the importance of social equality and compassion. This quote is typical of what many participants saw as the meaning of the Ramadan fast, as a process of spiritual regeneration and physical discipline, among other things. A time of starting from fresh, of taking stock of one's position in life, to become better than before. In this section, I discuss the meaning of the month of Ramadan for Muslims in my study, as well as my own experience from participating in fasting and taking part in religious rituals in two Muslim congregations in Reykjavík, during Ramadan of 2012. I had participated in the fasting earlier, but this time I took part in the fast and the prayer rituals for the whole month. Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, is the month when the Prophet Muhammed is believed to have received the first revelations which eventually became the text of the Holy Qur'an. The importance of this month for Muslims and Islam consists of it being a ritual process where the most important tenets of Islam are emphasised and manifest and where Muslims are presented with the opportunity to renew their faith and regenerate themselves as Muslims and as persons. This month presents believers with an opportunity to improve their social relations whether their family, neighbours, and by extension, humanity as a whole.

In the following few paragraphs, I refer to relevant quotes from the Qur'an that bear on the meaning and significance of this important ritual month, to demonstrate the connection between the holy text concerning Ramadan and the ritual practice performed during this fasting month. Ramadan begins when the crest of the new moon is sighted by reliable viewers, and it ends similarly at the sighting of the next new moon. Theologically, its significance derives from it being the month in which the revelations of the Qur'an began, when the archangel Gabriel (Jibril in Arabic) brought the Word of God to Muhammad, the Prophet of Islam. Chapter (Sura) 96 of the Qur'an, verses 1-5 is regarded as the initial revelatory message to Muhammad from God and it commands:

> Sura 96: (1) READ in the name of thy Sustainer, who has created, (2) created man out of a germ-cell! (3) Read - for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One, (4) who has taught [man] the use of the pen, (5) taught man what he did not know! (Asad, 2003).

The Arabic word Qur'an means "the recitation", and there is strong emphasis on the Prophet not being able to read or write and therefore the impossibility of him having written the Qur'an himself, being further proof of the Holy Book as the direct Word of God. In Sura 2:183-186, there are some commands concerning Ramadan and some of the codes to be upheld by the believers during this month:

> Sura 2: (183) - O YOU who have attained to faith! Fasting is ordained for you as it was ordained for those before you, so that you might remain conscious of God: (184) - [fasting] during a certain number of days. But whoever of you is ill, or on a journey, [shall fast instead for the same] number of other days; and [in such cases] it is incumbent upon those who can afford it to make sacrifice by feeding a needy person.

(185) - It was the month of Ramadan in which the Qur'an was [first] bestowed from on high as a guidance unto man and a self-evident proof of that guidance, and as the standard by which to discern the true from the false. Hence, whoever of you lives to see this month shall fast throughout it; but he that is ill, or on a journey, [shall fast instead for the same] number of other days. God wills that you shall have ease and does not will you to suffer hardship; but [He desires] that you complete the number [of days required], and that you extol God for His having guided you aright, and that you render your thanks [unto Him]. (186) - AND IF My servants ask thee about Me - behold, I am near; I respond to the call of him who calls, whenever he calls unto Me: let them, then, respond unto Me, and believe in Me, so that they might follow the right way (Asad, 2008).

In these few verses of Sura 2 (Al Baqara/The Cow), some of the more important aspects of Ramadan are outlined; the revelation, fasting and prayer. The month of Ramadan has a special relationship with the Qur'an as the Qur'an was revealed during this month and therefore Muslims are encouraged to practice the so called *tarawih* prayers (which are not obligatory), where the whole Qur'an is recited aloud for the duration of the Holy month. It is recorded in hadith (the sayings and actions of the Prophet) that Mohammad stood in prayer and recited the Qur'an (remembering it with the archangel Gabriel) during this month. Therefore, the Qur'an is recited from beginning to end during the 29-30 days of Ramadan, where the book is divided into 30 equal sections (*juz*), each read for one night's tarawih prayers.

Ramadan starts formally with the *fajr* (dawn) prayers, which herald the beginning of the fast, lasting until sunset. These prayers are deemed to be very important and powerful because they demand much discipline, since people must wake up very early and they are therefore markers of piety and spiritual determination. Most people perform these prayers at home, but during Ramadan, some people (mostly men) prefer to perform them collectively. I participated regularly in these prayers, together with a small group of three to four men. These prayers took place around 3:30 in the morning. Here I refer to one such occasion where four worshippers and I had gathered in the mosque. Before offering the fajr prayers one must perform two rakat (prayer cycles), one of the men pointed this out to me. An Icelandic convert led the prayers and when they were over, another worshipper performed quite a long *du'a* (personal prayer), where he prayed for us who were present, for our families and for all humans. It is often said that these prayers are the most effective ones and that they were the Prophet's favourite prayers. As this was very early in the morning, the atmosphere was very peaceful, and it felt different from other prayer contexts, not easy to describe, just more serene and bright. When the prayers were over, there was informal talk about Islam, what Islam is, what it means to be a Muslim and I asked the others about a few Islamic concepts, such as *din* (faith, religion). The Icelandic convert said that din was a path, a way, and that there were many paths, also in Islam. Another worshipper said that

Islam was what Muslims did, how they conducted themselves in their life, their actions. He said that the faith/religion (*din*) was manifest through deeds and intent (*niyyah*). Here, these men expressed two sides of Islam, as a spiritual path and as everyday practice, or praxis, and that the spiritual meaning expressed itself through living Islam, by conducting oneself in a proper manner as a human being among other humans.

The Ramadan fast is from the sunset prayers (*maghrib*), the evening before the official start of the fasting month, until the same prayers the evening before Eid-al-Fitr, which is the holiday celebrating the breaking of the fast. The Islamic prayer times are determined by the relative positions of the sun. As will be shown later in this chapter, there were disagreements over these praying times, due to the short night in Iceland during this period. The fasting is from dawn to dusk, where (healthy) people abstain from food, drink, and sex, that is, from all basic physical needs and desires. The meaning of Ramadan fasting is manifold, both physically and spiritually. Physically it is supposed to enhance people's awareness of their bodily needs and desires and to discipline these, becoming more conscious of them in the process. Also, and importantly, the fasting is meant to strengthen empathy towards the poor and hungry, by becoming aware of what it feels like to go without food and water. The fasting is also important for cleansing the body of toxic waste. Thus, the awareness of what is physical necessity and what is not comes into focus. Here is a quote from fieldnotes where an imam underlines some important spiritual and social aspects of Ramadan:

> The imam did a long speech (for the Friday sermon), first in Arabic, then in English. He reiterated for the attendants the importance of the moment. He said Ramadan passed quickly, and that these days would never return and that it was vital not to waste one´s time. He underlined the emphasis in the Qur'an of knowledge (ilm) and of seeking knowledge, and the need to investigate God´s creation. Also, the imam reiterated the role of the Qur'an in guiding humans and that Islam helped show the way in life, to live righteously and make a just society. The imam talked about the concept of taqwa, which implicates "God consciousness", and which is linked to the ethical concept of "conscience". Taqwa means being always conscious of God´s wisdom and to conduct oneself, accordingly, behave righteously, be conscious of what is correct and of the straight path, and to fulfil one's ethical obligations.

As this quote demonstrates, the spiritual aspects of Ramadan are very important to Muslims. One feature of the fasting month, often emphasised, is that the gates of Heaven are open, the gates of Hell are closed, and all demons are tied down, meaning that if people strive to get closer to God through prayer and contemplations, they will reap only good things. But the effort must be made, with the right intensions (*niyyah*). This spiritual effort is in some respect what is meant by the term jihad, which is to strive to conquer oneself and become a better human being. One important aspect of Ramadan is the so called "Night of Power" (Laylat-al-Qatr), also called "Night of Destiny" or "Night of Decree". This is the night when the first message of the Qur'an was revealed to Muhammad by the archangel Gabriel in a cave in a mountain, close to Mecca. The common consensus is that this night was one of the

last ten nights of Ramadan, most likely one of the odd numbered at the end of the month. Even if it not certain, many believe it to be the 27th night of Ramadan, and Muslims spend more time in the mosque and more energy praying during these nights because the prayers offered are believed to be much stronger and more beneficial than otherwise. Some even stay in the mosque for these ten days and nights (this seclusion is called *itikaf*) in intense prayer and reading the whole Qur'an, as they believe the spiritual power of Ramadan is enhanced during this last part of the fast and that the mosque is being visited by angels, who act as mediators between men and God. This is accounted for in the Qur'an by Sura 97:1-5:

> Sura 97: (1) BEHOLD, from on high have We bestowed this [divine writ] on Night of Destiny. (2) And what could make thee conceive what it is, that Night of Destiny? (3) The Night of Destiny is better than a thousand months (4) in hosts descend in it the angels, bearing divine inspiration by their Sustainer's leave; from all [evil] that may happen (5) does it make secure, until the rise of dawn (Asad, 2008).

In 2012, Ramadan was from the 20th of July to the 19th of August. During that time, I participated in the religious activities, as fasting, and praying, in the two mosques in Reykjavík, on a bi-weekly basis. A Muslim friend of mine, originally from Syria, taught me how to ritually clean myself before prayer (perform wudu) and to pray and it was made clear that I was very welcome in both mosques, as a non-Muslim, which was known to most of the two congregations. I decided to divide my time evenly between the two mosques, one week in each. There had been considerable tension between the two associations for several reasons (mainly political) but as I had declared myself neutral in these disputes, everybody accepted my position and my bi-weekly presence as a participatory praying, non-Muslim anthropologist.

As I participated in these rituals every day and often during nights, I could not avoid being affected by the emotionally charged spirituality experienced and acted out by my fellow practitioners, while realising the religious/spiritual sincerity and gravity expressed by these men (there is close physical contact during the performance of the ritual) and the importance of their religion (*din*) to them (these late-night prayers were mostly attended by men). It was also clear that these rituals strengthened the unity and togetherness of the practitioners and confirmed their belonging to this community. By being involved in the praying in this way, my access to the men became more open, which facilitated discussions about many topics concerning Islam and being a Muslim, as well as creating positive bonds of fellowship, even though it was known that I was not a Muslim.

When I arrived at around half past nine in the evening of day 27 of Ramadan, iftar (breaking of the fast) was being prepared. The fast was broken (a religious act) by eating a few dates and drinking water or yogurt, soon followed by the *maghreb* (evening) prayers, after which the men sat down to eat, started by the customary Moroccan harira soup and cuscus. I was told that in Morocco, cuscus was always the main dish on the eve of the (assumed) 27 of

Ramadan, which many believe is the Night of Power (Laylat al-Qatr). I talked to an Egyptian man, who has lived in Iceland for many years, who said he stayed all evenings and nights in the mosque during these last days of Ramadan, while he worked during the day. He said he did not sleep much and that he was a bit tired, but that God gave him strength. He also said he was finishing reading the whole Qur'an. After finishing eating, the *isha* (night) prayers were made, followed by the long tarawih prayer cycle, which can last for hours. Before that, the imam made a speech, where he emphasised the importance of the family, which was the most important unit of society. Also, that social rules were necessary, and people should guard against unruliness and chaos, that desires should not rule, but rationality and order should rule. The tarawih prayers were very long, where long passages from the Qur'an were recited, and one could sense that the imam's voice was becoming a little worn-out. When these prayers were over, the worshippers were sitting all over the mosque and reading from the Qur'an, some half-silently, intense and sincere. Some of the worshippers performed a pair of rakat while reading, as to underline the atmosphere. Following this intense ritual activity, the faithful turned again for some more food, fruits and cheese, together with AB milk. At last, the *fajr* (dawn) prayer was performed, after which most of the men went home. A few worshippers stayed in the mosque all the time, contemplating, reading the Qur'an and praying.

I suggest that it might be useful to conceptualise the Muslim ritual prayer-cycle in similar terms as Arnold van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1995) did, i.e., as a ritual process divisible into three phases/states. Arnold van Gennep (1960) divided most rituals of status change into three phases/states: of separation; transition (liminality); and incorporation, and Turner (1995) elaborated on van Gennep's insights in his analysis of the ritual process, in so doing, formulating the concept of communitas, which can roughly be conceptualised as a liminal community, more or less secluded from the main society and based (bonded) on strong unitary ideology, often temporary. Using this approach, the Islamic ritual prayer-cycle can be conceptualised as a three-fold ritual process, where the practitioners separate from the everyday world and enter the sacred world of religious ritual practice, and then back to the quotidian world again, using purification rituals at both ends (entering and exiting purified sacred space/state). "Muslim life maintains the rhythms of nature and the rhythms of culture in a seamless whole that characterizes the community. The daily prayer interweaves intervals of the sacred and ordinary" (El Guindi, 2008, p. 129). As El Guindi shows, every practicing Muslims goes through this alternating process five times every day. According to her, practicing Muslims' lives move through time and space in "interweaving rhythm" (El Guindi, 2008, p. 123), as they move easily between ordinary and sacred space, according to the rhythms of nature (solar/lunar cycles) and culture (prayer times and religious festivals). The daily prayer times are based on the solar cycle, while the Islamic calendar is lunar, and the timing of collective rituals are according to the lunar cycle. This rhythm, or cycle, is both daily (the daily prayers - solar) and annual (Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr, hajj, Eid al-Adha - lunar). It is not only the regular prayer-cycle that can be conceptualised

from the thoughts of van Gennep (1960) and Turner (1995), but the ritual participation during the month of Ramadan does in the same way fit perfectly into this processual model.

Before the fasting begins, most practicing Muslims have already prepared themselves spiritually for Ramadan, to enter the "state of Ramadan", as they look enthusiastically forward to the four weeks of fasting and intense praying. The first *fajr* (dawn) prayer of the month, ritually marking the beginning of Ramadan, symbolises the separation from the rhythms of ordinary life as practitioners look forward to submerging themselves in intense religious practice, the reading and recitation of the Qur'an, which for that purpose takes place in three phases (the three *juz*). During the four weeks of fasting and communal breaking of the fast (*iftar*) every evening, social and spiritual bonds become strengthened and the feeling of communitas becomes deeper. It is really awe-inspiring that this ritual process is taking place among almost one quarter of humanity at the same time, with common aims and goals, so the meta-national community of believing Muslims, the ummah, is strongly energised during this month (not least with digital communication). For me, as a non-Muslim, to experience this unitary emotion, was not only educational, but also very emotionally positive. When Ramadan approaches, people look forward to it, in a light-hearted, spiritual way, almost like children, and as one participant expressed it:

> There is a very special atmosphere that Ramadan creates, people look forward to it and celebrate its coming, and it is so, when everyone unites towards it, and come together in worship. This has incredible positive effect, as I say, the atmosphere is in this way very light-hearted. For me it is more like, everybody fasts together, people meet and do things together, people's attitude changes, everyone strives to become better and to cause something positive, to become a better human being and concentrate on the faith and God, and seek to get rid of bad habits, whatever they are, I think this is good for the body, it purifies it (detoxifies), and maybe reminds one not to eat too much.

Another participant (convert) stated that:

> I would say that one gets, somehow, renewed hope during Ramadan, as one gets a chance to start again, if one has done something wrong. You know, it is like, one is closer to God, and in a state of worship all the time, it is like worshipping God the whole day, so it is very positive, one strives to do better, much better. It is purification, cleaning, physically and spiritually, a wonderful experience, I think it is impossible to imagine, if you have not experienced it. I never imagined there were so much joy, first I could not understand the Muslims enjoying not eating even if I don´t understand the Arabic [note: refers to the recitation of the Qur'an] too well, the heart understands, it is a challenge, but the gates of heaven are open, and the gates of hell are closed, and an open heart can receive. When Ramadan is over one returns to normal, everyday life again, back to the usual, that is the main challenge, to maintain, it can be hard.

While Muslims generally experience Ramadan each in his or her individual way, there are certain common themes which become apparent. Most Muslims see the month of Ramadan as a blessing, a gift from God, and as a chance to become a better person and a better Muslim. It presents new opportunities to deepen and develop ones "God-consciousness" (*taqwa*), internalise all that is good and perform good deeds. During Ramadan, the believers seek to attain clearer consciousness of mind and body, as well as becoming aware of the needs of those who suffer in one way or another. This month is important for purifying body and soul, enhance the positive aspects of social relationships and get closer to God. Everyone should strive to improve individually, socially and spiritually and meditate on the meaning of the relationship between the person and society, between the one and all. One important thing is the sincerity of intentions (*niyyah*), and the importance of honesty and integrity. An example is the obligatory giving of alms, the zakat, one of the five pillars of Islam, since the giver must have pure intentions for offering the alms to the poor, because God will know if he or she is insincere. Many participants expressed the importance of opening the heart and of clearing the mind to be able to receive God's message. To live in the moment (which could always be the last) and keep to the "straight path" is a common theme and is linked to the concept of *taqwa*, discussed earlier. Some young people I talked with compared Ramadan to rebooting a computer as shown in the example above, and one pointed to the meaning of the word, Ramadan, meaning dry, scorching heat (fire), and that Ramadan was a fire that destroyed the old and useless and facilitated a new beginning. Everybody agreed on Ramadan being a time of regeneration and revaluation of all aspects of life, helped by devotion to God, expressed through prayer and righteous conduct. Many people emphasised that Islam is not only scriptures and norms, but not least a way of being and acting, and that praying was useless if the heart was not involved. Generally, even though fasting for 17-20 hours can be taxing, most of the Muslims talked of it as something healthy, physically and spiritually.

6.4 The hajj from Iceland to Mecca

The Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca (*hajj*) is the largest gathering of people in the world and has been taking place once every year for the last fourteen hundred years and is the fifth and last pillar of Islam. Between two and three million Muslim worshippers undertake this journey annually and perform religious rituals in Mecca and the surrounding area for five days. It is an immense ritual of spiritual, social, and political dimensions, culminating in visiting the Ka'ba, or "God's house" in Mecca and praying on Mount Arafat, where the Prophet Muhammed made is last sermon. It is a ritual of spiritual and religious renewal, where all sins are cleansed, and all the main rituals of Islam are re-enacted. The social aspect is underlined by the gathering of millions of Muslims from all corners of the world, people of diverse origins, nationalities, class, gender, skin colour, and so on, as a manifestation of the ummah, and its political aspect is reflected in the increased manipulation of all facets of the *hajj* by nation states, by politicians as well as financial powers (Bianchi, 2004; Haley, 1965 [cf. Malcolm X]; Hammoudi, 2005). It is the reaffirming of the worldwide Muslim community, the ummah, expressing the common destiny of the faithful, for example, symbolised in

identical dress of all participants, which also underlines the equality of all before God. It is also physically very trying, even dangerous, strewn with uncertainty, where the awareness of life and death becomes intense, sense of time becomes blurred, and the participants are forced to face their limits, and their best and worst sides (Bianchi, 2004; Hammoudi, 2005).

Some Icelandic Muslims have performed the *hajj* from time to time, both converts and born Muslims who live in Iceland, on individual basis, but in 2014 ten Icelandic Muslims went on the hajj, organised by the Islamic Cultural Centre in Iceland (ICCI) and the Saudi authorities (who financed the journey, which is very expensive), and the ICCI imam undertook the training of the group. Among the group were three born and bred Icelandic converts, one woman and two men. I did an interview at the time with the imam who had prepared the group, where he explained the *hajj* and its proceedings. The imam who instructed the new pilgrims explains this aspect of the *hajj*:

> Yes, it´s a state of spiritual purity, and physical…and something has to do with the dress…and words that you say…so all this is called a state of ihram. So, I start teaching people about the first things, step by step of hajj, first the spiritual and then how I should be, if I go to hajj now. I leave my business behind, my money, all my suits and my nice clothes, everything, and go with just two pieces of cloths and nothing else, just for some spiritual act of worship. Then there is the phase where one should be in a state of ihram. Now is the time to be in this state, and one has to say: "Oh Allah, at your service, here I am", this is an old prayer, from the time of Abraham (Ibrahim), so it also connects Muslims as servants of God, to the root, to that link to the prophet Abraham, the father of the Prophets.

An Icelandic convert who participated in an organised hajj to Mecca told me that the *hajj* is one of the five pillars of Islam, it is mentioned in the hadith (sayings and doings of the Prophet). She said that someone had to instruct first-time pilgrims, because many people among the Icelandic Muslim community did not have this experience. Therefore, she continues, they must learn the rituals of the *hajj*, how to enter ihram (a sacred state before entering *hajj*). The convert says that they had been invited by the Saudi king (through the Al Risala foundation, then linked to the ICCI), bypassing endless rows of people. When arriving in Mecca, the whole ritual proceedings began and there were people from all over the world and the convert said that it was an incredible experience to participate in this massive ritual.

> To pray along millions of people at the same place, where it all began, it was just incredible! This was fantastic, I felt that my heart was about to erupt from my chest, and when I talk about it now, I get goose pimples! When I was home again, I felt that my "iman" (faith) was stronger, like a "power boost", I felt like a renewed person, as reborn, and I had seen how widespread Islam really is, just sitting and watching all these people, it was fantastic, they were so beautiful, the diversity was so amazing, it was just so beautiful.

These quotes demonstrate common sentiments of Muslims who offer the *hajj*, the feeling of being overwhelmed by the massive crowd, the religious intensity, the feelings of unity, profound emotions, as well as the exhaustion and the trying moments, being part of two to three million worshippers gathered in on place. The hajj is often said to be a "homecoming", as returning to the source of where monotheism began, when Abraham/Ibrahim built the first house of the One God, helped by his son Ishmael, whose mother was Abraham's slave, Hagar, who he drove into the desert with their son, and where one of the major *hajj* rituals is enacting this story. One common theme from doing hajj is the feeling of being reborn, of having received new spiritual energy, and in that way, it is reminiscent of Ramadan. I have had informal talks with Muslims who have undertaken *hajj*, and they all expressed the same sentiment of wonder and being overwhelmed by the magnitude of the occasion.

There have been many different approaches to how to understand the *hajj*, and Bianchi (2004) mentions three writers who have tried to interpret the ritual. Muhammed Iqbal, an Indian, who Bianchi labels revivalist, sees the *hajj* as a reconstruction rather a return, and as more than a spiritual journey preparing the faithful for the afterlife, rather it is a collective revival empowering the whole community, the ummah, paving the way for attaining a role in history. The second writer, Ali Shariati, from Iran, whom Bianchi calls a rebel, claims the *hajj* mobilises the ummah in redistributing power and resources to the low trodden members (cf. the distribution of meat during the Feast of Sacrifice, the Eid al-adha), and that it is a reminder of the injustices promoted by the political and financial elites. The last writer mentioned is Mohammed Arkoun, from Algeria, termed a humanist, who sees the *hajj* expressing universal human aspirations, transcending any religion, an expression of higher principles, independent of any culture or religion. Bianchi (2004) also claims that the people who undertake the *hajj* today are increasingly young, female, cosmopolitan, who focus on this life, and not primarily as a preparation for the Day of Judgement, but as benefitting them socially and politically, as the Pilgrimage enhances their social status and honour.

However, one interprets the *hajj*, it might be useful to consider it as a rite of passage, in the context of the ritual analyses of van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1974), as a tripartite process of separation, liminality and reintegration, as well as seeing the liminal stage comparable to Turner's concept of communitas. The hajj, apart from being a massive religious ritual, is also a process that drastically changes the status of the participants, who will have the title of *hajji* (male) and *hajjah* (female), when the pilgrimage is concluded. This title enhances the status of the person in his or her community and is often added to the name of the person. Thus, the offering of the *hajj* is a typical rite of passage, where the social status of the person changes permanently. The tripartite context of the *hajj* is seen in the total separation from the normal life of the person, from possessions and status, the intense liminal state and process of the rituals in Mecca and surroundings, and the reintegration into the person´s normal life when the pilgrimage is concluded, after which many experience profound change, deeper religious sentiments, as the quotations from the Icelandic convert, referred to above, demonstrate. It is a personal and collective regeneration, emphasising the personal faith as well as the collective spirituality of the community, the ummah. As the

fifth and last pillar of Islam, the *hajj* ties the Islamic ritual corpus together, and therefore I want to cite the Moroccan anthropologist, Abdellah Hammoudi (2005, pp. 279-280), who summed the *hajj* ritual process in a sublime way:

> The pilgrimage gives the intersection between religion and anthropology an urgency that Islam's other canonical rituals rarely attain; besides, it unites them all, or their equivalents: prayers, invocations, sacrifices, profession of faith, alms, abstinences connected to fasting, and of course the prescribed purifications. The emphasis of intention, the rhythms, the halts, and the general sense of a break are juxtaposed with, and set against, the habits of daily life. All these rites develop in contrast to other religious traditions, but they also echo them.

Above, I have discussed the main religious rituals practiced by Muslims and used ethnographic examples from the Muslim community in Iceland, where I have underlined the powerful experiences of unity among the practitioners, but there were some frictions among the Muslims when it came to practical measurements of religious practice, that is, the question of at which times the Ramadan fast should begin and when it should be broken. This became a contested issue during my participation in the Ramadan proceedings one summer, due to the very long days at the northern longitudes in Iceland. This caused disagreements between the (then) two mosques, as well as confusion among the Muslim community.

6.5 Contested timetable and the question of religious authority

The two Muslim associations in Reykjavík, the Muslim Association of Iceland (MAI) and the Islamic Cultural Centre of Iceland (ICCI) had their differences with regard to Ramadan in connection to prayer times for extreme latitudes. The ICCI, used times that correlated with the position of the sun, relative to earth, in Reykjavík, i.e., "real" sunrise and sunset. This was according to a *fatwa* (legal advice) from the Muslim World League's Islamic Fiqh Academy and confirmed by the European Council for Fatwa and Research, placed in Dublin, Ireland. The *fatwa* was based on some technical measurements, which I will not discuss here, and was seen to be authoritative (the strength of fatwas can vary widely by Islamic scholars, mainly relative to the temporal proximity to the time of the Prophet). Thus, the prayer (and fasting) times were according to this legal advice. The MAI used different prayer times, according to the same fatwa, but used different interpretations, where praying and fasting times was coordinated with the timetable of the closest Muslim majority country (Turkey) or with Mecca times. Thus, the two associations agreed to disagree about the length of time of fasting during the day and this caused some confusion in the beginning. In addition to this difference, there was another ritual difference, which did not cause any problems, which was the performing of dhikr following each prayer cycle of tarawih prayers. *Dhikr* is repetitive chanting of some of the 99 names of God, as a way of remembrance, and it is a common practice among Sufi Muslims. This ritual chanting took place in the MAI mosque, but not in the ICCI mosque, but the imam at the ICCI, who has a background in a more orthodox strand of Islam, compared to the group of laymen who take turns in leading prayers at the MAI

mosque. This was one of the very few differences between the two mosques concerning ritual practice, which demonstrates the different political set-ups, where at the MAI, the leadership during sermons was dispersed, while at the ICCI, the imam was the undisputed religious authority.

Religious authority can be embedded in individuals (Islamic scholars), groups or institutions (e.g., the Al Azhar in Cairo), and, like most forms of authority, it is relational and based on trust and legitimation, but how it is projected, mediated and received (or perceived) in different contexts, is not a simple matter (Krämer and Schmidtke, 2006). Thus, religious authority comes from individuals (imams or ulama), who due to their knowledge and experience (and respect) manage to make the congregation accept their religious authority. As an example, the imam for the Islamic Cultural Centre of Iceland (ICCI) seems to fit this category, where his relations with the congregation is based on trust and tacit consent, even if part of his authority is linked to the known fact that he is educated at the prestigious Al Azhar university in Cairo, one of the most influential Islamic institutions in Sunni Islam, lending him institutional authority. He also has certain opinions on the need for improving the knowledge of the Icelandic Muslims regarding Islam. Accordingly, Muslims in Iceland need a learned imam to teach Islam, both to the young and adults, and not least do the Icelandic converts need teaching and guidance.

The disputes about the prayer timetable were reflective of the different approaches of the two associations. The older one had at that time chosen an Icelandic convert as leader and another Icelander regularly conducted Friday sermons, using Icelandic as one of the languages. Also, there was at the time no "professional" or learned imam or religious leader at that mosque (MAI), but several men led the prayers, and a few took turns reciting the Qur'an during tarawih prayers in Ramadan. This contrasted with the other association, which had (and has) a learned Islamic scholar as an imam. He is the uncontested religious leader in that mosque and the only one who leads prayers and conducts sermons. This shows that the two associations, or mosques, have not only used different prayer times, but they have different political structures and leadership styles, where one is horizontal and the other vertical. The religious approaches appear as being different in some ways, which may stem from the level of religious scholarship and/or cultural background of the religious leaders, but this is more a question of attitude than doctrinal differences. Most of the time this is not a concern for lay Muslims, who most often see a mosque just as a mosque, a place of worship, and many use both mosques for prayer, while there are core groups who frequent each place, both for praying and for general socialisation. This example should be instructive of the fact that Islam and Muslims are not a monolithic, reified mass, but groups of people with different views on many things and different social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Considering religious authority as a relation to religious specialists, the position of converts and born Muslims is in many ways different. Converts have not been socialised in the religion, as born Muslims have, and therefore they have different links to Islam, both as a religion and as a formative social and cultural factor. Converts' approach to the faith is often

less conditioned on tradition and social sediments and can be said to be freer in many respects (Jensen, 2006, 2008; Østergaard, 2009). This has repeatedly been expressed by some of my participants, both converts and other Muslims, who, through observation, have reached this conclusion. In addition to this, most Icelandic converts to Islam have at best, very rudimentary knowledge of the Arabic language, and read English or Icelandic "translations" of the Qur'an, and/or acquire knowledge and advise online in English. Thus, they have a twofold "distance" to their new faith, social and linguistic. Consequently, as not being "authentically Muslim" (Jensen, 2006, p. 643), they have more individuality and autonomy in their pursuit on their spiritual path and can be more eclectic than many "born Muslims" and one of my participants commented that converts were in a similar situation as the Companions of the Prophet, who were all "new Muslims", learning the religion, as they went along. This issue will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven.

The imam at the ICCI told me about his education at the Al-Azhar university in Cairo, where he learned to recite the Qur'an by heart, which was done by a special technique. He told me about the special "chain", or method in how to recite the Qur'an "correctly", a chain which has been unchanged since the times of the Prophet, thus his way of reciting was the same as the Prophet's, as it had been preserved and taught by one generation to the next, from that time. The imam also told me that he had visited the MAI mosque, wanting to discuss the debated time-issue, that he had tried to explain it for the people there, but without success. He said that many things had changed from the time of the Prophet, but basic things, like prayer times, should not be tinkered with. I read the *fatwa* in question and found that it was possible to interpret it both ways, which might suggest the sensibility of making reasonably "open-ended" and flexible fatwas. This uncertainty, or flexibility, continued to create confusion, as when an Iranian man came to the MAI mosque to pray (with his piece of clay), and was perplexed over the two different time schedules, and one of the men present told him that he was not going to try and explain this, other than both times, or all, were "correct", the main thing was that they all believed in God, that this was between them and God. The Iranian seemed to accept this and laughed. But this issue continued to create frictions and irritation. One of the elders said he was surprised about this dispute, as the Prophet had said that worshippers were not meant to suffer during Ramadan, they should not risk their health or make the fast too difficult. He did not understand why some Muslims or imams were insisting on their own opinions, as it was only creating tensions and rift among the Muslim community. He said the Muslim community was too small for such divisions. Some men had come to the mosque to pray and witnessed the confusion, but one of the MAI elders commented that people should stop quarrelling about this, they were free to choose which timetable they used, it was a matter of interpretation. Thus, this example demonstrates how religious authority is linked to religious interpretations of established rules, or guidelines concerning prayer times in extreme latitudes. These guidelines were contested despite both parties insisted on being supported by the same fatwa (non-binding

legal opinion) from the European Council for Fatwa and Research in Dublin[18] . In the next section, I recount another example of efforts to exert religious authority, which played out when two different Islamic groups visited the Muslim community in Iceland. The visiting groups sought to influence the local Muslims by promoting two opposite visions of religious ideas and practice, as is discussed in the next section.

6.6 Religious authority, guests and "just Muslims"

Since the beginning of Islam, historical tensions between local cultural factors and the universalist characteristics of Islam have been frequent (Berkey, 2003). This became evident in the complex cultural heterogeneity of the Muslim world that developed over time, and this complexity has become more evident today, not least in the West (see e.g., Bowen, 2004; Mandaville, 2001; Roy, 2004). One modern reaction to this cultural heterogeneity is the phenomena of Salafism[19] and other similar movements, such as the transnational, proselytising Deobandi organisation Tablighi Jama'at, which aims to purge Islam of accretions and return it to a pure, imagined past with literal interpretations of Islam's holy texts and, in some instances, the establishment of social polities built on these interpretations. Even if such undertakings are not all modern, most researchers agree that these movements are recent and engendered by modernity and the colonial context (Bangstad and Linge, 2015; Olsson, 2014; Roy, 2004). Some other Islamic movements have taken different roads, aiming to build bridges and establish dialogue within Islam and with other religions and cultures. One such movement is the Gülen Movement (Bilici, 2006; Cetin, 2010), which will be discussed in this section as an example of the dialogical orientation, as compared to the more fundamentalist, purist direction of the Tablighi Jama'at, using examples from two separate visits to the Muslim community in Iceland.

According to John R. Bowen (2004), transnational Islam constitutes a global public space with normative frames of references and debates that transcend migratory factors and transnational religious movements, since Islam possesses its own universalistic religious ideas, practices and norms. Bowen (2004, p. 880) argues that transnational Islam implies "democratic movements, transnational religious institutions, and the field of Islamic references and debate," which have recently been enhanced by electronic media and digital communications (Bunt, 2002). One of the more prominent transnational Islamic religious institutions is the Tablighi Jama'at, a puritanical movement that practices transnational proselytising (Metcalf, 2003; Olsson, 2014). The Tablighi Jama'at branch in Norway visited Icelandic Muslims, provoking controversial reactions, as will be discussed below. The Tablighi Jama'at movement was founded in India in 1927 (Metcalf, 2003). According to Vertovec (2009), transnational processes and practices affect religious factors in a multitude of ways,

[18] I am in possession of this particular fatwa

[19] Salafist refers to the pious forefathers (al-salaf al-salih), who were the companions of the Prophet Muhammed, and the following two generations. Salafis most often adhere to literal religious doctrine without temporal cultural contexts. Salafism is a broad definition with diverse strands, some militant (jihadi), while others are not (see e.g. Wagemakers, 2018).

on both the personal and group levels. He refers to Clifford's (1992) concept of travelling cultures, which implies that movements of people transpose meanings and relationships, whereby notions of localised culture and space become displaced. Religious travel has always taken place, for example in the form of pilgrimages, missions, and proselytising, and recently by way of increased migration across the world. In his edited book, Muslim Travellers, Eickelman (1990) discusses the importance of travel and migrations in shaping Islam and Muslim practices, invoking symbolic nodes and spiritual centres across continents that reformed transnational notions of belonging, identity and religious practices and unified the ummah across ethnic lines, space, and time as adjustments were made to diverse social and cultural contexts. Non-local religious Muslim space can be categorised as a social space of connections of identities and organisations, as well as a cultural space of Muslim interactions, implicating de-cultural processes, transcending time and space, and influencing countless groups of people.

The two visiting groups discussed here represent roughly opposite positions on the Islamic religious spectrum: the Tablighi Jama'at, with its literalist, puritan orientation and emphasis on proselyting (*dawa*), and a moderate variety of Islam, in this case representatives of the Gülen Movement[20] . Both of these movements are transnational and operate in international contexts, and both are of relatively recent origin. Besides their different religious emphases, one vital difference is that the Tablighi Jama'at movement openly proselytises (*dawa*), while the Gülen Movement advises against such practices and discourages direct proselytising. However, the visit to Iceland served to introduce the Gülen way to Icelandic Muslims and could thus be thought of as proselytising, or *dawa*)[21] . My participants described these two groups in these terms: as fanatical (Tablighi Jama'at), and as moderate or modern (the Gülen group).

Here, I address the issue of proselytising in the context of the visits by the two groups introduced earlier. It implicates questions of religious authority and how religious ideas are transmitted to religious practitioners. It involves inviting people to God (*dawa*), and in practice denotes some sort of missionizing or proselytising of Islam. Some Muslim leaders believe Muslims should go out and spread the word, and I know an Icelandic Muslim convert who has worked for international organisations practicing *dawa* around the world, an effort that also includes charity work among the poor. Many Muslims oppose such open *dawa*. One is the Turkish-American scholar and sociologist, Muhammed Cetin, who visited Iceland in the spring of 2010, and who insisted that the practice of *dawa* was not to be encouraged, because people should not interfere with the way others conduct themselves and what they believe in. Instead, Cetin stated that one should cultivate and conduct oneself according to

[20] Here I point to Abou El Fadl (2005), who uses the terms "extremists" and "moderate", or "puritans" vs "moderates". The term "moderate Muslim" is contested (see e.g., Mamdani, 2005). Some of my participants talked about these two groups in these terms, especially the Tablighi Jama'at, who they saw as being extremists, as opposed to the Gülen group.

[21] Dr. Cetin, the representative of the visiting Gülen group, expressed his opposition to proselytising, saying that modern Muslims should promote Islam by their righteous conduct, not by dawa.

Islamic values and strive to be a good role model for others through deeds and correct behaviour. This apparently sat well with many of my Muslim participants. Cetin emphasised that Muslims in the West should lead the way through righteous conduct and by being "normal," i.e., Western, in dress and general behaviour.

The Gülen Movement can be seen as a contrast to Samuel Huntington's clash of civilisation thesis (Huntington, 1993), because the main goal of the movement is to establish dialogue among religions and cultures by organising international educational projects. The Gülen Movement presents itself as religiously moderate, but socially conservative, with Islam as its underlying ideology (Bilici, 2006). After the abortive coup in Turkey in 2016, the Turkish President, Tayyip Erdogan, declared his former ally, Fethullah Gülen, a terrorist and asked for his extradition from the United States (Tas, 2019), which highlighted the social and political importance of the movement. Muhammed Cetin is an example of what is sometimes – and misleadingly – termed a moderate Muslim. The leader of the Turkish association and I organised a talk for Cetin at the University of Iceland entitled Lecture on inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue, especially from a Turkish Muslim perspective. This took place at a time of tension between the MAI and the ICCI, as mentioned earlier, but the Turkish-American guest was unaware of that. The lecture was coincidentally a constructive contribution to the ongoing feud between the two associations, as it discussed the need for dialogue across religious, political, and social divides, and it was well-received by the relatively small group of attendees. Cetin was not aware of the schism between the two Muslim associations at the time, and he went to the MAI mosque to pray, because the leader of the Turkish association frequented that mosque. At the lecture, he had talked with one of the ICCI leaders, who invited him to visit their mosque. When that became known, the mood among local Muslims became apprehensive, since it meant that some members of the MAI mosque would have to accompany him to the ICCI mosque and enter what they viewed as enemy territory. I had gone to the ICCI mosque, and those present there were waiting patiently, and somewhat tensely, for the guest to arrive. Some thought he would not come, or that he had been advised against it by members of the MAI, and they became anxious. The ongoing tensions between the associations were political and personal in nature, rather than having a religious basis, so the different religious sentiments of the two visitors did not resonate with these tensions. Therefore, members of both associations more or less shared their sentiments towards the two guests, despite the political conflict between them.

After the call to prayer (*adhan*), the Gülen delegation arrived, to everyone's relief. Muhammed Cetin took centre stage and said he wanted to say something important. He began by saying that someone had mentioned *dawa*, and that he did not favour this practice. He repeated that one should not criticize other people's behaviour or what they believe. Instead, one should strive (*jihad*) to be a good example, conducting oneself in a proper manner and acting in accordance with real Islamic values. He emphasised the role Muslims should play in making the world a better place, referring to a few examples of this. He talked about the importance of Muslims demonstrating good leadership by example and avoiding frightening others through their appearance, dress or behaviour. After 9/11, Cetin said, it

was easy to misinterpret such behaviour, because "one brainless idiot can ruin things for all Muslims." When his talk was over, he left with his companions. I had the impression that the men present were happy with his visit and his talk, and that they saw his message as a positive contribution toward alleviating the tensions in their communities at the time.

At the opposite end of the Islamic spectrum, in various parts of the Muslim world, there are transnational, puritanical and literalist organisations like the Deobandi movement Tablighi Jama'at, which practice *dawa*, a form of proselytising of a puritanical version of Sunni Islam. The Tablighi Jama'at is a branch of the Deobandi movement, founded in India in late 19th century. The Deobandi movement was, and is based on education, learning and teaching in madrasas, as well as proselytising, and it is based on personal development along puritanical lines, wanting to emulate the Muslim community in 7th century Arabia at the time of the Prophet Muhammed (Metcalf, 2002). The Tablighi Jama'at is a a-political, quietest movement, focused on individual regeneration, focusing on reshaping individual lives through learning and teaching. It has its beginning in the 1920s in India, as an offshoot of the Deobandi movement. They define their missionary activity as jihad (struggle, effort) and see it as an unnegotiable duty. For the Tablighi Jama'at religious practice is a of personal and private matter, devoid of politics (Metcalf, 2002). This organisation is also active in the West, in both America and Europe (Mårtensson, 2014; Olsson, 2012), where their members go out into the street, or into shopping malls, to introduce Muslims and non-Muslims alike to their faith and hand out pamphlets. These organisations, such as Tablighi Jama'at, also send travelling missionaries to work for the cause in distant places like Iceland. Many see this strand of Islam as a reaction to an insecure world, and to what the purists perceive as the immoral society of the West (Olsson, 2012). These movements have been termed post-Islamism (Roy, 2004) and characterised as apolitical, pietist, and de-territorialised. These groups are very text-oriented and see the Qur'an and the hadith as the only legitimate references for their faith. According to Olsson (2012, p. 178), the Swedish Al-Risala Scandinavian Foundation, which owns the Ýmir house in Reykjavík, formerly used by the ICCI and which is linked to the Islamic Foundation of Iceland, is among the Salafist *dawa* societies. Similar groups operate in Norway (Bangstad and Linge, 2015; Mårtensson, 2014), and representatives of the Tablighi Jama'at in Norway visited the Muslim community in Iceland during the holy month of Ramadan in 2009.

According to my participants, the Tablighi Jama'at visitors simply turned up without an invitation. This, I was told, is what they usually do. The visit coming during Ramadan created some tension among Icelandic Muslims, as the visitors were considered radical or fanatics by local Muslims. One Icelandic Muslim compared them to Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons. This group of visitors was composed of Moroccans and Pakistanis who lived in Norway, and they all dressed in traditional Islamic clothes, sporting long "Islamic" beards. Local Muslims said these visitors were obsessed with strict rules and wanted to ban everything, and that this was not good in Iceland. Thus, there was some antipathy towards these guests, and they were not very welcome. However, according to accepted Muslim

custom, the hosts had to show hospitality to the guests, especially since they came during the month of Ramadan.

At the MAI's Ármúli mosque, the leader of that organization held a short speech to welcome the guests. Then, he invited the Moroccan from Norway, who seemed to be the leader and spokesman for the visiting group, to speak. The visitor sat down on a stool in front of the pulpit (*minbar*), and began his talk, first in Arabic and then in English, while the men present sat in a semi-circle in front of him on the floor. The speaker, who said he was an electrical engineer, discussed the relationship between religion and science, arguing that there were no disagreements between these two knowledge systems. Muslims, he said, had no problem uniting faith and their concept of God with scientific disciplines like physics, chemistry, genetics, evolution, and so on. This view is held by many practicing Muslims who are natural scientists, and some of them even say that scientific discoveries are the best proof of God´s existence. He also claimed that it was vital to have an open heart and a sharp mind to be able to receive God's grace and wisdom. This speech did not in fact correspond to the puritanical and fanatical reputation this group has among local Muslims, but it did not change their opinions either. One could speculate that the speaker sensed negative local sentiment and wanted to minimise the expected fundamentalist side of his message. Since it was Ramadan, he emphasised the need for reviving God-consciousness (*taqwa*) and focusing on the ultimate meaning of life. No one present could refute that message, but they still maintained that these people were some sort of Islamic Jehovah's Witnesses; one saying the Icelandic community could manage very well without them. Nevertheless, the atmosphere in the mosque was quite light-hearted, which is usually the case during Ramadan sermons, as Ramadan seems to move Muslims to enhance spirituality and goodwill towards others.

The visitors from Norway went on a tour of the southeast of Iceland. When they returned, they visited the MAI mosque again. A Pakistani man in the group, who perfectly fit the Islamist stereotype due to his clothing and beard, decided it was time to preach to his hosts and talked about the importance of strictly upholding basic Islamic values, and he even indirectly questioned my presence in the mosque. This message was perceived as quite a contrast to the one delivered by the leader of the group earlier. The hosts, as before, commented afterwards that these men were too fundamentalist, and that their message had no place in Iceland. One of the leaders of the MAI left before the service ended, right before prayer was about to commence. His dislike of the visitors was clear for all to see. The guests from Norway were not aware of the tension between the two associations and wanted to host a collective meal for both associations to break the fast (iftar), an offer that was declined by everyone, demonstrating the depth of the antagonism prevailing at the time. Shortly afterwards, the Norwegian delegation left the country, to everyone's relief. While the negative reaction by many local Muslims towards the Tablighi Jama'at group was evident, my own impression from listening to them and talking to their leader did not completely confirm those sentiments (apart from the scene in mosque described above), so I suspected that some communication in Arabic between the locals and the visitors may have

caused the animosity that was quite apparent during the visitors' stay. Many of the Icelandic Muslims stated that they had no interest in having fanatics in Iceland. Instead, Islam should be in harmony with Icelandic society and culture. One explanation was given by the imam at the ICCI, who said the problem with Tablighi Jama'at was that they were uneducated. They were not Islamic scholars, he said, which meant they were promoting wrong ideas about Islam. The danger lay primarily in their wrong ideas, not necessarily their supposed radicalism, which again brings in the question of religious authority.

The local reception to these two visits was telling. The representatives of the Gülen Movement were met with muted interest and acceptance, while the Tablighi Jama'at group was viewed with scepticism and apprehension. This shows that the overall attitude of Icelandic Muslims is what has often been called moderate, which, as discussed before, some see as a contested concept (Abou El Fadl, 2005; Mamdani, 2004). There is no obvious consensus among Icelandic Muslims as to which branch of Islam is most genuine, demonstrating the cultural and national diversity of the Icelandic Muslim community. My experience from field work among Muslims in Iceland had showed me that in this community there are diverse religious standpoints and approaches, some more moderate than others. As this chapter demonstrates, taking into account the heterogeneous spectrum of the religious sensibilities of my participants, there was near unanimity concerning their aversion towards the Tablighi Jama'at group's visit. At the same time, most participants expressed positive sentiments towards the Gülen group, but without showing much interest in it. Differences in religious approach among Icelandic Muslims are played down by Muslims themselves, the most frequent comment being: "we are just Muslims." When these two visits took place, the impression was one of curiosity, if not acceptance, most Icelandic Muslims apparently wanting to continue being "just Muslims".

6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I described and discussed Islamic discourses and the religious practices of Muslims in Iceland, which in most ways resemble religious practices of Muslims everywhere, as the Islamic ritual protocol is universally very uniform. By presenting these concepts and practices, I addressed the contested nature of the definitions of the concept of religion and shown that there are variations in the anthropological literature concerning these issues, whether religion is a universal (essentialised) concept, a Western formation, or a locally and culturally and historically contextual social practice. If seen in the latter sense, religion, and especially Islam, should be conceptualised as a discursive tradition, as a social practice, based on the holy texts, but structured by "living Islam". I described the daily prayers (*salat*) and the Friday sermons (*Jumah*) as well as the ritual process of "doing Ramadan" and presented descriptions from the Icelandic context. I discussed the pilgrimage to Mecca, the *hajj*, and referred to an imam in Iceland and one convert who embarked on the pilgrimage. The ritual prayer process, as rhythmic nodes, measuring the temporal and spatial life of practicing Muslims, has been discussed, as well as Ramadan as a project of spiritual, social and physical regeneration and discipline. Islamic religious ritual is also a continuous

movement in and out of sacred and secular time and space, and thus marks the daily rhythm of practicing Muslims. I suggest that these two major Muslim rituals, Ramadan and *hajj*, should be defined as rites of passage, as purification rituals, implicating the expiation of sins, and as rituals of spiritual and social renewal.

I recounted the prolonged dispute that took place among Icelandic Muslims during Ramadan, concerning the "correct" fasting and praying times in extreme longitudes as in Iceland, a dispute that went on between the two (then) Muslim associations. This dispute illuminated the question of religious authority, of what was "correct" Islamic practice, and of who has legitimate authority to decide this and thus demonstrated the diversity of interpretations within the Islamic textual corpus and religious practice. *Fatwas* published in this case, which were interpreted in different ways by the different parties of the dispute. Some participants said this was to undermine the religious authority of the leaders of one association, and to create a split. Yet, despite this disagreement, most of the Muslims paid little attention to this apart from being initially a little confused. The timetable dispute was seen by most as a question of interpretation and many participants said everyone was free to choose what times they used.

I addressed how two contrasting, transnational actors, from the Gülen Movement and representants of the Deobandi group Tablighi Jama'at. The reception to the visitors turned out to be telling and functioned as a catalyst of the general standpoint of most of the participants, which was a rejection of extremism and outside interference concerning their religious practice. The representatives from the Gülen Movement were met with passive interest and acceptance, while the Deobandi group was viewed with scepticism and apprehension. There is no obvious consensus among Icelandic Muslims as to what branch of Islam is most proper, and differences in religious approaches among Icelandic Muslims are downplayed by the Muslims themselves, with the most common expression being "we are just Muslims."

7 Becoming Muslim – Converts: forming religious identities.

Introduction

In this chapter I discuss the formation of Muslim identities in the context of conversion to Islam, with special emphasis on Icelandic converts. To become a Muslim is formally quite simple in itself; it entails professing the faith (*kalimat shahada*) in front of a witness or witnesses. But to begin to live as a Muslim is a much more complicated project, which demands discipline, intensive effort and struggle on many levels (*jihad*). It usually means a fundamental change of life, lifestyle and living. Islam has rules about "everything that has to do with life," as one participant expressed it; how one conducts oneself, physically, socially, and spiritually. The participants referred to in this chapter are Icelanders of both sexes, who have embraced Islam. Some of them have been Muslims for a long time, while others converted recently. I introduce some concerns of participant converts and their overall ideas of becoming and being a Muslim, of "living Islam". It concerns the relations of the newly acquired religion and the converts' background, as well as disentangling the new spiritual dimension from diverse traditional contexts linked to born Muslims, whose community the converts join. Most of my participants emphasised the moral and spiritual as the most important aspects of the religion during and following their conversion. When discussing the radical changes that converting to Islam caused, the participants described mainly two major trajectories: intellectual and rational, as well as emotional and mystical. This corresponds roughly with the findings of Lewis Rambo (1993), who schematised conversion processes by presenting several motives for conversion, with the most important being the intellectual, where the main path is research and study, reading of texts and studying online material. Another important motive is the mystical, characterised by sudden emotional and spiritual insight, inspiration and even revelation. Rambo (1993) mentioned another path that he termed the experimental, which he considered an important, modern manner of conversion contextualised by increased religious freedom and variations of religious venues in the "spiritual marketplace", where individual choice becomes part of the path. These three conversional trajectories and motives are present among the convert participants introduced later in this chapter.

According to Allievi and Dassetto (1999), the migration from Muslim majority countries to Europe implies that Europe has become "included in the Muslim space" (p. 243). Before this migratory situation, knowledge of Islam and Muslims had mainly been framed by colonial and orientalist discourses (Asad, 1993, Said, 1978). Conversions resulting from these migrations of Muslims to Europe have become increasingly common and, in a sense, have created what can be termed homegrown Muslims in Europe. This has introduced a novel

context and thus made the Other closer to "us" and gradually becoming part of European public space, with all the political, legal and cultural contexts that it implies. Allievi and Dassetto (1999) argued that conversions to Islam pointed to important processes in contemporary societies, symptomatic of social and cultural changes. An important factor implied in these changes is the question of individual and collective identity, putting the role of religious communities in the secular state into focus (p. 246). For new Muslim, and society in general, these questions are important, as the convert partly leaves one community to join another. Also, as is shown in this chapter, the convert is in many ways on a personal, individual quest to form his or her new identity, or habitus, as a practicing Muslim. This process relates both to the past and the present, as well as towards the emergent future. Also, in a more general sense, conversion of Europeans to Islam brings up questions about the significance and identity of Europe (the West/Christianity/secularism) and Islam (the Orient) (p. 247). In this context, Ali Köse (1999) argued that an important factor for British converts to Islam was their disillusion with the state of religion in their own lives and the marginalisation of religious life in their own society. Some found Christianity and their own society too permissive. Other converts contested the concept of the Holy Trinity or the divinity if Jesus. In contrast, the converts found that Islam enabled them to relate to God in a simpler and more practical manner (Köse, 1999). This fits well with comments from some of my participants, who claimed that Islam provided a clear and coherent frame for orienting the religious practice and ideas, as well as providing a clear system of values.

The last section of this chapter looks at the issue of the "Muslim woman" (Abu-Lughod, 2002, 2013), framed as the "veiled gender". It is based on interviews with a few Icelandic Muslim women converts and born Muslim women (immigrants), as well as on a short participation among the Women's Group in one of the mosques. This reveals, among other things, differences in attitudes to dress, mainly towards the significance and symbolism of head covering (hijab) and other sartorial matters. It seemed as though there were differences along ethnic and national lines, as well as along the convert/born Muslim axis, and these aspects were important in shaping an identity as a (new) Muslim woman. I present the views of some of the Muslim women concerning this factor, as well as the significance and meaning of being a practicing Muslim woman and the importance of their newly acquired faith in affecting and shaping their life.

7.1 Converts and religious authority

Tina Gudrun Jensen (2006) argued that Muslim converts often have different attitudes to authority than born Muslims since their conversion often results from resistance to the social and religious norms of their own society. When talking about religious authority, it is seen as a question of relations to religious specialists (*imams, ulama*), who are schooled in Islamic studies and consequently viewed as possessing this authority. This authority implies interpreting the holy texts and religious practice in general. For converts, the question of authority (as a Muslim) is important for framing a new religious and cultural identity in a new social environment, confronted by social, cultural, national and ethnic diversity, as is the

case of the Muslim community in Iceland, and which I discuss in this chapter. According to Jensen (2006, p. 643), while converts are not seen as "authentically Muslim", their approach to their new situation is motivated by individuality and autonomy. Converts enter the religious field (cf. Bourdieu, 1991) as outsiders and must prove their authentic identity as Muslims. This is often expressed through dress and in other performative ways, like language and common Islamic phrases and greetings. As is demonstrated in this chapter, converts see themselves as seekers of truth and legitimations on the path towards their relations with God. The path chosen is mostly twofold, as a rational study and as spiritual and emotional inspiration. Some convert participants express the view that "Islam has all the answers", as a transcendental consciousness, or that their path feels to them like "returning to God", or "reverting", rather than converting. In addition to this religious and spiritual returning, converts also move through resocialisation, positioning themselves, at least temporarily, in a liminal condition. This liminal situation of converts has been addressed by various authors (Jensen, 2006, 2007; Jensen and Bagge, 2015; Roald, 2012). Wohlrab-Sahr (1999) conceptualised this context as syncretism and as embedded in a symbolic battle, implying a "double frame" (p. 351), as converts turn away from their former religious context and social values and turn to Islam as their new world view and orientation, with which they cannot completely identify. This exemplifies the often-discussed aspect of liminality of converts as cultural bridge-builders and intermediaries between communities, even as cultural critiques, but not fully part of either community. The predicament of the converts' relations with the original social and cultural background presents, according to Wohlrab-Sahr (1999), a problem of disintegration and reinterpretation, embedded in the liminal position of the converts.

According to Roald (2012), conversion to Islam takes place in mostly four phases. The first phase Roald calls zealotry, or enthusiasm, or what the British convert Abdul-Hakim Murad (Tim Winters) termed "convertitis" (Roald, 2012, p. 7), a term one of the participants also used for this first phase after his conversion. The second phase is often characterised by disappointment or disillusion when converts realise that born Muslims are just as ordinary and imperfect humans as everybody else, including themselves (Bagge and Jensen, 2015; Özyürek, 2015). The third phase is one of acceptance and coming to terms with the fact that Muslims are like other people and that neither born Muslims nor converts are "saints". The fourth stage is what Roald (2012) terms secularisation, which is when converts approach their religion and faith as a private matter and become increasingly a normal part of their society. It is important to note that not all converts pass through these stages in equal measures, as these stages are not static nor necessarily regular (Roald, 2004, 2012).

Addressing religious and political authority, Volpi and Turner (2007, p. 1), argue that Muslim actors around the world have been working to establish "who, where, when, and why claims to authority expressed in Islamic idiom" matter in reforming the global community of Muslims in the 21st century. To understand this is to focus on social practices and processes underpinning claims to religious authority. In this context, Brian Turner (2007) points to how modern information and communication technologies have transformed the social and

religious conditions that produce political and religious authority. Interestingly, the paradox of digital media technologies is characterised by the free flow of information; at the same time, attempts are made by governments and other ruling instruments to control, edit and investigate this form of knowledge (p. 117). One important effect of digital media is the ability to undermine traditional forms of authority that have customarily been transmitted orally or through written texts and have been guarded and interpreted by religious scholars. Digital technology can bypass these lines of communication and challenge traditional religious authority (p. 118). Gary Bunt (2018) has shown how digital technology affects the relations of Muslims to religious authority, where even converts turn to cyberspace to seek advice and answers to religious questions. This situation is increasingly challenging the traditional (oral) religious authority of local imams and ulama (Islamic scholars). One consequence of this is the pedagogical and religious reformation of Islamic knowledge and normativity, which is traditionally the domain of religious specialists. This recent context is especially relevant for Muslim converts, who utilise this technology in their search for religious inspiration and content, looking for what is suitable for their purpose on their path to forming their new identity as Muslims and seeking to make this digital knowledge fit their own individual religious needs.

The new Muslim participants in my study use the diverse and abundant online source material teaching basic religious practices and ideas. However, they also learn from born Muslims by imitating and internalising certain behaviours and practices, manners of talking and greeting, how to dress, and so on. Many converts utilise and mix these diverse methods of internalising the Muslim habitus in their attempts to form and reform their religious identity as Muslims. This shows that many converts use self-education in this process. However, an imam in one of the associations stated that it was vital for the new Muslims to learn "the true faith," as he put it, and this education could only come from a learned Islamic scholar, who could guide the novices along the path of conversion. This issue of religious authority is addressed in more detail in the previous chapter.

7.2 Becoming a Muslim: Forming new identities

As is demonstrated in this section, some of the participants were attracted to Islam by emotional experiences or through a spiritual enlightenment of some sort, while others took the path of reason and rationality, even in a scientific manner, by doing scholarly research over a protracted period. I describe the experience of conversions that took place for the participants in the study, how family and friends reacted and how the conversions changed the lives and lifestyles of those implicated. In this way, it may be said that two conflicting identities converse, or intersect, in the one and the same person, in what it means to be a Muslim and Icelandic, presenting tension between religious and national (secular) identities, where the idea that Islam and the so-called Western/Judeo-Christian civilization are incompatible is common (Huntington, 1993; Lewis, 1990, 2002; Storhaug, 2015). Converts see themselves sometimes as "different" and the "other"' at the same time, but also as "different" from the "other (Jensen, 2008). In this context, religious positioning and piety

have similar implications as race, ethnicity or class and is used in a comparable way as identification or stigmatisation. There is an inclination to perceive converts as a possible threat against the integrity and purity of the nation and the national culture (Werbner, 2005), which is seen as collective identity or imagined community (Anderson, 1983/2006).

The reformation of identities of converts is in most instances a lengthy process, which is structured by reciprocity and perceptions of the social and cultural environment of the convert (Jensen, 2008). The formative process of the conversion entails a dialogue between that which is similar and different, and it can create tensions and contradictions in the consciousness of the convert. Baumann (2004) has presented a construct concerning the concepts of identity/alterity, making these concepts seen as indivisible and intertwined and selfing and othering are processes wherein identity implies identifying with something, while othering implies identifying from something (see chapter Two). During this process, the questions frequently asked are: who am I, where, how, and when? In this way, this intersection of identities reflects the process and the context at hand. The polarity is also between the internal social space of the religious community and the social environment of the convert and the external social and cultural environment of the non-Muslims belonging to the majority society, which includes family and friends of the converts. This is not only fluctuation of blurred identities but also a conflict between different social and cultural spaces, with the convert positioned as a liminal being in between two positions and states (Turner, 1967, 1969). This implies possible mutual exclusion and the formation of clear boundaries between the religious space of the convert and non-Muslims. Yet, it is imprecise to talk of a common space of converts. Some converts emphasise external signs of their newly found identity: women might put on a headscarf (*hijab*) and men might grow their beard or wear a skullcap. Other converts do not use clothing or other external signs to underline their new religion but instead concentrate on showing what is deemed correct behaviour and perform rituals in the right way (Jensen, 2008). Thus, converts express their new social and cultural status and identity in diverse ways, just as the path towards conversion is similarly different. This diversity in identifying as Muslim was apparent among the Icelandic converts.

Considering the different approaches to religious practice and ideas of converts and born Muslims, there is no obvious, inherent relationship between the contents of religious orthodoxies and heterodoxies, or variations from orthodoxy (Østergaard, 2009). As converts are “different” Muslims, they have easier access to conceptual freedom because they made a choice to convert and become Muslims. They do not take anything for granted and consequently they sometimes downplay doxa (common belief and opinion) and are often critical of what is deemed as orthodox viewpoints. When discussing practice and the religious field, it can be conceived as part of what determines practice. The concept of the religious field is important for understanding practice, and it is important to understand that a field emerges when it stands out as relatively autonomous (according to Bourdieu, 1991); it is not directly linked to other fields, as each field has its own logic (Østergaard, 2007, 2009). Religious practice and theologies consist of what is acceptable in the religious field. There

are certain rules, norms, and interplay of different positions, such as religious specialists. Converts tend to stretch these limits by emphasising heterodoxy in the process of incorporating and adjusting to the new field and its practices, as well as slowly accumulating necessary cultural capital (Østergaard, 2007, 2009). One might question whether Bourdieu's theory of the religious field is useful in pluralistic societies, as he constructed his model of the religious field with his eyes mostly on the French Catholic Church, which he viewed quite negatively, mainly as a political institution (Bourdieu, 1991). The question is whether his model applies equally to an Islamic religious field in a pluralistic and multicultural society in the West. Kühle (2009), discussing Muslim converts in Denmark, argues for the presence of several fields and sub-fields, and she argues for a religious "power-field" constituting links between the dominant actors within the different religious fields/sub-fields and offering a modification of the theory of field to fit in pluralistic societies. The dynamics related to Bourdieu's practice theory in relation to the religious field where diverse forms of cultural capital and positioning takes place is important in understanding how converts and other Muslim members of the community/field navigate their passage towards reforming their identities as new Muslims and are able to "live Islam."

Most of the earlier conversions to Islam in Iceland were through marriage, and most converts were women who married men from Muslim countries. Recently, however, persons of both sexes have converted for a variety of reasons other than marriage. Conversion is a process which takes time, where renegotiations and reformations of identities take place. During this process, people frequently change from one emphasis to another and alternate between extremism and moderation. As mentioned earlier, it is quite common for converts to suffer for what has been called "convertitis," a diagnosis used jokingly among Muslims to make fun of fanatical converts (Jensen, 2008). One of the participants said that he had suffered another common conversion symptom, "Salafi burnout," but both conditions make the convert go to extremes in being a "correct" Muslim and in adhering strictly to all rules of what is *haram* (forbidden) or *halal* (permitted). The two main approaches on the path towards Islam were referred to in this chapter are the intellectual study of the texts and the history of Islam; and the emotional, spiritual mode being more concerned with spiritual experiences, sensory connections to the divine and direct contact to God. These two approaches appear clearly in the interviews and conversations with the Icelandic converts presented in this chapter. In addition to these two paths towards Islam, some people have political motives for converting, such as solidarity with the Third World and/or Palestine, aversion to materialism, and capitalism and consumerism.

An Icelandic convert stated that "Islam is not one culture," but at the centre of Islam the unity of God (tawhid) is found. That is common to all Muslims, but how they practice their faith, how they dress, how they eat, is a free choice, representing diverse cultural factors. What was appealing for this convert was the conceptual simplicity implicated in the absolute unity of God (*tawhid*), that on the one hand Islam is one idea and on the other hand people have distinct cultures and different identities. He stated that for converts being or becoming

a Muslim is time consuming, that "it takes time to live Islam," to practice the faith correctly. The first and most important step is to try to understand the unity of God. He said God created the world, but he is not begotten and has not begotten, and is not like anything men know. He is not himself part of creation, thus transcending the concept of kinship and origin. Another participant insisted that it was important for every Muslim to understand this concept concerning the nature of God (*tawhid*). He continued by stating that there was no contradiction between being a Muslim and being Icelandic, as Islam has nothing to do with nationality; it transcends social categories, such as nationality, ethnicity, class, and kinship. This convert argued that Islam should always be the middle way, promoting modesty, not extremism, and since politics can lead to extremism within Islam, they should not mix. Extremism, he claimed, leads people away from the "straight path." Another convert described Islam as consisting of multiple choices and possibilities, all located within a conceptual frame, urging the practitioner to think and learn with an open mind and open heart. Many of the participants underlined that conflating religion and culture is usually problematic, where all kinds of traditions and customs are seen to pollute the religion and where cultural factors gradually seep into the religious space to later become an apparently natural part of the faith. As was sometimes expressed by some born Muslim participants, this conflation applies to a lesser degree to converts, since they do not have the same cultural or historical backgrounds or baggage as born Muslims, suggesting that the converts possessed the possibility to become better Muslims than the born ones.

To demonstrate the trajectories of accepting the Islamic faith as a convert, here are two quotes from interviews with Icelandic converts, showing different manners of approaching the faith, the emotional and the intellectual ones. One convert said that by becoming a Muslim he had acquired a deeper sense and clearer consciousness about his life and his environment, both social and physical, and that his focus in life had become sharper. He found Islam to be stable and secure, "perfectly measured," and it gave him clear guidelines how best to conduct a "good life." According to him, the most important project for a Muslim, and other humans, was to "purify the heart," since the heart is the most important organ. For only then can the heart be opened to be filled of God. He describes his first experience of Islam as overwhelmingly emotional and that becoming Muslim totally changed his life:

> […] a man I met in Morocco took me to the mosque, it was nearly empty, apart from an old man who recited from the Qur'an, and I think that must have been one of the strongest experiences I have ever had. Everything in my head went on full speed, my hair stood on ends, and tears came into my eyes. Something just happened in my soul, I thought about what it was… [Becoming Muslim] totally changed my life, when I made the decision, it was like a series of miracles happened, there are probably some explanations, but I have experienced a bunch of miracles, real miracles, that I cannot explain other than being divine intervention.

The other Icelandic convert explained how she found the concept of God in Islam to be very clear. The religion offered a simple path with clear logic. Islam, she claimed accordingly, encourages one to think, inquire and to use the brain to ask. She found the historical link between science and Islam logical. She thought that the most important project for Muslims today was to clarify who and what they are--and, importantly, what they are not--and to rectify common misconceptions about Islam and Muslims. In an interview she said:

> The more I learned about Islam, I became intellectually stimulated, it was incredibly exciting, when I read something about Islam, it was always like, think, use your brain, use your brain, so I just, wow how audacious this is. If God asks one to use the brain, I don´t know, this is my experience of religious people, don´t think too much, it all flows from the faith, it´s all inside, well, I don´t accept that, so I read about Islam with an open mind, I had been an atheist, but I was on this journey, searching, therefore I was open for everything.

These two personal experiences demonstrate the two common but different trajectories towards conversion: emotional and rational. Yet another convert said that the faith affects all decisions, all of life, emotional and physical, "everything in my life". She also argues that to be a Muslim is to "implement the will of God" and "to make his will your will." This identification is very strong, and to get closer to God, one must try to acquire His qualities, to a certain extent, for example by practicing *zikr*, or remembering God. This act is an important method for that purpose, especially among Sufi Muslims, whereby the names of God are called out, in a repetitive manner. This convert stated that to be a Muslim is a moral factor, as one is constantly valuating what is right and wrong – what is permissible (halal) and forbidden (haram) in one's thoughts and actions. As such, the faith is an ethical inquiry and a compass, as well as consciousness about limits. Consequently, Islam is a lifelong project of learning, where one is constantly presented with and confronted by something new and challenging, often emerging from reading the Qur'an. These challenges can be revelatory, strengthening consciousness and purifying the mind. Thus, becoming a Muslim, according to this participant, is an ethical project of personal progress and development, as well as a quest for knowledge and learning.

As argued by Rambo (1993), some converts approach conversion as based on personal choices and as an experimental quest in the religious marketplace. However, a learned Muslim, who is an immigrant, argued that members of the Muslim community in Iceland needed Islamic education to learn "the true faith." He stated that only learned scholars can mediate this knowledge and warned against uneducated teachers who talk about matters they do not understand and that have nothing to do with Islam. He discussed this educational need:

> This is really something good, it's good for them, I believe that Islam, [Muhammed] being the last prophet in the world … when I find someone who reverts [converts] to Islam I say praise be to Allah, this one will be saved, so it's something good for him, and at this time I feel it is my responsibility that this man, not just the matter that he

> is reverting. It's important that this man will receive teaching, that he will be taught about Islam, you know, the right worship. And to become a true Muslim, it's important to learn what is real Islam and a comprehensive way of life. It [the Muslim community] is very hospitable… [chuckles], they are good Muslims, they are trying their best to be better. They need someone, not [necessarily] me in particular, but someone who is knowledgeable, who has studied Islam, so that they can teach Islam, the true Islam … [some] talk things that have nothing to do with Islam, so people take a wrong image of Islam.

Thus, he stressed the importance of teaching converts the "correct" Islam and teaching them what "real" Islam is, bringing the issue of religious authority into focus again, as well as the question of whether the believer/worshipper needs an intermediary or if the relation between believer and God is direct (Jensen, 2006; Mandaville, 2007; Peter, 2006). In addition, this man claimed that some Muslims in Iceland practiced something which had little to do with Islam, hence the need to educate themselves about their faith. He was adamant that there is only one Islam, and to talk of European Islam or Icelandic Islam was meaningless to him. He stated that Islam or being Muslim should not be opposed to cultural sentiments. Accordingly, Islam cannot contradict thinking or common sense since people who belong to diverse cultures can easily embrace Islam and be Muslims. Therefore, he claimed that one cannot talk of Islamic civilization or Islamic culture. The teacher must be a practical role-model (as the Prophet was for his companions), someone the novices can learn from (the companions of the Prophet were all "reverts" [had "returned"], as the companions learned to be Muslims from the Prophet[22] as they were all originally converts. Similarly, the Icelandic converts are in a similar position to the first Muslims. It is clear from this that this participant considers formal teaching and training necessary for ordinary Muslims, contrary to what some others think. Asked if he thought the turmoil in many Muslim countries (following the so-called Arab spring) might change Islam in some way, he expressed his doubts, since Islam, as an ideological and religious system, transcends cultural and social differences. He argued that Islam lives in Muslims and Muslims "live Islam", where the faith is continually reproduced and that it has always had the ability to adjust to changes in time and contexts (cf. Asad, 1986, on Islam as a discursive tradition – see chapter two). He emphasised that it was important for Muslims to return to the original ethic of Islam, not as individuals but as a collective and a society, as the order of life, where justice rules for all, both Muslims and non-Muslims. When Muslims realise this, more people will come to Islam when they see how real Islam works. Good role-models, with their practice, with their actions, and with lived Islam will demonstrate to people the nature of real Islam and the "straight path."

[22] Muslims often talk of "reverting" instead of "converting", i.e., returning to the spiritual essence inherent in every human being.

7.3 Converts' voices

In this section I present voices of five Muslims converts in Iceland, their different paths to Islam and the various hurdles they faced during the process of becoming Muslims. As I have referred to earlier in this chapter, some of the converts approached the conversion through rational research and patient learning, while others were affected by experiences that triggered strong emotional responses. Some came to almost scholarly conclusions, while others were "struck by lightning." This is reflected in the following references from a number of converts. What these individuals have in common is that the conversion to Islam profoundly changed their life, their relations to friends and family, at least initially, their fundamental outlook on themselves and life.

Battuta[23]

Battuta has been a Muslim for several decades and is one of the first Icelandic converts to Islam. He has lived in many Muslim countries and knows the Muslim world quite well. When he converted, Islam was practically unknown in Iceland and of little interest. He was travelling in South Asia when he converted and said that it happened gradually: "I had heard the call to prayer in Turkey, and then in South Asia, that was when I decided to become a Muslim." When he returned to Iceland, he did not fit in because he was the only Icelandic Muslim, and his practice was solitary. This was during the heydays of the hippy era, and he said: "I experienced two revolutions – the hippy cultural revolution and becoming a Muslim. And I would call myself a Sufi, depending on the definition of what Sufi is." He said that "the older I get, the more I read, the more I have travelled, the only thing I read [concerning Islam] is the Qur'an and the biography of the Prophet and his companions. That´s enough for me, and completely satisfactory. It´s all there." Talking about believing, he said, "You believe in revelations … you believe in miracles and revelations, that´s how it is, and you can communicate with, that you´re told something, something symbolic, that really you´re not mad when feeling God is talking to you, that´s how it is. I have a flying carpet, and that´s my Islam."

Nadia

Nadia is a young Icelandic woman married to a man from North Africa who she had known for a while, and they were expecting a baby when they married. According to Nadia "… he was not pushing his faith on me." She started to "dabble" on the internet, bought the Qur'an, and started studying. Eventually, she became a Muslim. Concerning special ways of signifying that one is a Muslim, she stated that men did not have to grow their beard long, "… I would toss my husband into the sleeping room [were he to grow a long beard]." Similarly, women

[23] I have given these Icelandic converts Arabic/Muslim names that somehow suits their character.

should not have to wear a headscarf, which, for her, was a matter of personal choice. Some Muslims want to show their religion through external signs and thus choose to dress in a certain way or grow out their facial hair. According to Nadia, these people, "… to express and be proud of their religion." Beards and headscarves are signs of identity for Muslims. Some people choose to change their name or add an Arabic name to their original one. According to Nadia, some converts do this as some "kind of sport", but she has not changed her name: "… I have no reason to do so, I have a nice name … don´t need to change … also, nobody has asked me to". In the beginning, the reaction of Nadia's family and friends was shock, outrage and rejection. "People couldn't stand that I had quit drinking alcohol," she said. She also said that it had taken two years for her family to accept this change. Some of her girlfriends had difficulties swallowing this dramatic turnaround, and they "[…] could not stomach me not eating pork anymore." Despite all the difficulties her family and friends had in accepting that their daughter, sister, and friend had become a Muslim who sometimes donned a headscarf (hijab), she herself did not see this as a major problem – she did not think she herself had changed. It is interesting how customary consumption of food and drink works as such strong cultural parameters, as in this case, where rejecting particular food and drink is perceived as crossing cultural taboo-boundaries, and for Muslims, rejecting alcohol and pork.

Fareed

Fareed is a young Icelandic Muslim convert who lives in the Middle East. As a student, he studied at a university in Scandinavia. He described the social environment he entered when he became a Muslim as quite fanatical, "[…] you know, Salafi and Wahabi." He recalls that in the beginning he became what he labels a "super Muslim": "[…] I banned red wine from being on [my parents'] table and you know, things like that." But this attitude eventually changed. He was very enthusiastic to begin with, "[…] you know, it was immense in the beginning," and he claims that he suffered badly from "Salafi burnout" at that time. Eventually, he began reading more about Islam and learning Arabic, and, as time passed, he understood that things were not so strict as he had thought in the beginning. He started reading Islamic philosophy and he became fascinated by the idea that God was one, and that the Oneness of God (*taqwa*) was beyond and above the world and creation. He was attracted by the thirst for knowledge which he could sense in Islamic scholarship and as the word *ilm*, Arabic for knowledge, is the second most common word in the Qur'an, he found what he was looking for, "[…] this love for knowledge…this, you know, opened the door for me." Fareed's approach was very objective, rational, and scholarly, and individualistic at the same time. Following conversion, the converts need to learn the basics of the Islamic religious ritual and prayer. What follows can take some time, but the saying goes that it will take a whole life to become a real Muslim. The conversion leads in most cases to radical, life-altering change – change in diet, daily behaviour, attitudes to a wide spectrum of things, material, social and spiritual. In many cases, as in Fareed's, the process that the conversion

is has strong modernistic characteristics where the converts initiate this change themselves and approach the process on individualistic terms (Roy, 2004). People turn to Islam in many ways and for several reasons. The conversion marks a clear rupture from earlier life and lifestyle as well as creating new social boundaries, way of life and worldview. Many converts have stated that the conversion infused their life with new meaning and insight and that Islam has prescribed their "path" in a clear and concise manner and showed them the best way to life their lives (Jensen and Østergaard, 2007; Rambo, 1993).

After having had enough of western philosophy and "… all the relativism…", Fareed found the message of the Qur'an clear, and he performed the shahada, the Islamic confirmation of faith, "… for myself, you know." He said that the relationship with God was personal and therefore it did not need any witness (he performed the shahada[24] alone; usually a Muslim witness is required to be present). He started to meditate on the Islamic concept tawhid, which symbolises the total unity of God and the idea that God is completely outside and above the known world, as well as different from Creation itself. Fareed's approach was very objective, rational, scholarly, and individualistic at the same time. Following conversion, converts need to learn the basics of the Islamic religious ritual and prayer. What follows can take some time, but the saying goes it will take a whole life to become a real Muslim. In many cases, as in Fareed's, the process of conversion has strong modernistic characteristics where the converts initiate this change themselves and approach the process on individualistic terms (Roy, 2004). Many converts have stated that the conversion infused their life with new meaning and insight and that Islam has prescribed their "path" in a clear and concise manner and showed them the best way to life their lives (Jensen and Østergaard, 2007; Rambo, 1993).

Fadl

Fadl is a middle-aged man married to a woman from Central Asia, and they have one young daughter. He said that total change had occurred in his life and miracles started to take place as though by "divine intervention" – or, by act of grace. He found himself a spiritual teacher (sheik), and his life became solid and steadfast. He became increasingly aware of his actions and behaviour, as well as the world around him. He said that he had become surprised how he could live the life he lived in the past before he became a Muslim. He agrees that Islam is a special path, one of many – that there are many such paths, but that Islam suits him best, "[…] the most secure form, thoroughly marked … to obtain a good life." He approaches his religion through his emotions and says the core of the matter is to purify the heart and learn to perceive with the heart, "[…] to fill the heart with God." He still sees his old friends, but some of them feel he has "[…] stumbled into some religious rubbish … [that he has become] … saved." He tells me that the distinct groups of Muslims in Iceland are somewhat separate as there are many different ethnic and national groups of Muslims in Iceland and some of

[24] "There is no god but God and Muhammad is His Messenger".

them do not socialise outside of the mosque, or during Friday prayer (Jumah), and that in Iceland everybody is always so busy anyway. According to Fadl, people who have difficulty fitting in with society can easily become attracted to Islam because of the strong ethos of unity that characterises Islam (cf. the ummah). When asked if it makes sense to talk about "Icelandic Islam," he doesn't think the idea of Icelandic Muslims make senses because of the low number of Muslims in Iceland. Fadl had been searching for meaning in his life and had travelled a lot. He first came into contact with Islam while travelling in North Africa, and he got quite a different picture of the religion and Muslims than he had previously held, which had been somewhat negative. Once when he was inside a mosque, he listened to an old man recite the Qur'an, and it was like a lightning had struck. He experienced an intense spiritual emotion: "[…] my hair stood on ends and tears came into my eyes." He set out to learn about Islam without becoming a Muslim. One day while in Europe, however, he met a Muslim man with whom he had conversation about Islam. At the end, Fadl recited the Islamic profession of faith, the shahada, with the man as a witness. At first, he found it hard to practice the daily rituals, and for a time he half-heartedly strayed away from the faith. Over time, he decided to become a practising Muslim, which he has been for more than two decades.

Aida

Aida is a young Icelandic woman with a BA degree who is currently studying at a university in the Middle East. She is also married to a man from that part of the world. Since she became a Muslim, she has been studying Islam, as well as Arabic at a university level. She has approached the religion in a logical and rational way, almost as a scientist, doing scholarly research on the Islamic scriptures. She took her time and thought long and hard before she decided to convert to Islam. During her time studying in Iceland, she used to ponder what path she should take in life and what decisions she should take. She was raised in the Catholic faith but "became an atheist" when she reached puberty. but at the time, she became When she turned twenty years old, she decided it was "[…] time to give God a chance (laughs), and I stumbled all of a sudden into Islam." She had learned about Islam while communicating online with some foreign Muslim friends. This was an enormous step for Aida, and she became scared. She was studying at a university in Iceland at the time and felt that "[…] it was all or nothing." She did not want to be a hypocrite. The run-up towards the big step had been long, from being an atheist to starting to believe in God – she felt she had to do everything all over again, "[…] you go over to the other side." For Aida, it is important to develop and improve, and the main purpose of Islam is to become a better human being. Initially, she felt she was an unlikely candidate for this change: "[…] one would never have believed this, never, never in a million years, I mean it!" There was some strange power, a conviction that drove her onward toward a decisive path, "[…] then, naturally, you change automatically, everything [is going] in a good direction, this is so positive, I deserved to live this way."

Aida's path towards the religion was objective, logical and was based on rational understanding. She set out to find "[…] the big Truth in life … you [can] become so confused." She wanted to know the workings of the mind and to get the right information. She thought faith had to be objective, and she thought it necessary to find and use special methods to seek for the truth in science: "[…] you think you can use the same methods to find faith, but I tried [to do it that way] … to understand and to believe that if it was … if there was a faith that [really] existed". She surveyed many religions and wanted to use her powers of understanding "[…] to understand and to believe if it was, if there was a faith." She found Islam to be an attractive interpretation of the existence of God: "It was just logical for me." The image of God she found in Islam is the image she was looking for but had not found, an image that was very clear and easy to understand. She became intellectually stimulated: "This was incredibly exciting!" When she read about Islam, the same thing always appeared: "Think, think, use your brain, use your brain!" She found this so audacious, she wanted to learn more about Islam, about science in Islam, about failures of religious men and she was open; she was "[…] naturally on this journey, looking." This was an intense intellectual struggle. She wanted to understand all of it rationally and by logic, she just had to get close to the truth. She wanted to discover the existence of God by using her own logical reason, and now the time was ripe for the big step: "What happens will happen."

The relationship between the new convert and her or his family and friends can easily cause multiple problems in the beginning, especially concerning the parents. Family dinners and gatherings can be difficult when suddenly the daughter or son does not eat pork and does not drink alcohol. Friends and family stand before a new person who has, to a certain degree, turned her or his back on the old values, customs and habits that he or she had shared with them before the conversion (Jensen, 2006, 2008; Østergaard, 2009). Usually, this situation changes with time, and these important relationships become more "normal" again. However, a definite and irretrievable line has been drawn in the sand, so to speak. Østergaard (2009) has suggested one subtle identity of converts as mediators being aligned with the "Trickster figure". This figure represents transformation and cultural critique, even as revolting against the traditional, national community, constituting alternative public spaces, something Vertovec (2009) has also suggested, using the concepts of "social space" and "Muslim space", as a separate field of Muslims, living Islam. This conceptualisation brings Bourdieu's (1991) theory practice into play, in this case Muslims seen as a distinct social, cultural and religious field, where the positions of converts, participating in competing for symbolic capital (religious knowledge, cultural habitus) is established.

Aida hid her conversion from her parents for some time. Her mother took it well, and she said that if Aida was happy, then fine. Her father was suspicious: "[…] he had his opinions about Muslims." Aida kept this secret from her father for a while longer, she continued with her normal life (and practiced her new religion), and he did not notice any change in her. When she finally broke the news to him and told him that she had not actually changed so much, and if so, then only for the better, her father accepted her choice. Later, Aida thought her father had been brave to take walks with her in the town with her wearing a hijab.

Despite this acceptance, Islam was avoided as a topic at family gatherings. Aida thinks Islam gives women respect, self-respect in society and in marriage, and she says that the opinion that Muslim women are oppressed is a misunderstanding, "[…] I am not going to let anybody step over me."

In this section, I have discussed the conversion of new Muslims and presented experiences of Icelandic Muslim converts. This is not a new phenomenon in the West, and it has, in fact, been gaining momentum during the last decade, paradoxically since the attacks of 9/11. It seems that transformations like these conversions – personal and social – can be a sign of certain changes in Western societies. In the same way, as an interaction takes place on the personal level between identities/otherings, it can be surmised that the meeting of those cultural aspects that intersect in those individuals is in the same way symbolic for similar changes in the respective societies. Changes like these have not been obvious in Icelandic society in the same way, as Muslims in general were quite invisible in the public space in Iceland until around 2013. Fareed and Aida can be seen as "scholarly" Muslims, and they both said that they wanted to return to Iceland in the future and educate the upcoming generation of Icelandic Muslims. They consider themselves to be "real" Icelanders and "real" Muslims. Aida emphasised the importance of a proper self-image and that Muslims should be proud of their religion. She emphasised that the young ones must learn that people are different and that everybody must live in peace and respect oneself and with each other. She concluded by stating that there is no contradiction in being a true Icelander and a Muslim. As can be seen in the first sections of this chapter, the process of conversion to Islam undertaken by these Icelanders is more or less identical to similar situations in the neighbouring countries. Initially, most converts were women, but gradually, young males have turned to Islam for a variety of reasons. In most cases, the converts seem to be looking for "something else" in a religious, spiritual and cultural sense, as well as a new way of life and a new worldview. Also, in some cases, the reason for converting is because of a significant other, where a future husband or wife, where one part was a Muslim, met and fell in love. Concerning the social background of these converts, it is quite diverse, with some of them coming from working class backgrounds, while others come from middle class families. In general, the most important catalyst for these conversions seems to have been the search for something new, something different from what had been before.

7.4 Disputes, generations and gender

The new generations of Western Muslims and converts, with different forms of habitus from the older immigrant generation, entails new forms of religious approaches and authority, setting them apart from what before was transnational relations with the home country, or the country of origin. Now Western Muslims must align themselves to the secular nation state, having at the same time become increasingly globalised, in large part because of digital media of blog sites and social media platforms. This has made them partly deterritorialised, socially and culturally, where the vicinity and relation to the traditional (local) mosque has weakened (Bunt, 2000, 2004; Mandaville, 2001, 2007; Roy, 2004). This situation increasingly

facilitates ijtihad, or individually orientated interpretations of the Islamic texts, which used to be the domain of learned scholars, but recently is being practiced, particularly online, by laymen or persons without satisfactory scholarly credentials. Consequently, religious emphasis and interests of Muslims in the West are changing along generational lines. Furthermore, the great ethnic diversity of Muslims in countries like Iceland and Denmark – compared to France and Germany, for example – leads to different interpretations of Islam (Østergaard, 2009). Young Muslims, especially converts, are involved in new forms of symbolic capital, such as religious knowledge, found on the Internet, with more heterodox ideas that affects their standing in the community. Converts and other young Muslims often challenge orthodox views of imams and other kinds of religious authority and might choose either a liberal or a more conservative version of Islam (Jensen, 2006; Schmidt, 2004).

I observed cases where the cultural differences between converts and born Muslims were apparent, where generational differences were present One case was the dispute which resulted in the split between the MAI and the ICCI in 2008-2009, which was partly a generational schism, as well as disagreements over how to run the association. Then there was a case concerning the difference of opinions in using head covering at a women's group meeting, where the Icelandic converts all wore hijab, but the born Muslim women did not, except when praying. The discussion of this takes place in the next section. Another case is from debates among MAI members about the design of prayer facilities regarding gender segregation, where cultural, generational, and gendered divisions emerged during the debates and lead to the election of a new chairman for the association. During discussions and disputes about the conditions of women's praying space in the planned new mosque, which reflected various cultural standpoints and viewpoints regarding religion, nationality and generation/age, diverse views were expressed. One view from the elders (the older generation who had controlled the mosque from the beginning) was that there should be separate entrances for men and women, a point causing disagreements. One leader of the association and some of the converts, mostly women, talked about a design with a common prayer space for men and women, with the possibility of having a moveable partition. One Icelandic woman, a convert, referred to Islamic scholars in the US who argued for men and women sharing prayer space, and that this had been the norm during the life of the Prophet. This showed that there were some cultural differences concerning the opinions of the Muslim women, where culture and tradition overruled gender. The converts were more positive towards shared space, yet some of them and most of the immigrants, or born Muslims, leaned towards separate praying spaces. Some of the women said they were not sure or that they were flexible and open to both possibilities. A common comment was that if women prostrated in front of men, it would be hard for the men to focus on the praying – something some of the women (and some of the men) dismissed and said that men should be able to control themselves in such a situation.

One of the leaders of the association argued that because of the great cultural diversity of the Icelandic Muslim community, the design of the mosque and the praying space should accommodate this situation. He said most of the board had agreed on a shared praying space

for men and women, with the possibility of setting up a portable separation, if needed. A woman convert called this the perfect solution, following the example of the Prophet, who (according to the hadith) always tried to accommodate differences, and that a group of old men should not be able to take that away. Two born-Muslim men, one young and one elderly, commented that this woman should not opine about this case, as she had not lived in Iceland for a number of years. She answered that she had been a member of the association for many years and never had any problems before. Another young woman, an Icelandic convert, commented that she had had enough of "some men" forcing upon her their cultural ideas upon her that she claimed contradicted the main tenets of Islam. She said that it was important for women to have equal and easy access to the prayer space, not only for prayer but also for other social activities--especially in a country such as Iceland, where the Muslims are a very small minority. She said that in many places in the West, mosques and Muslim associations were losing members because women were discriminated against, which led to fewer women and children coming to the mosque. She claimed that the Muslim community was running the risk of losing the next generation because of this. Furthermore, if the mosque is supposed to be used for educating non-Muslims about Islam, for example with open house arrangements, an obvious gender segregated place might feel disagreeable in the minds of the non-Muslim visitors. She argued that the idea of gender segregation in the mosque was a cultural tradition and not inherently Islamic, implemented after the time of the Prophet, and that it was important to separate the cultural from the religious, to elicit the pure and true aspects of the faith, and to keep all the diverse cultural sediments apart from religious practices. She said many of these traditions and habits were relics from conservative, Arabic patriarchal societies, and that today, most Muslims were not Arabs and that they had no links to these old traditions. This woman argued that it was about time to put an end to what she termed the wrongdoings and even the humiliation women have had to suffer at the hand of these patriarchal traditions. Therefore, she said she wanted to follow the example of the Prophet and make the mosque an equal space for both sexes and equally accessible for both, at all times (Note: Muslim women have increasingly gone back to the original texts to justify their feminist claims and oppose the male-biased interpretations in Islam, see for example Amina Wadud, 1992). There were other women, converts and born Muslims, who were in two minds about this issue: some of them disagreed about sharing space with men, while others were positive. Some of the men were against the idea of shared praying space, and all of the older immigrant men opposed the idea. This shows that gender is not the only decisive factor here, but still seems to be important, as the women did not all agree, converts or born Muslims, but all the older men dismissed the sharing space idea apart from two converts, who were positive. Here we have an intersection of gender, generations, cultural traditions and diverse national origins, which demonstrates that Muslims and what they think and what they mean is always complex and diverse, thus negating common stereotyping of the "Muslim".

Another issue that caused great consternation and divisions was the election of a chairman for one of the associations. Fierce discussions and disputes took place, and a few people

were blocked from participating on the group's social media platforms, while others left the association. One young Icelandic woman convert clashed seriously with one of the elders, which again underlined cultural, gendered and generational divisions. This clash alarmed some members of the community and the association. The debates and disagreements surrounding the vote and the consequent change of the board, where the former leadership regained their position, can be seen as a cultural and generational conflict, with gendered undertones, as increasing female, mainly converts voices, were being heard and wanted new approaches to the relations between the genders in the mosque and in the community as a whole. Some of the ideas promoted around the planning of the new mosque and the change of control of the association were not very much to the liking of the elders, who had other cultural ideas based on their own background, even if they had lived in Iceland for many years. Thus, it became apparent that there were deep differences underneath the surface of this Muslim community that emerged when the pressure was on and when important changes were about to take place, where roughly two camps, though not completely uniform, became visible – the liberal, or progressive camp of mainly converts and women on one side, and the conservative, traditional camp of older men (the elders), most of them born Muslims, on the other. Even if these lines were not completely clear-cut, there were obvious cultural, ethnic, gendered, and generational fault lines.

Thus, these two issues: the design of a new mosque, which is yet to be built, and the election of a new chairman caused a crisis in this small community, especially within this association, where issues of culture, gender, nationality, and generations clashed. The situation remained tense for some time, but things eventually calmed down, while some influential members, mainly converts, left the association. It appeared that the elders, or the old guard, had had concerns that their creation, the association, was being taken away from them by younger and more progressive people, women and converts. The elders of the association eventually regained control.

7.5 Veiled gender – Icelandic women converts

The Muslim woman has for long been "veiled" by orientalist mystique – with or without a veil. She has often been given the role of culture-bearer of the Other and has historically been used for measuring the evolutionary status of the Other, thus been the ultimate orientalist trope (Ahmed, 1992; Mortata, 2010; Said, 1978). The mostly negative identification of the Muslim woman with Islam and "Muslim culture" has a common expression in the reification of Islam/Muslims into a piece of cloth, the headscarf, or the veil (Abu-Lughod, 2002, 2013; El Guindi, 1999; Scott, 2007, 2010). When discussing Islam or Muslims with non-Muslims, the discussion frequently becomes channelled into few topics on the "Muslim woman": the headscarf/veil, oppression, and female circumcision (which is not a religious but a cultural practice). One of the participants said that many books and magazines on the Middle East had images of veiled Muslim women on the front cover, even if the subject had nothing to do with women. Despite this narrow view of the Islamic

headscarf/veil, it has, in fact, multiple symbolic meanings in diverse locations and at various times (Abu-Lughod, 1986, 2002, 2006; Ahmed, 1992; El Guindi, 1999; Hoodfar, 1992).

This piece of cloth used for veiling and/or covering the hair or the face possesses important and contested symbolic power. Muslim women (and men) wear a cloth for variety of reasons, but usually as a religious identity marker. It has many versions and names, but generally it is termed *hijab* (Arabic: curtain, separation, screen, veil, etc.). Its symbolic power is such that sometimes Islam and Muslims are reduced to this piece of cloth. According to the anthropologist Fadwa El Guindi (1999), there is no single linguistic referent in Arabic for the English word veil, and she argues that this word and its use in the West rests on Orientalist discourse, while the Arabic word hijab is linguistically and specifically rooted in Arabic/Islamic cultural conceptualities, denoting covering, modesty. It has a relational and contextual meaning, while "to veil" means to hide from view, conceal or disguise. But "veil" is a common term for this piece of cloth and El Guindi wants to position the veil as part of dress and from the viewpoint of the anthropology of dress, as it should be seen as intersecting dress, body, and culture, making veiling mainly about identity and privacy, of space and body. In addition, contrary to common opinion, it symbolises agency, empowerment, and autonomy, as well as being an agent of resistance, depending on the context. Thus, for understanding the veil, one must place it in historical and cultural contexts, and as an intricate social communication, where the covering is manipulated as a device for communicating specific cultural meanings and relations (Abu-Lughod, 1986, 2002, 2013; Ahmed, 2011; El Guindi, 1999).

The debate about the headscarf is not new. Ahmed (1992) recounts that during the times of the Assyrians (18th century B.C.E), the use of headscarves or veils had been made compulsory by law (Hammurabi's legal code) for upper class women for special occasions. In the Christian Byzantine and in Persia, upper class women were required to wear head coverings as a symbol of their elevated status and respect, and on the Arabian Peninsula the use of covering was common long before the advent of Islam. When Europeans were establishing their colonies, they wanted to force their supposedly higher civilisation upon their subjects and the societies they were busy occupying and exploiting. In Egypt, the representatives of the patriarchal structure, helped by Western feminist ideas, went about making the local women remove their head covering, because they saw it as a symbol of the backwardness of Arabic and Islamic society and of the oppression of the Arabic Muslim woman by the Arab Muslim man. Many men of the local upper class wanted to join in this cultural colonisation. Cultural debates, often based on cultural evolutionism, usually revolved around women and head covering and the mantra was that it was necessary to emancipate the oppressed, underdeveloped, oriental woman – and as so often, the woman was made to carry the culture, to embody cultural values and moral norms. These debates and conflicts became embodied in the image of the oriental woman and in how she chose to dress or not to dress. The colonial masters who were most eager to engineer this emancipation were at the same time trying to prevent women from getting voting rights back home, in England (Ahmed, 1992). The European "liberators" wanted to force the native

populations to renounce their own culture and religion (Islam), traditions and dress, and they used Western feminist ideas in co-operation with the local and colonial patriarchy. Parts of the local elite took part in this Westernisation and thought of it as a necessary civilising of the native population to spur progress in the colony. This colonial, cultural oppression met considerable resistance, and the veil became an important weapon in that resistance. Instead of being a symbol of backwardness and patriarchal oppression, the headscarf became synonymous with respect for the local culture and religion. In this way, the symbolic value of the headscarf/veil alternated according to the historical, political, and cultural contexts, and has done so ever since (Abu-Lughod, 2002, 2006, 2013; L. Ahmed, 1992, 2011; Bracke and Fadil, 2012).

During my visit to the Women's Group, I observed different approaches to veiling among the women, especially considering the converts versus the born Muslim women, where the former seemed to conform more rigidly to orthodoxy than the latter. To shed some light on these complex issues from the perspectives of the Icelandic participants, I refer to my discussions and interviews with a number of women, converts as well as born Muslims, and I describe the scene at the Women's group meeting. I had been invited to attend a meeting of the Women's Group in one of the mosques, and when I arrived there were eight adult women present and two young girls. Four of the women wore headscarves (all Icelandic converts) and four were uncovered, apart from when they entered the praying room. Three of the women were recent converts. The three new Muslims did not wear headscarves. One Icelandic convert, who had been a Muslim for over a decade, and whom the Icelandic Muslim women had often referred to as being knowledgeable about Islam, was present, and she was one of the women wearing hijab. When the question of the hijab or the veil came up, the majority of the women participants saw it as religious symbol to show that the woman was a proud Muslim, as well as to please God and intensify the awareness of God. One immigrant woman insisted that it was not very smart for Muslim women to wear head-covering in Iceland because it attracted too much attention, which is exactly not what veiling is supposed to do. She said it was different in societies where covering was common, but not in Iceland. The women participants all agreed that wearing a head-covering was a matter of personal choice and that it was not a symbol of oppression. Some said that some male relatives or husbands were opposed to women covering (Killian, 2003). This shows that there are many misconceptions in the public discourse related to Islam and women, and these women were aware of them and eager to put some of those ideas to rest.

The meeting was informal, and the women conversed about diverse things, such as cooking, how to avoid pork and alcohol in food, baking cakes, health, children, men, and love. When discussing baking cakes, the women pondered whether they could use cake liquid (kökudropar), since it contained alcohol. There was no clear consensus on this issue. The same discussion touched on using wine in cooking, as in making gravy, since alcohol evaporates when cooked, but there was general agreement that one should avoid using alcohol in cooking. They also discussed hot-dogs and pizzas and if pork was always part of the ingredients. Someone said that if a Muslim buys pork unknowingly, she should not throw

it away, as it is *haram* (forbidden) to destroy food; instead, it should be given to someone who eats pork. It is quite common for recently converted Muslims to strive to uphold strict regimes in their daily practice of the faith, while questioning these practices often comes later. Therefore, these issues do occupy their thinking to a considerable degree.

In the interviews with the women, they discussed issues like piety, religious practice, the position of Muslim women in society, their opinion about head covering and the matter of the headscarf/veil in general. Topics like the strength of faith, how it is to be a Muslim, and a Muslim woman, and whether doubt sometimes crept into the mind were also discussed. The responses were different from person to person, but most of the women said they were very religious. During conversations at the meetings and in the interview context, the women agreed that the Qur'an had answers to every question and problem, even if it could take some time to find them. They also agreed that the Qur'an could be very challenging, even provocative, with apparent contradictions that forced the reader to analyse and ask questions. They said it was useful to read the Qur'an thematically to get a better grip. A common sentiment was that one had to read the Qur'an with the brain and understand it with the heart, which presupposes that the heart is open. Everyone should read and interpret the Qur'an, each in their own way. When asked what Islam is and what it is to be a Muslim, the most common idioms were "calm" and "peace." It was important to be a good person, to help others and raise good children. It was important that a Muslim was to implement God's will and make his will her own. They put great importance on striving to do the right things and being aware of what one says and does. One woman said her faith was a private matter, only for herself and God. Asked about the various norms and prohibitions, one woman said that she saw Islam as having a wide framework, and within it there was considerable room for individual interpretations and practices. There were certain parameters and norms/prohibitions concerning diet and so on, but there was also much freedom for expression. She said that it was important to use the brain, to think and be rational and not follow any creed blindly. Concepts like compassion, justice and equality were equally important among the women.

One evening, a woman who had just returned from Cairo and had brought with her a bundle of colourful headscarves, started a lively discussion on the *hijab* and the general position of women in Islam. As mentioned earlier, some but not all of the women wore head scarves, and they all agreed that covering was a matter of choice. It should, however, always be worn in the mosque and when praying. It soon became clear for me that the *hijab* is not only a religious, cultural or a political symbol but also a fashion object, and the women all had different takes on the fashion of head-coverings. During these meetings, coffee and tea was served, together with soda water and home baked cookies and cakes. The ambience was very lively and positive, and the women were unafraid to express their opinions on a variety of subjects. They were not always in agreement about different subjects, and I sensed some conceptual differences between the native Icelandic women and the ones with immigrant background. This could be an expression of the difference between newly converted Muslims and those who are born Muslims, where the former tends to take the formalities

of the religion more seriously than the latter. The women's meetings always concluded with the evening prayer (*isha*) in the prayer room of the mosque.

When asked whether the hijab was symbolic as a religious, political, cultural identity, or even a form of resistance, an Icelandic convert who does not cover regularly emphasised the religion as the major identity factor connected to the headscarf said:

> […] it is religious, but also cultural and can also be political. It also shows that you are a Muslim woman. Today many young Muslim women wear hijab to show their pride, that they´re proud of their religion and culture. But I think it can also be political, for example in France, to show the state that it cannot control everything, so it can be a blend of things, but it always comes down to religion, as a religious symbol.

As this participant argues, the symbolism of the hijab is complex and multi-layered, with the religious aspect important; the cultural and political aspects also frequently play big roles, and, as in the case of France, it can become a symbol of resistance (El Guindi, 1999; Scott, 2007). But the participant also emphasised the importance of the *hijab* as a symbol of Muslim identity, of pride and empowerment. The same participant said:

> I wear headscarf sometimes, but not regularly, mostly in the mosque when I pray, but also when I am abroad [in a Muslim country]. I usually cover when I pray at home, I think you should. When I wear the hijab, I feel deeper, I think more deeply, and become more conscious of myself, that I am a Muslim, it's remembering, and it often makes me feel good. It puts me in another place. I also think the headscarf symbolises freedom of the woman to choose what to wear, without external interference.

Thus, according to this participant, the *hijab* can embody agency and symbolise freedom of choice, as El Guindi (1999) and Saba Mahmood (2005) have argued. In this sense, a seemingly patriarchal/oppressive symbol, which has by some been interpreted as oppressing women, becomes a symbol of agency, and of individual volition and choice. The discourse on the hijab is often quite heated, and some European countries have made it unlawful to wear these cloths in public places, with France being the prime example (Killian, 2003; Scott, 2007). This development has taken place at the same time as radical, right-wing, nationalistic, and racist/xenophobic parties have gained strength in many European countries and, in some cases, have become part of parliaments. The French authorities have stated that this law is for the liberation of Muslim women in France and for defending the basic French concept of *laïcité* (secularism), which is seen to be fundamental to the integrity of the French nation-state (Bowen, 2007; Werbner, 2005). The historian Joan Scott (2007, 2010) has argued that this legislation is a part of a policy of purifying and protecting French national identity, working to cleanse France of alien characteristics and thus leading to the exclusion of foreigners and immigrants from becoming part of the French nation-state. She argued that this was a cynical part of the election strategy of the then President Sarkozy, by which he hoped to utilise the anti-immigration (read: anti-Muslim) sentiments that have kept the right-wing nationalistic parties, such as the Front National, intact – hoping to collect

votes from that side of the electorate. Scott adds that this law has nothing to do with an open and transparent society, as the legislators claimed as they tried to convince the public about the legitimacy of this law (Scott, 2010). The French context is something the Icelandic Muslim women were attentive to, and an Icelandic convert, when discussing the symbolic meaning of the hijab, argues that:

> The hijab can have several different symbolic meanings, depending on the context. It can be on individual basis, or in the context of the social and cultural environment, as in France, where part of the symbolism is resistance [against the oppression of the secular state], then it symbolises something other than religion, but it is often very personal, but can also easily become political or as signifying cultural identity. But it is not part of Icelandic culture so it cannot become symbolic of Icelandic culture to wear hijab [laughs], not that many women wear hijab in Iceland.

Here, the symbolic multivocality (Turner, 1969) of the *hijab*, dependent on the context and situation, is expressed by this participant. According to her, the context can be individual, as a symbol of piety, modesty and privacy, as well as representing collective Islamic values, or symbolising resistance, as in the case of France, where there are laws targeting Islamic attire of women. However, as the participant points out, it is doubtful that the *hijab* can work as a cultural symbol in Iceland, as it has no history or tradition here, and, due to the smallness of the Icelandic Muslim community, it is rare in the public arena. She continues:

> But fundamentally, it [the hijab] is a religious symbol, people look into the holy texts or interpretations, or it's about their relationship with God, so the question is what it really symbolises for each individual woman, if they decide to cover or not. For me, I had this inner need, that this was the right thing for me to do, so for me it´s about identity, it´s easier for me, then everybody knows I´m a Muslim, no discussion [laughs], but, you know, it was just this inner urge, it was the right thing concerning my relationship with God.

As other participants recounted, the *hijab* is primarily a religious symbol for them, connoting the closeness to God and the cultivating of that relationship, but it is also an individual choice for each Muslim woman whether she covers or not. It is often connected to a strong inner need and desire, but for converts, this choice frequently triggers serious crisis among friends and family. Here is a common story of the reaction of friends and family when the daughter turns up wearing a headscarf in a "Muslim manner":

> Unsurprisingly, in the beginning, my family was shocked, but this was for me. It was difficult to begin with, but today my relationship with my family is very good. I am not sure they understand it fully, but they accept it, and accept me as I am, even if they might shake their heads from time to time [laughs]. In the beginning the hijab gave me strength and pride, but today it´s just a natural part of my day-to-day dress, and it´s not something I think about [laughs].

As discussed earlier, the discourse of the veil has been recycled by politicians and media for a long time, especially since 9/11, as part of political and military engagement in Muslim countries (Abu-Lughod, 2002, 2013; Kumar, 2012). Dichotomies were established "… not to capture the complexities of either Islam or "the West." … [t]hey are polemics that in fact create their own reality: incompatible cultures, a clash of civilizations" (Scott, 2007, p. 5), resulting in sustained political discourses and debates, underpinning increased Islamophobia in many Western countries. Leila Ahmed (2011) argued that rather than being a symbol of female oppression, the veil has increasingly come to signify resistance against Western hegemony in the Muslim world and against the growing oppression of Western states of Muslim women who cover. Importantly the veil has become a symbol of piety and religious practice in secular societies. Ahmed argues that this dynamic must be examined in the historical context of colonialism and sustained political and military interference of Western powers in the Muslim world (see also Abu-Lughod, 2002). When one of the women participants was asked whether the hijab symbolises oppression, she commented:

> No, of course not, I don´t see the hijab as oppressive of anything, yet I see their [those from outside] point, and the hijab can be used and misused as everything else, you can oppress people with many things, and I think for example that in case of France, the attitude [and laws] against Muslim women covering their hair is oppressive, it´s the state that´s doing the oppressing. But when you cover voluntarily, it´s not oppression, but choice, a choice that can be very emancipating, when you choose what you do or wear. But sometimes it happens to you that someone reacts to you in a negative way, as once in a large mall in Reykjavík, when someone approaches you in a threatening way or says something to make you feel uncomfortable, it can happen, but it´s not so common.

The role of the veil in the struggles for the position of women and culture is on-going in the West just as in the Muslim world, where there are still struggles about the complex, changing and ambiguous symbolism tied to this piece of cloth. A prominent part of discussions about this phenomenon has centred on the women of Afghanistan and the burqa under the terror regime of the Taliban. Lila Abu-Lughod (2002) has pointed to the fact that the *burqa* was not invented by the Taliban but has been worn by Pashtun women in the border areas between Afghanistan and Pakistan for a long time. There, this dress mode has signified modesty and has been used as protection for women against harassment from male strangers in the public space. When the Taliban regime fell in 2001, many predicted a similar fall of the *burqa*, but most women in the area continued to dress as before the regime change and most of them would have found it immoral to stop dressing like this (Abu-Lughod, 2002). In this context, it can be mentioned that in the 1970s a strong cultural and religious awakening took place in many Muslim countries, linked to the political situation in West Asia, the oil crisis and conflicts between Israel and some Arab countries, and earlier during British rule in Egypt (see Ahmed, 1992). This had, among other factors, the consequences that many women, especially the educated young, began using the hijab and it acquired a renewed symbolism

of cultural sophistication and self-confidence. There was still life in the old cloth, and it has maybe never been as contested as in recent times.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the situation of Icelandic converts to Islam and their identity (re)formation during the process of becoming new Muslims, and I have compared their situation to the position of converts in neighbouring countries. I have demonstrated that this process of conversion, often taking place in a few phases, is perceived by them to be a fundamentally a life-changing experience, subjective as well as objective, but often creating tensions and even crisis in their relationship with close kin, family, and friends. I have recounted that converts do, in many ways, have a more open relationship with their new faith and more freedom to choose how to navigate their new trajectory, which many see as contrary to most born Muslims, who are more dependent on their cultural background. In that way, the converts can be seen as being between cultures, as cultural mediators, even cultural critiques. As liminal persons, they become the Other, but in certain contexts, different from the Other. To underline these issues, I gave room for voices of Icelandic converts to demonstrate their thoughts and experience of being new Muslims in Iceland, both in relation to the Muslim community and the majority society in Iceland.

The relationship of converts to religious authority was addressed, where it was argued that even if many converts seek authoritative structures for their religious practice, they also contest traditional religious authority by individualising their religious trajectory. This is in no small part due to modern digital communication technology, which offers multiple choices and possibilities in religious matters, potentially bypassing the authority of traditional religious scholars. Related to this is the perceived difference between converts and born Muslims, where the latter are seen and see themselves, as being burdened by diverse traditional customs, while converts are perceived as being free from that. Born Muslims often refer to this situation by claiming that converts are better Muslims. I examined the context that emerged during two important instances for part of the Muslim community in Iceland; the discussions around how to organise the social and religious space in the planned new mosque, and disputes that emerged during the election of new leaders for one of the associations. These debates revealed several tensions characterised by intersections of gender, age (generations), nationality and culture, in addition to some differences in opinions between converts and born Muslims. These debates showed for example that cultural and generational concerns sometimes are stronger than those of gender, and that all these categories are flexible and contextual.

I looked at the situation of women converts who founded a Women´s Group in one of the mosques, which consisted of both converts and born Muslims, where they expressed their diverse views of being Icelandic women converts and Muslim women in general. In that context, I addressed the conspicuous and contested issue of the veil, the *hijab*, and presented the views and feelings of some of the women about this issue, which has become a compulsive object in Western discourse on Islam and Muslims, where the Muslim, or by

extension Islam, is being reified and reduced to this piece of cloth. This object has become a negative symbol of Islam and Muslims, with the Muslim woman in particular as the reification of Muslim "culture" of oppression and patriarchy. As is shown by the views of the women quoted in this chapter, the idea of the covering being patriarchal oppression is not in agreement with their experiences, as they do not identify with being oppressed, but on the contrary, they see the veiling as an individual choice, as agency and as signifying the pride of being Muslim.

8 Images of Muslims and Islam: Islamophobia and the mosque affair

Introduction

In this chapter, I focus on image making and narrative discourses of Muslims and Islam, both in the local, Icelandic context, as well as addressing the wider global connections influencing the Icelandic situation. I present definitions and examples of Islamophobia, or anti-Muslim attitudes, in global and local contexts, as well as presenting theories concerning what has been termed Islamophobia and demonstrate how these anti-Muslim sentiments operate in relations to speech, utterances and actions. Denying Muslims their multifaceted identities and reducing them to a monolithic image, "The Muslim", is an important aspect of Islamophobia, as it is framed as identity politics, expressed as tensions concerning defining personal and collective identities of being Muslim, aiming to flatten the multiple and diverse identities of Muslims in a severely reductive manner.

When Islamophobia raised its head in Iceland in 2013, it caused temporary anxiety among some residents, manifesting itself as moral panic, defined by Stanley Cohen (2002) as a stressful collective condition that can emerge and subsides relatively quickly. I address how anti-Muslim attitudes in Iceland have been organised into what some have defined as activism (with foreign connections). I use the allotment of a ground for mosque construction in 2013 to the Muslim Association of Iceland as a case study, demonstrating how anti-Muslim sentiments emerged in Iceland. These discourses took place primarily in the media, both the so-called mainstream media and on social media sites. I present comparative cases from Europe, showing that similar patterns and processes took place when new mosques were established in European cities. I recount two well-publicised events linked to the Icelandic Muslim community; the funding issues of mosques in Iceland which received much media attention, and the Venice Biennale in 2015, which involved the Muslim Association in Iceland and was reported in Icelandic and foreign media. These two events were presented with strong Islamophobic undertones. Finally, I present and analyse media discourses and debates in Iceland that emerged following the donation of the plot for the mosque building in 2013 and place those debates in a comparative context to some neighbouring countries.

8.1 Islamophobia – emanation of fear

In 1997, a report on Islamophobia was published by the Runnymede Trust in the UK, putting the concept to the attention of the public for the first time (The Runnymede Trust, 1997). In the report, Islamophobia was defined as a negative attitude and discourse on Islam and Muslims, and it stated that Muslims encounter discrimination and abuse in employment and in public services, such as education and health. It claims that Muslims endure exclusion

from public politics and government, from management and responsibility and from public life generally. According to the report, Muslims are more frequently victims of violence and verbal abuse than most other groups in the UK, and they experience prejudice in the media, in everyday conversation and public discourses. The report underlined the importance of the participation of Muslims in society and saw the consequences of exclusion and symbolic violence against Muslims as racial violence. The report also discussed the importance of legal definitions on racial and religious violence (i.e., violence against people due to their religion) and suggested that discrimination because of religion should be made illegal. Comparing the Icelandic context, such laws do exist in Iceland (Alþingi, 1940 art. 233a), where it says that whoever mocks, slanders, belittles or threatens an individual or a group by expressing with words, images or symbols, because of nationality, skin colour, race, religion, sexual orientation or gender, or distributes such expressions, shall be fined or imprisoned up to two years.

As a concept, Islamophobia in some form has been around for a long time (see Runnymede, 1997). One can trace anti-Muslim sentiments back to the beginning of the relations between Christian Europe and the Muslim world, through the Crusades and Muslim Iberia, all the way to the present. But, according to Bleich (2011), there is no widely accepted definition of what Islamophobia refers to in an analytical manner. Islamophobia is part of research on racism, xenophobia and other forms of prejudice in the context of hierarchical social categorisations. It is seen as a harmful discourse directed at Muslims and Islam, especially in the West, and one consequently useful definition of Islamophobia is "indiscriminate negative attitudes of emotions directed at Islam or Muslims" (p. 1581). It is a political concept concerned with identification of historical and political context, which is comparable to the concept of race, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, even if the historical conditions of Islamophobia and anti-Semitism are not the same (Bunzl, 2005; Kazi, 2019; Kumar, 2012). One important characteristic of Islamophobia is fear and dread of the Other, the Muslim (Bleich, 2011, p. 1583), and because of these sentiments, it is defined as being a "phobia". Bleich (p. 1583) refers to the definition of Stolz (2005), which formulates Islamophobia "… is a rejection of Islam, Muslim groups and Muslim individuals on the basis of prejudice and stereotypes. It may have emotional, cognitive, evaluative as well as action-oriented elements (e.g., discrimination, violence)". It must be said that definitions of social concepts usually tend to be fluid and flowing, as concepts like "culture", "identity", "ethnicity", and so on, and to determine what Islamophobia is and what it is not, or what is not Islamophobia (see Runnymede, 1997), can be difficult to ascertain in a satisfactory manner. As Blech comments, the concept of Islamophobia and its social and political use is here to stay, even if some scholars question the analytical usefulness of the concept (Bowen, 2005, p. 524).

Islamophobia has been present in the West and has lately, particularly since 9/11, grown and been magnified, especially by extreme right-wing members of society, but it has also been maintained by some sections of the media and politicians (Ali et al., 2011; Bangstad, 2014; Hervik, 2011, 2019; Lean, 2012; Shryock, 2010). Islamophobic discourses can be characterised as hate speech (Jóna Pálmadóttir & Kalenikova, 2013), and it tends to influence

public opinion and official policy, an example being the so-called hijab affair in France (Bowen, 2007; Scott, 2007), as well as banning halal slaughtering in Denmark (Withnall, 2014) and Germany, and banning minarets in Switzerland (Cumming-Bruce and Erlanger, 2009). Such law-making can arguably breach the civil rights of Muslims (Shryock, 2010), and there is also evidence of Muslim groups being to a greater extent under surveillance from the authorities than other social groups, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom (Beydoun, 2018; Kumar, 2012; Lean, 2012). In the Icelandic context, a parliamentarian in Iceland wanted to monitor the background of Muslims, as he saw them as potential security threats (Eyrún Eyþórsdóttir and Kristín Loftsdóttir, 2019).

Islamophobia is expressed both as public discourses and as embedded in everyday encounters. The former is overt and easy to detect in most cases, but the latter is often covert and difficult to ascertain, as many of my participants were unwilling to admit to and were dismissive of everyday show of anti-Muslim sentiments. Similar attitudes are referred to by Kristín Loftsdóttir and Helga Tryggvadóttir (2020) in their study of racism in connection with refugees and asylum seekers in Iceland. Both these forms are discussed in this chapter, especially the public discourses, as these are easier to monitor, since they take place in diverse media outlets. The personal experiences of anti-Muslim attitudes in everyday encounters are more difficult to measure, as many Muslims who experience these attitudes are reluctant to recount them. I witnessed many indirect hints of unpleasant experiences of encounters of this kind during my fieldwork and many Muslims in Iceland have experienced anti-Muslim sentiments in one way or another, often in subtle forms in everyday encounters, expressed both verbally or as hostile looks on the bus or in the supermarket. To demonstrate how anti-Muslim sentiment can surface in everyday life, I quote here a short excerpt from an interview with a Muslim couple, an immigrant husband and Icelandic-born wife, discussing the reaction from family and neighbours when the husband moved into her village in rural Iceland.

K: But your family, they've taken it well?

W (Icelandic wife): no

K: No?

H (Arab husband): not at all

W: not at all …

K: The people in the village?

H: [laughs] crazy …

K: [To H] but you were living there for a while?

W: yeah … for a year … it was very hard

H: it was not good … it was sensitive for them to hear about a Muslim guy coming [laughs]

W: even when my sister is going to there … she is going to a hard time … I´m not allowed to talk to her because my father thinks I'm going to convert her to Islam.

This quote demonstrates the concerns many Muslims in Iceland and elsewhere must live with when confronted with negative attitudes.

Kristín Loftsdóttir (2016) has examined the intersection of race, the exotic, the immigrant, the African and the Muslim in contextualising the Other in connection to the Unwanted and as markers of otherness. She sees this as contradicting Western aspirations and tropes of cosmopolitanism and liberalism, where racialised and gendered discourses on mobility have entered the discursive stage and, in some instances, become dominant voices in public debates. Kristín Loftsdóttir (2016) asks the question of who are allowed to be global citizens, who are the exotic others, and who are the unwanted migrants – and how this correlates with Western ideals of a free and open society and cosmopolitan connections. Connecting these thoughts to Icelandic conditions, as mentioned above, Kristín Loftsdóttir and Helga Tryggvadóttir (2020) have studied the predicament of refugees and asylum seekers in Iceland, especially the racialised context these matters are framed by. Their discussion focuses on refugees and asylum seekers being perceived as a grave threat, with African (black) males and Muslim men being the primary embodiment of this threat, based on negative stereotypes. Kristín Loftsdóttir and Helga Tryggvadóttir (2020) argue that because of Nordic exceptionalism and of presumed lack of participation in the colonial project, Nordic people, which includes Icelanders, often feel that they cannot be accused of being racist. After WW II, notions of race or racism shifted from biological references to cultural ones, where traditions, religion, ethnicity became the main focus and idiom in addressing the Other. Kristín Loftsdóttir and Helga Tryggvadóttir (2020) demonstrated that asylum seekers and refugees from outside Europe, i.e., people of darker skin and with "exotic" culture and religion, who were in precarious positions, were susceptible to discriminatory treatment. Some of my participants in this study dismissed the racist allegations, which could be related to the insecurity of the position they found themselves in and the structural violence they were subject to from the state and border policies (p. 24).

When it came to online and public discourses, Kristín Loftsdóttir and Helga Tryggvadóttir (2020) found that news coverage and comments in the media on refugees and asylum seekers in Iceland increased largely from 2009 to 2017. Negative comments were predominant, mainly with racist and Islamophobic utterings, often with nationalistic sentiments. One of the most common tropes was the "Muslim takeover" idea, which was being promoted widely in anti-Muslim rhetoric, as in the Eurabia thesis (Bat Ye'or, 2005), predicting the imminent takeover of Europe by Arabs/Muslims and the abandonment of Christianity and "Western civilization" as we know it. This Eurabia thesis is also one that Hege Storhaug (2015) was occupied with in her ant-Muslim project, as discussed above. Furthermore, this theme came frequently up in online discussions during the "mosque

affair", addressed later in this chapter, where I place the situation in Iceland in a wider context, especially in relation to neighbouring Nordic Countries.

This fear or dread of the presence of Muslims in the West, and the reactions to specific events, such as to the planned mosque building in Reykjavík 2013, can be characterised as moral panic, a concept made well known by Stanley Cohen (2002), who used the concept over sudden upsurge of fear and anxiety caused by (unexpected) changes in the social landscape of a given social environment. He introduced the term moral panic in 1972 to describe the reactions of the press, the public, politicians, police and diverse public institutions to youthful disturbances in the south of England in the 1960s, in most cases, the perceived "imminent danger" is blown out of proportions as a serious threat to the social order, later usually found to be mostly baseless. When the planned mosque construction in Reykjavík in 2013, which will be addressed in more detail later in this chapter, became official knowledge, moral panic erupted among some members of the public and in the media. Inherent in the discourses that emerged during this period were obvious signs of Islamophobia and more generally, xenophobia, with these discourses framed as free speech, and as the right to offend. In this sense, the zone between free speech and hate speech might seem blurred, as Gavan Titley (2020) has examined, where he asks if, and how free speech is utilised as an instrument of expressing racist or derogatory remarks and utterances, and how racist discourse is protected by freedom of speech. In this manner, free speech is used to protect the licence to provoke and offend, and weaponised to express demeaning and derogatory idioms towards targeted groups (often Muslims and immigrants). This makes Titley question why racism is so often at the centre of free speech debates. Accordingly, free speech has been fundamental in constructing racist expressions and is being instrumentalised in public discourses and debates, or, as Titley puts it: " […] free speech has been adopted as a primary mechanism for validating, amplifying and reanimating racist ideas and racializing claims" (Titley, 2020, p. 6).

The media and other public institutions reacted to Muslim immigration and the planned mosque in a negative way, which reflected Cohen's definition of moral panic. This reaction affects the general public as well and is usually out of proportion to the perceived or imagined danger threatening society. "Folk devils" (Cohen, 2002) are created by the "moral entrepreneurs" (Becker, 1963), stereotypes are produced and reproduced to identify and to "other" the evil wrongdoer, and sensationalisms are promoted and published by diverse media. But, as Cohen (2002) argued, the connection between the supposed threat and the actual situation is usually vague or non-existent. However, for moral panic to emerge, there most likely must be some pre-existing anxiety somewhere in the social strata, some historical or political sediment lurking beneath the surface. In the case of Muslims and Islam in the West, these sedimentary layers have a long history, and as recounted earlier, the collective memory of Europe goes back to the Moors in Andalusia, the Crusades and the Ottoman Empire stretching into Europe (Kumar, 2012). In Iceland, the so called "Turkish raid" (Tyrkjaránið) in 1627, referred to earlier, left deep seated resentments, submerged in historical sediments, towards the Muslim world (Þorsteinn Helgason, 1996; 2013). This story

was brought to life by a former mayor of Reykjavík in his anti-Islam, anti-Muslim and anti-mosque construction outburst in an Icelandic tabloid (Jóhannes Stefánsson, 2013), where he said that "Muslims are spreading across the world, and we must contain them". In addition, he claimed that "Islam is a religion that aims to eliminate other faiths and establish itself all over the world". He referred to the "Turkish raid", saying we should "… learn from experience and history. Is it not disgusting that now, 40 years from the volcano eruption in Heimaey [in Westman Islands], to embrace the co-religionists of those who committed mass murder on the island in 1627? And to make them a special brand and symbol in Reykjavík?" (Ólafur F. Magnússon, 2013, 17 July).

Strong anti-Muslim sentiments were underlying factors in the discourses surrounding the mosque affair 2013 and the following few years, and many of the reactions should be conceived and treated similar to terms like racism and xenophobia (Esposito and Kalin, 2011; Kumar, 2012; Rana, 2007; Werbner, 2013). When the mosque affair was in full swing, negative sensibilities and their expressions took hold in public discussions, some of them coloured by fear and – for a want for a better word – hatred. For the sake of fairness, it must be said that there was also considerable support for the mosque and what it stood for: the visible manifestation of Muslim presence in Iceland (Bjarney Friðriksdóttir, 2014). Considering the small number of Muslims in Iceland, (approximately 1200-1500 persons at that time), the violent reaction from the opponents of the mosque was somehow disproportional. Also noteworthy is the fact that most of the ideas put forward by the opponents of the Muslims were imported and borrowed, for example "news", stories and rumours about issues connected to Muslims taken from foreign press outlets that reproduced well-known clichés and stereotypes about Muslims and Islam. These are examples of what I have earlier termed "imported anxiety" (see Introduction). It has been shown that some of this "information" stems from well organised and well financed organisations, whose agendas seems to be to spread Islamophobic material in the media (Ali et al., 2011; Alsultany, 2012; Esposito and Kalin, 2011; Hervik, 2011; Lean, 2012; Shadid & Koningsveld, 2002; Shaheen, 2009).

One of my participants said: "I have experienced discomfort due to my faith … because I "look like a Muslim" … a few times, once I was threatened with violence …". This quote demonstrates the racial dimension of Islamophobia and shows that Islamophobia implies an intersection of ideas about race and religion. The anthropologist Junaid Rana (2007) has discussed the construction of the figure of the "Muslim", and he argues that this figure is to a large degree based on racism where cultural categorisations of nation, religion, ethnicity and gender intersect. Rana sees Islamophobia as a type of racism and claims that the special fear and phobia inherit in it is rooted in economics, social injustice, and inequality (discrimination), as well as in complex historical memories and relations between the West and Islam, as discussed earlier. A part of what is called Islamophobic racism is, according to Rana (2007), a reflexion based on reciprocal narratives about the aggression and transgression of empires, as well as systematic oppression. He considers Islamophobia to be a form of gloss to cover over racism, which has reduced complex groups into a homogeneous

category, “Muslims”. Similarly, Jeldtoft (2009) has addressed collective identification and reification of Muslims (see chapter 5). The examination of Islamophobia as a form of racism is similar to the study of how the concept of race and racism has moved from biological definitions to cultural essentialism (Liberatore, 2013; Rana, 2007; Werbner, 2005). Within this discussion, the concepts of culture and ethnicity has increasingly superseded the concepts of race and racism, which has, as an example, become clear in the way groups such as EDL (English Defence League) started talking about culture instead of race, culture, in this case meaning Muslims, as the anthropologists Giulia Liberatore (2013) and Pnina Werbner (2005) have shown. Similarly, some Icelandic politicians have stated that the “culture” of Muslims is incompatible with Icelandic culture, or European or Western culture for that matter, (Jón Magnússon, 2006; Ólafur F. Magnússon, 2013).

Islamophobia is in some ways a vague concept, but Sayyid (2014) argued that it is a concept for categorising what racism cannot do. It seems unclear and the media further complicates the topic. According to Sayyid (2014), Islamophobia prevents Muslims from living and expressing their identity as Muslims in a meaningful way. Due to the vagueness of the concept, it is better understood by using examples of utterances, actions, practices and attitudes as they actually manifest. Many examples can be found in mainstream media and on social media where hate speech and hate crime takes place, where these examples form a cluster of utterings and actions, and where the dominant theme is the same, i.e., a derogatory discourse and actions against Muslims and Islam. By studying these clusters, it is possible to see how Islamophobia becomes visible (Sayyid, 2014). He also argued that Islamophobia is first and foremost a form of governmentality (Lemke, 2001) and as an instrument of control and oppression. Sayyid (2014) mentions a few examples to support his argument: physical and verbal attacks on Muslims, attacks linked to property owned by Muslims (cf. the dumping of bloodied pig’s head on the ground allotted for mosque construction in Reykjavík), threats of any kind, e.g., burning copies of the Qur’an, and systematic discrimination in public institutions and organised hate speech in the public sphere (especially in the press). One example being death threats to leaders of the Muslim Association of Iceland, expressed on social media (Kristjana Björk Guðbrandsdóttir, 2016; Þorbjörn Þórðarsson, 2016). As discussed earlier, it became clear that Islamophobia is linked to the concepts of race and to racism, but it revolves not solely around fear and hate of Muslims or Islam, but more importantly, it prevents Muslims to be Muslims in multiple ways, covert and overt. This was evident among many of my participants, who found it burdening, repeatedly having to stress what they are not, having to struggle with negative identity.

As has been discussed earlier in this chapter, anti-Muslim views gained momentum in the West post 9/11 and in particular in Scandinavia and Europe following the publication of the so-called Muhammed cartoons in the Danish newspaper Jyllandsposten in 2005 (Herve, 2011). The publication became the subject of public discussions in Icelandic, and a book devoted predominantly to the cartoon affair was published (Auður Jónsdóttir and Óttar M. Norðfjörð, 2008). As can be seen from the following quote from one of the participants, these sentiments were never far below the surface in the public consciousness:

> Back in those days, if we continue with the story, people took me just as an ordinary person, Iceland was relatively poor, compared to many other countries. I felt the person had more value, how he is, how he behaves, your nationality was not an issue, or your religion, even if people sometimes made joking remarks, but after the fall of the Soviet Union, it seemed as if society was turned upside down. Muslims and Islam became the bogeyman to scare Icelanders. Then lately, of course, it's not only towards Muslims, it's foreigners in general … since this is discrimination, not only Muslims, also the Poles, Lithuanians, it depends on the news, negative news. This hurts me, you see, I more or less became a man here [in Iceland], you see, this [Iceland] is my home, my country and my family, if I look back, it seems as something has failed during the upgrading of society, and it is, now, lately, the discussions and the like, it's mostly negative. We were seen as positive and optimistic, and all that, there seems as some "closing of eyes" is ongoing in society now.

This quote from a Muslim man in Iceland demonstrates sentiments of concern and highlights how historical and political factors shape the situation of Muslims. It also underlines that the situation of the Icelandic Muslim community must be seen in the context of geopolitical forces and the wider public discourses on Muslims and Islam in our neighbouring countries.

The negative images and stereotypes of Muslims can be said to have essentialising properties and be given particular values. As was addressed in chapter two, Said (1978) described the forming of images by Europeans concerning the Orient, which first gained momentum with the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon Bonaparte at the end of the 18th century. This was a pivotal moment in the European colonisation of the so-called Muslim world, often said to be the beginning of European colonisation of this region. This Orientalist image-making is inherently negative, where the Other is being imbued with narratives, histories, images and ideas of essence, narrowed down to a manageable phenomenon for political purposes. Often, this image-making went hand in hand with the subjugation of whole peoples (Kazi, 2019; Kumar, 2012; Said, 1978), implying that these peoples were "primitive", backwards, and in some way lower on an imagined evolutionary scale than their oppressors, who considered themselves to be at the top of the evolutionary ladder. This ideology not only implied evolutionary differences but importantly it also conveyed the idea that these subjugated peoples were a potential threat to the oppressors and had to be kept in check. Importantly, it was seen as a threat to European culture. This idea is prevalent today, especially concerning Islam and Muslims (Hervik, 2011), having its origins from the times of the Crusades (Kumar, 2012), and promoted by right-wing xenophobes today (Bangstad, 2014; Carr, 2006; Storhaug, 2015; Ye'or, 2005), as in the form of the "Eurabia discourse".

In the Icelandic historical context, particular images and narratives concerning Muslims and Islam stems from the 17th century (1627), when pirate ships from Algeria conducted slave raids in the south and east of Iceland, mainly in the Westman Islands (Vestmannaeyjar). The

crew on these ships was a mixture of international mercenaries, European and North African/West Asian (Þorsteinn Helgason, 1996, 2013). In addition to having been studied by scholars, this event has also been the subject of a few historical fictions based on contemporary sources from the time of the event (Steinunn Jóhannesdóttir, 2010; Úlfar Þormóðsson, 2003, 2004). Importantly, there is one contemporary account of the event, written by the pastor, Ólafur Egilsson, who was among those captured in Westman Islands and brought to Algiers (Ólafur Egilsson, 1969). This event and the narrative it generated has been instrumentalised for nationalistic purposes from time to time. One of those occasions was when the plan for the Muslims Association of Iceland (MAI) to build a mosque emerged into the public sphere in Iceland, as has been recounted in chapter four.

8.2 Battles for identities:[25] "We must always fight what we are not"

In this section, I juxtapose images and identities of Muslims in Iceland with the public discourse and representations. When I started talking to members of the Muslim community, the first thing they brought up was the contradictions between the public perceptions of Muslims and its overall narrative, as opposed to their own self-image, which they claimed, "…is not us". This image, which is formed by the media and among politicians, pundits, policy makers and other public actors, feeds public perceptions in turn and forms a meta-narrative of the "Muslim" (Bangstad, 2013, 2014; Esposito and Kalin, 2011; Hervik, 2006; Scott, 2007). This "battle of identities" must be seen as identity politics, with roots in oppression, marginalisation and negative stereotyping, implying "ascribed" identities (Bauman, 2004; Bilgrami, 2006). This deprives the person of agency and the ability or power to define his or her significance and identity. Bilgrami (2006) talks of the subjective and objective aspects of identity, where the former often manifests as defensive identity politics, conditioned by external, objective pressure. In this section I address the concerns the participants' perceptions about their Muslim identity, as well as show common representations in the media about Islam and Muslims, juxtaposing these two. Public awareness in Icelandic media about Islam and Muslims in Iceland had been relatively limited, but the discussion would change dramatically in 2013 in relation to the mosque affair. Therefore, I also refer to examples from foreign media as Muslims in Iceland are aware of and concerned about these discourses and knowledge production and since much production of negative stereotypes in Iceland has its main sources there.

This knowledge production has been tied to foreign politics, policies and military operations of the US and their allies that target the Muslim world (Kazi, 2019; Kumar, 2012; Mamdani, 2004; Said, 1997). A certain meta-narrative has been put forward that has been continuously reproduced in the media and in a variety of academic publications (Harris and Nawaz, 2015; Huntington, 1993; Lewis, 1990). This knowledge production is not new, and, as Edward Said (1997) has shown, there have been correlations between the interests of so-called

[25] A participant said to me once that "we must always fight something we are not", when discussing common stereotypes of Muslims in public discourse.

orientalists and the West's colonial and post-colonial projects in the East. Also, the prevalent anti-Muslim discourse in Denmark (Hervik, 2011; Larsen, 2009) for many years has been extensive and has considerably affected the Muslims in Iceland, leading back to the so-called Cartoon affair in 2005. One participant, talking about the Cartoon affair, said:

> I know that Muslims these days are making mistakes, are making a lot of mistakes today, they don't know their religion well enough, are ignorant of their religion. And the enemies of Islam are taking this and putting this on the front page and saying: look at Muslims, that's how they are, it's like totally, this has nothing to do with Islam… [Y]eah, there is a saying, where my freedom stops, your freedom starts, like to take the freedom of others, like when you draw something like this, you are expressing your freedom but you are taking the freedom of others. I mean, because you're hurting a lot of people.

This quote demonstrates the concerns many Muslims in Iceland have when it comes to the image the majority society in the West makes and promotes about them – an image that has no resemblance to their own identity as Muslims. They have expressed their concerns to me about these discourses, especially the Danish one, since in the globalised world of our time ideas travel unhindered across the world, disregarding borders and boundaries, where images and imaginations form ideas and attitudes (Appadurai, 1996, 2006). The people I encountered in my study were concerned about the possibility of this negative discourse taking roots in Iceland. These concerns increased during the recession after 2008, with increased unemployment and other socio-economic problems.

As mentioned above, Islamophobia has gained steadily momentum in Denmark for more than a decade. This momentum was set in motion by a right-wing government and inspired by The Danish Peoples' Party[26] . This government was in power from 2001 to 2011 (Hervik, 2011; Larsen, 2009). The politics of this right-wing government during this period, have been referred to as systematic persecution of one specific social group, Muslims (Hervik, 2011; Hussain, 2007; Larsen, 2009). The party leader Pia Kjærsgaard, for example, said on DR2 Deadline, 3 February 2001: "But Islam, in its essence, and that is what we should focus on, is a religion of violence" (Larsen, 2009)[27] . Another utterance compared Islam to Nazism: "I am in agreement with Søren Krarup (radical right-wing Danish pastor), that it is exactly the same symbol – the hijab and the swastika" said by Pia Kjærsgaard, on TV-Avisen, DR1, 29 April 2007 (Larsen, 2009)[28] . Icelandic Muslims looked to the situation in Denmark with

[26] This anti-Muslim campaign started while I was living in Copenhagen, where Pia Kjærsgaard, the then leader of the Danish People's Party (DPP), began talking about the threat to "Danish culture" from Islam, thus reifying all Muslims and Islam as monolithic. The DPP has never been in government but had immense influence on the right-wing government and its policies towards immigrants, and Muslims in particular.

[27] Translated from Danish by the author. Pia Kjærsgaard was the leader of the right-wing nationalist party Danish People´s Party (Dansk Folkeparti), known for her Islamophobic views.

[28] Translated from Danish by the author.

concern as a possible future scenario for Iceland, as expressions such as these had become accepted as “normal” in Danish political discourse.

Corresponding ideas had been present in Iceland, expressed by, for example, (former) Icelandic parliamentarians for the Liberal Party (Frjálslyndi flokkurinn), Jón Magnússon and Magnús Þór Hafsteinsson, who both sought political capital by diving into the ongoing Islamophobic ideas in the surrounding countries. Magnús Þór Hafsteinsson, translated a strongly Islamophobic book by the Norwegian journalist and writer Hege Storhaug, with its Icelandic title Þjóðarplágan íslam (e. The National Plague of Islam) in 2016. The following quote from Jón Magnússon is an example of this discourse: “I do not want people from the brotherhood of Muhammed [sic] coming here, with their own laws and who do not respect basic human rights and who offend women” (Jón Magnússon, 2006). These two Icelandic politicians had officially aired their displeasure against the “stream” of immigrants to Iceland. Jón Magnússon (2006) wrote an article in the newspaper Blaðið that Iceland should be for Icelanders and that it was vital to limit immigration. He expressed especially his antipathy against what he called the “Brotherhood of Muhammed” [sic] and by his account, their presence in Iceland was quite undesirable and most likely dangerous. In 2008, Magnús Þór Hafsteinsson expressed his concerns about the arrival of a small group of single mothers (Palestinian from Iraq) and their children who were to arrive in Iceland as refugees and were to be resettled in the small town of Akranes in Western Iceland when he said that “We must look to our own first (Við höfum nóg með okkur sjálf)” (Magnús Þór Hafsteinsson, 2008). According to Erla Kristjánsdóttir and Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir (2018), who conducted a study among this group of refugees, the women said they had enjoyed welcome and sympathy from the local residents in Akranes, who were curious about their “exotic” culture and appearance, with the hijab as the most obvious item of attention. They said that some of the locals accepted them while others did not, and they reported an incident where a group of teenagers assaulted them in the street, giving them a serious shock. Yet, the women maintained that many of the locals had good relations with them, despite some drawbacks. They underlined their insistence on maintaining their culture and Islamic religion, outwardly expressed by wearing the hijab and living their “Islamic way of life” (p. 9). The women expressed positivity of feeling safe in their new surroundings but complained about their general social isolation and not managing to have close Icelandic friends, which was also largely because of their little knowledge of the Icelandic language. The language barrier along with being an “exotic” group of Others, living in a small town, and not able to work, all helped to nurture a feeling of being left out. Generally, the women were unhappy with the organisation of the language lessons for them and their children, as well as not getting enough help with getting work. The situation of these women and children seemed to reveal an intersection of alienation, isolation, and distancing from parts of the local people, who found the refugees to be different, Other, strange and practicing a religion which was surrounded be negative stereotypes and narratives and being women (Erla Kristjánsdóttir and Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir, 2018).

The Othering of Muslims is often centred on The Muslim Woman, which has been characterised as gendered Islamophobia, where gender is a central identity in the construction of anti-Muslim sentiments. At the launch of the so-called War on Terror in 2001, one incentive for the invasion of Afghanistan was the "fight for the dignity of women" (Abu-Lughod, 2002; Mustafa, 2020, p. 4). Muslim women had to be freed from the constrains of their religion and culture, as well as from their oppressive Muslim men (Mamdani, 2004). Linked to these Islamophobic stereotypes, and with no regard for freedom of religion or expression, several European states established laws and regulations banning head coverings of Muslim women (Bowen, 2007; Scott, 2007, Mustafa, 2020). Even if anti-Muslim discourses affect all Muslims, it is Muslim women who have had to suffer the brunt of the regulations and bans related to this prejudiced rhetoric. These bans have left Muslim women vulnerable to attacks, as well as restricting their religious freedom. Islamophobic attacks, verbal or physical, have become normalised and have "passed the dinner-table-test" (Batty, 2011). Oppression of women in the Muslim world was seen as part of Islamic fundamentalism, and in Europe as a sign of the failure of Muslims to integrate into Western society, with the stereotypic trope of the Muslim woman as the standout figure, and in extension, the hijab. In this manner, gender was instrumentalised in the anti-Muslim discourse, what has been called gendered Islamophobia (Alimahomed-Wilson, 2020; Bakali and Soubani, 2021; Gohir, 2015; Mustafa, 2020). In addition, anti-Muslim discourse in the West pointed to the status of LGBTIQ+ rights and women in general to demonstrate the cultural superiority of their societies over Muslim ones. At odds with this "liberal" image was the veiled Muslim woman needing to be assisted in liberating herself. Using the status of queer people and women's rights in the anti-Muslim propaganda has been called homonationalism (Dohest, 2020; Puar, 2013), a concept referring to the way LGTBQ+ people and other gender issues are instrumentalised in nationalist projects in opposition to the religious Others, mainly Muslims. Puar (2013) has shown how homonationalism is used to understand how liberal attitudes towards queer people had become the measure of "[…] the right and capacity for national sovereignty [to be] evaluated" (p. 336). He claims that homonationalism has become internationalised, and, as an example, he argues that the state of Israel instrumentalises homonationalism to divert attention from the occupation and oppression of the Palestinian people, "pinkwashing" (p. 377) the occupation of Palestinian lands. Interestingly, like Muslims, queer people have been marginalised in different ways, and queer immigrants in Iceland have been racialised comparably to Muslims, while being instrumentalised in opposition to them, using the homonationalist trope in doing so (Linda Sólveigar Guðmundsdóttir and Unnur Dís Skaptadóttir, 2017).

According to Gohir (2015), the gendered dimension of Islamophobia is not only the fact that it targets Muslim women's clothing but also that most political actors who want to limit Muslim women's choice of clothing in expressing their religion are men, with a few exceptions, such as Pia Kjærgaard, from the Danish Peoples Party. Gohir points to the fact that women's head coverings are a contested issue within Islam itself, demonstrating the flexibility and diversity of interpretations within the Islamic tradition. Most of those opposed

to the face veil are men, but they are also mostly from (far) right wing political parties (p. 28). She argues that the bans concerning veiling are not just about Islamophobia but also about misogyny. This is not about gender equality nor about protecting the rights of women, since at the same time they dictate how Muslim women should dress. This can only be seen as the patriarchy wanting to control women's bodies, to control what they can wear and what they cannot wear (p. 29). Therefore, as El Guindi (1999) has argued, the hijab should be categorised as a matter of clothing and not as a religious symbol. According to Bakali and Soubani (2021), the discussions around Muslim women concern not predominantly religious issues but also gender and its physical identity marker of their faith: the hijab. One important aspect, therefore, of Islamophobia as a form of racism is gender. Accordingly, by understanding the gendered dimensions and experiences of Islamophobia, it is helpful to see how the image of the Muslim Other is constructed in relation to a nationalist subject of the majority culture, where the experiences of Islamophobia according to gender are not necessarily identical (p. 3). Muslims' experiences of Islamophobia are diverse, as it operates on many levels and is an intersection of race, class, gender and ethnicity; that is, it is not primarily about religion but with gender as an important identity marker. The cultural and national contexts concerning the Muslim veil are diverse and differ from country to country and are contextual to various cultural and ethnic situations, which makes Muslims' approaches to veiling in the West similarly diverse. As Gohir (2015) stated, this issue is equally contested in many Muslim societies, therefore this picture is far from being singular or simple.

By positioning Muslim identities against the dominant discourses concerning Muslims (Baumann, 1996) as expressed by the media and other public institutions, it becomes clear to what degree power is exercised and asymmetry is involved. Here we have two voices where the stronger overpowers the weaker and puts words in his/her mouth. This relationship and potential conflict regularly came up during conversations with the participants, who said that they only wished to live in peace with God and their fellow humans and to build a good life for themselves and their children. They were concerned with what they saw as a one-sided and biased discourse in the media about their fellow religious brothers and sisters. For them, this situation signifies lack of justice, mutuality and respect, and they wondered what they had done to have to suffer a discourse which often resembled persecution. They knew some of their fellow Muslims committed serious crimes and practiced excessive utterances and actions, preaching uproar and hate instead of peace and compassion. They claimed that they did not want to be prosecuted for the sins of the few – for them, that was the ultimate injustice.

8.3 Organised Islamophobia

Organised forums promoting Islamophobia and racism in general, have been operating in Iceland for some time. One example is a blog called Group 1627[29] (founded in 2002) and the subsequent Facebook group, Mótmælum mosku á Íslandi ("[We] Protest against a mosque in Iceland"), founded in 2010, which was very active in the mosque affair before the municipal elections in Reykjavík in 2014. This Islamophobic movement has published a lot of anti-Islamic material in Icelandic, much of it translated from diverse foreign Islamophobic sources, both as articles in the mainstream media and online (Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson, 2017). There have been several polls, where attitudes of people in Iceland towards foreigners and immigrants, were shown to be relatively negative towards Muslims in Iceland. An IMG Gallup poll from 2005 conducted for the Icelandic Red Cross (Rauði krossinn, 2005) showed that 22% did not want to have Muslims as neighbours. Most of those polled felt that immigrants were positive for the economy, but Muslims were negatively singled out (Vísir, 2005). In a poll from 2014 (MMR, 2014), 43,4% of the respondents were against the building of a mosque, while 31,5% supported it. People were more positive towards other religious associations than Muslim, as 67,2% were positive towards the National Lutheran Church; 54,7% were positive for the Nordic Pagan Society (Ásatrúarfélagið) building a place for worship; 41,7% were positive for the Buddhist Society having a monastery; and 32,9% were positive towards the Russian Orthodox Church building a Church (Eyjan, 2013). Another poll showed a notable difference in respondents' views of immigrants according to their place of origin. 72% were positive towards immigrants from Western and Northern Europe, while 43% were positive towards people from the Middle East, and 34% negative towards that same demographic. In the same study, 57% said they support the reception of refugees from Syria, while 22% were against it (Þórunn Elísabet Bogadóttir, 2015). These polls all show similar results, where the general attitude towards Muslims is more negative than against other immigrants or foreigners. These results seem to reflect the general mood of the Icelandic public spanning approximately 12 years.

The activities of the people behind the Group 1627 and the Islamophobic Facebook group, Mótmælum mosku á Íslandi, must be seen in relation to results of these surveys. The scholar of comparative religion, Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson (2017), argues that one should see the actors promoting Islamophobia in Iceland as an organised activity, or as activism, finding inspiration and material from international Islamophobic organisations. This has been mapped in the report The Roots of Islamophobia Networks in America (Ali, Wajahat, et al, 2011), European Islamophobic Report (Bayrakli and Hafez, 2016) and in Confronting Fear: Islamophobia and it impact in the US (CAIR, 2017). These reports show that there are organisations whose aim it is to produce and distribute Islamophobic material in diverse media and online and that these organisations, located mainly in the US, in Europe and in Israel, are well-funded by many "sponsors" whose common position is strong support for

[29] 1627 was the year of the so-called Turkish Raid (Tyrkjaránið), where corsairs from Algeria attacked southern Iceland, mainly the Westman Islands (Þorsteinn Helgason, 1996).

Zionism and extreme right-wing, nationalist politics. The Icelandic Islamophobic actors have used material from these sources, translated it to Icelandic and published it on their various fora (see Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson, 2017). The Group 1627 was founded on 11 September 2002 (one year after 9/11) and the anti-Islamic Facebook group Mótmælum mosku á Íslandi (We protest a mosque in Iceland) was founded following the allotment to the MAI of the plot to build a mosque (the site has since become a "closed group"). The goal was to fight Islam and the presence of Muslims in Iceland, as the leading person behind these sites felt that "Muslims had embarked on an invasion of the West" (Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson, 2017, p. 8). He wrote letters under different names to public figures and politicians, as well as published articles in the mainstream media and on his blogs (for example hrydjuverk.wordpress.com)[30] , and later, on the Facebook group page. His opinions were presented on a local religious television station and on the radio station, Útvarp Saga (Radio Saga), both active anti-immigrant media (Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson, 2017). Both these outlets have repeatedly been criticised by ECRI (2006, 2012, 2017) for inflammatory rhetoric against Muslims.

Most of the material published by these actors against Muslims were false and hateful discourses and included threats against known members of the Muslim community in Iceland. They wanted to ban Islam and expel all Muslims from Iceland and from the West. They railed against the danger of "genetic mixing" with the "pure" white race, and they had been inspired by the ideas of the Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik, for whom they had shown great admiration (Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson, 2017). They recommended his ideology and his publications (e.g., his propaganda film Knights Templar and his infamous manifest, 2083; A European Declaration of Independence, where Breivik conceptualises his plans for his coming actions, the murdering of a large number of youths in Norway in July 2011). Breivik found much of his inspiration from the same international organisations as the Icelandic actors have done (Bangstad, 2014). The admiration for Breivik by these Icelandic Islamophobia actors is, according to Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson (2017), demonstrated by their repeated talk of the importance of killing Muslims and all those who do not accept the viewpoint of their movement. For example, the editor of the Facebook group suggested dropping an atomic bomb on Mecca during the hajj, the Islamic pilgrimage, where around two million Muslims come together. He also talked about exterminating all Muslims in the West (Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson, 2017, pp. 13-14). Similarly, extreme racist sentiments are being expressed by these actors, where they claim that "Africans" have low intelligence, and one should not let them into the country. When this racist and Islamophobic discourse is studied, the similarities with the discourse of the Nazis concerning the Jews in the last century are obvious, and the "Jewish problem", where they talk about exterminations, stripping people of their civil rights, wanting to place them in isolation (in concentration camps). This account is necessary to cast some light on the context of the

[30] Hryðjuverk = terrorism. This site is not easily accessible: "This site is marked private by its owner. If you would like to view it, you'll need permission from the site owner. Request an invite and we'll send your username to the site owner for their approval".

discourses about Islam and Muslims in Iceland, and to place it in the wider framework of international Islamophobic discourses.

One expression of the operations of the Islamophobic group was when the (then former) chairman of the MAI received repeated threats. He reported these threats to the police and said these threats were very demeaning to him personally and to his religion, and they should be punishable. He said that "this is personal" and that he hoped the police would start to take this hate speech seriously. The threats were placed online, under the name of the person making the threats. The chairman said that there was hate speech against many minority groups on this web page, and he mentions the "[We] Protest against a mosque in Iceland" Facebook group, where many disgusting things were published (Brjánn Jónasson, 2013).

There have been and are other, similar groups in Iceland, and in 2016, a political party promoting similar ideas was founded (Þjóðfylkingin [Icelandic National Front]). Another similar entity is a society called Vakur (vakur.is), which is an ultra-right-wing and nationalist group that wants to "preserve Western culture and the white race". Vakur invited the well-known anti-Muslim activist, Robert Spencer, to Iceland, which was met with protests from the Muslim community (Fontaine, 2017). This whole discourse does not go unnoticed by the Muslims who live in Iceland, who, as I have emphasised, often see themselves forced to fight images and ideas of who and what they are, which does not align with their own identities as Muslims. Eyrún Eyþórsdóttir and Kristín Loftsdóttir (2019) have shown that extreme right-wing organisations have become part of the political landscape in Iceland, yet without much following. Instances of hate speech and anti-immigrant, anti-Muslim rhetoric has become more obvious in the public space, both from politicians and media pundits. Some of these organisations have international connections and much of their fearmongering is based on imported discourses. I will address these issues in more detail in section 8.8 below. Much of hate-speech rhetoric aims at promoting negative and reductive stereotypes of Muslims and emphasising the perceived danger and threat they pose to Western societies and "Western Civilization" (p. 262). In this context, it is important to realise that one of the more serious aspects of Islamophobia, definable as symbolic violence, is forcing the diverse and complex ways of being Muslim into a homogeneous, stereotypical form, or model, thereby denying Muslims to express their complex identities, and preventing them to be what they are.

8.4 The Mosque affair in Reykjavík 2013

As mentioned above, the Muslim Association of Iceland (MAI) was allotted a plot to construct a mosque in 2013, which caused huge public debates in both the conventional press and on social media. Facebook groups were established by the opponents as well as by supporters of the project, and the discussion bore all the hallmarks of moral panic (Cohen, 2002). The MAI had been waiting for over a decade for this, which some Muslims interpreted as indicating that they were treated differently from followers of other religions. The thirteen years "non-process" on behalf of the municipal authorities in Reykjavík concerning the application for mosque construction had been criticised from several directions before

the final decision, by the U.S. Department of State (2012, 2014, 2015) and most importantly by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI, 2003, 2007, 2012, 2017, report on Iceland), which issued a report on implementing human rights in Iceland. According to the ECRI reports, perceptions regarding Muslims in Iceland had degenerated, and the authorities have been dragging their feet in implementing the recommendations for the protection of minorities, not least Muslims in Iceland. One small example of this is that for the month of Ramadan in 2009, a prayer room had been opened for Muslims at the University of Iceland due to pressure from some Muslim students, but it was not re-established after that Ramadan was over and not opened again for this purpose. This prayer room was part of a chapel, which is sometimes used for multi-religious purposes but mostly for Christian rituals. Since then, Muslim students have not had any special accommodations for their religious practices at the University of Iceland. The number of Muslim students at the University was at that time between 20 and 30, but they have yet to organise as a group, which might explain the inactivity in this case.

The subject of this section is the discourses and Islamophobic outbreaks that emerged when, as mentioned earlier, the Muslim Association of Iceland (MAI) was provided with a plot and permission for construction of a mosque in Reykjavík, the capital of Iceland (Borgarráð Reykjavíkur, 2013). What followed was that underlying scepticism and fear surfaced, fear against Islam and Muslims. I examine various discourses in the press and in social media in Iceland about this planned mosque construction. When it entered public consciousness, an outbreak of moral outrage occurred; suddenly, many people had opinions on Muslims and Islam, and a fair amount of those views were strongly coloured by well-known and frequently recycled prejudices and phobias towards Muslims and Islam. All of a sudden, Islam and Muslims became a concern. Public debate about Islam and Muslims was, until 2013 (cf. the “mosque affair”), mostly informed by global and international events (cf. “imported anxiety”) rather than by local Muslim affairs. Since early 2013, Icelandic Muslims emerged as an increasingly conspicuous topic in the public discourse in Iceland, following the fulfilment of a decade-long promise of a plot for mosque construction. In May 2014, the municipal elections in Reykjavík, the capital of Iceland, brought two representatives from the Progressive Party (Framsóknarflokkurinn) into City Hall on an overt anti-Muslim ticket. This caused prolonged and heated debates (see Jón Trausti Reynisson, 15 April 2014; Kjartan Atli Kjartansson 23 May 2014; ruv.is, 23 May 2014), which were further contributions to the debates caused by the allocation of the plot to the Muslim Association of Iceland (MAI) to build a mosque. The vote underlined the gradual accumulation of anti-Muslim sentiments that had been fermenting for some time, and the concerns surrounding Muslims and Islam came to a head during the summer 2014. This atmosphere led to growing debates about Islam and Muslims.

Before the allotment became reality, the chairman of the Muslim Association of Iceland (MAI) told a newspaper in 2010 (Karen Kjartansdóttir, 2010) that a new mosque must be built and run according to “Icelandic terms and conditions”. The association, he claimed, should not receive funding from abroad, since it was vital to have control over the finances

of the association in order to preserve its independence. He also talked about the (then) recent split, where a group of people left the MAI and established the Islamic Cultural Centre of Iceland (ICCI). The chairman of the MAI was concerned about radicalism and found it important for Muslim associations to avoid and prevent radical strands of Islam. He said that the position of Muslims in the world was precarious, especially because of radical groups and their militant actions. One should not, he continued, generalise about a group of people from the (bad) deeds of a few. In the spring of 2012, when it was known that the MAI had been granted a plot for mosque construction in Sogamýri in Reykjavík, it was reported on mbl.is that a letter from the anti-Muslim Facebook site had been distributed, where the neighbours to the planned mosque were warned about the mosque and the presence of Muslims in the area (Morgunblaðið, 2012). The letter had a header saying: "Protest against a mosque in Iceland" (as in the name of the anti-Muslim Facebook group, mentioned earlier). The letter pictured a mosque, with a skull in front of it and blood streaming from the mouth. The letter was obviously meant to frighten the people living in the area, but the then chairman for the MAI said the letter contained generalisations, false information, and distortions. The letter stated that terrorism was organised in mosques and that there would be constant disturbances from calls to prayer. The chairman denounced this and insisted that prayer times were and would be announced by SMS messages or on the website of the MAI, not through a loudspeaker. The letter stated that:

> A mosque is a parallel control centre of Muslims in the host country (where they have migrated to), where they are like a state within the state (some claim that there is foothold for an invasion army, and a threat of sharia law being established). The leader of the mosque is usually an imam, and is first and foremost a politician, aiming to work AGAINST the host society. On Fridays, he leads the praise of Mecca, the Muhammed the messenger and Allah. There [in the mosque], sharia judgements are delivered, about honour killings, which relatives perform against girls, who have become too westernised. Sharia-law is taught and used there. Most terrorist acts are organised in mosques (Fengu áróðursbréf, 2012. Translated by the author).

The chairman said he knew who the author of the letter was and that he had promoted Islamophobic material online for some time. The media coverage of the "mosque affair", which had become extensive in the summer and autumn of 2013, continued relentlessly in 2014. The printed press, television channels and radio stations, as well as social media, mainly Facebook, debated the case from different sides, supporting or opposing the project and by extension, Muslims. These debates will be discussed in more detail in section 8.8 of this chapter. A group that supported the mosque and the Muslims founded a Facebook page, "We do not oppose a mosque in Iceland" (Við mótmælum ekki mosku á Íslandi). As an example of the growing interest in Muslim and Islamic affairs, a humanistic, atheist society (The Icelandic Humanist Association [Siðmennt]) organised a seminar in late October 2014 with the title "Should we fear Islam?" Among the speakers was a member of the board of Siðmennt; an MP from the Pirate Party; the then chairman for the Muslim Association of

Iceland (MAI); and a PhD student in anthropology, who had lived in the Middle East over a period of time. Some people found the wording of the title strange and misleading, implying real need for fear, by linking "fear" and "Islam" and thus speaking into the mainstream stereotypical discourse which dominated public discussions of this group, which maybe was the goal of the organisers. After this seminar, the representative for Siðmennt was attacked on social media by anti-Islam activists for being an apologist for Islam and Muslims, despite his open declaration as atheist, which demonstrated the virulent mood surrounding this topic.

Around this time, a senior police officer expressed his concerns about the possibility of the civil war in the Middle East spilling into Iceland in the form of ISIS/ISIL militants and the consequent need for arming the police (Morgunblaðið, 2014). Many saw his claims as aimed at the Muslim community and an attempt to promote anxiety towards Muslims. Following the municipal elections in 2014, heated and often ill-tempered debates and arguments dominated social media. To put this into some perspective, referring to research (Bjarney Friðriksdóttir, 2014) on articles and comments in the digital media, for every negative, or anti-Muslim comment, two to three positive comments usually followed, demonstrating considerable public support for the mosque project and for the Muslims. A poll was conducted by MMR (Media and market research) asking people about the mosque construction, and the result showed that around 40% were against the mosque project, 30% were positive and 30% had no opinion; that is, 60% were, accordingly, not opposed to the building of the mosque (ruv.is, 8 October 2014; mmr.is, 2014).

During this period, debates linked to the mosque plan raged on in society. One widely published example was when a well-known radio host, who is known for her xenophobic and Islamophobic broadcasts on Útvarp Saga (Radio Saga), dressed up in a quasi-Islamic head-covering balaclava (calling it burqa), asking if broadcasters of the future would be forced to dress like that when the "Arabs" have taken over. This event was typical of a certain discursive level in the tabloid media (Hjálmar Friðriksson, 06.03.2015). Similarly, a historian, known for his anti-Muslim sentiments, framing the "problem" in kinship terms said that Muslims were like violent members of the family and that the politicians did not dare to act, indicating "political correctness" as the problem (note: no case of violent incidents involving Muslims in Iceland have been reported) (Jón Trausti Reynisson, 08.04.2015). The former chairman of the Muslim Association of Iceland was occasionally drawn into these discussions, and he saw himself forced to defend and correct multiple public statements uttered by diverse anti-Muslim persons (Ingibjörg Dögg Kjartansdóttir, 10.04.2015). One City council member for the Progressive Party (Jón Trausti Reynisson, 15.04.2015) said she wanted to expel all Muslims from the country: "All Muslims should be sent back to their home in Saudi Arabia" and "While we have a National Church, we should not provide plots for houses such as mosques or the Greek Orthodox Church". One well-known blogger said that a "shooting licence" had been given against the "Christian majority" (Hjálmar Friðriksson, 19.05.2015). Additionally, one priest belonging to the Lutheran National Church warned against the "growing influence" of Muslims (Hjálmar Friðriksson, 04.09.2015) and

expressed his concerns about Muslim influence on the "European cultural heritage". These diverse expressions show the extent to which Muslims in Iceland have had to endure discrimination and prejudice (see the ECRI reports). These few examples demonstrate clearly the mood that had emerged in the wake of the plan for the mosque building and echo the anti-Muslim views and sentiments that have been and are expressed in neighbouring countries; comments like these are part of a widespread and well-financed activism, often called the "Islamophobic Industry" (Ali et al, 2011; Lean, 2012). This further indicates the links between anti-Muslim activists in Iceland and international actors and the importance of placing the situation of Icelandic Muslims in a wider, historical and political global context.

8.5 Issues of mosque construction and funding

As was discussed in chapter four, the Muslim Association of Iceland's (MAI) application process for the construction of a mosque began in 1999 (the MAI was founded in 1997). In 2001 the MAI bought a locale in an industrial/office building in the eastern part of Reykjavík, which improved the situation for social and religious practices of the Muslims considerably. At the time of this writing the MAI is still based there. Following the application, there was scant response from the municipal authorities in Reykjavík, and, as has been recounted earlier, it was only after the municipal elections in 2010 that the MAI received a plot to build a mosque. Not until the 20th of September 2013 was the contract was completed and signed (Borgarráð Reykjavíkur, 2013), which led to further media and/or social media debates. The other Muslim association, The Islamic Cultural Centre in Iceland (ICCI), had recently acquired a house for themselves, financed by foreign funding from The Al Risala Scandinavian Foundation (Al-Risala, 2013), thought to originate from Saudi Arabia. This cultural centre, or mosque, did stir some controversies in the beginning, with some people worrying that it would become a centre for Islamic fundamentalism and eventually for Islamic political activism (Islamism) or something worse. According to some of the research participants, the ICCI's links with the Al Risala foundation implicated doctrinal conditions ("strings attached"), which supposedly influences the message during religious rituals and sermons, something the imam has denied (personal correspondence). This could not be confirmed, but from my own experience as having attended sermons at the ICCI, there was no indication that the imam was communicating anything other than basic doctrinal issues from the scriptures. He was very rarely political in any sense; rather he emphasised normative and moralistic virtues through his sermons.

As can be seen from the timeline, it would take fourteen years, from the initial application (1999) to the formal and official allocation of the plot for the construction of the mosque (2013) to come through. This is a far longer time than for most other similar cases. For example, the pagan Ásatrúarfélagið (The Nordic Pagan Society) and the Russian Orthodox Church received permission for their plots in 2007, despite having applied for it much later, than the MAI had done (Heimir Björnsson, 2009). The same applies to a Buddhist association (The Thai Temple in Iceland Foundation), who received their plot in 2009 (Morgunblaðið, 2009). The leaders of the MAI maintain that the delay in their case can only be because it

involves Islam and Muslims, and, according to them, this is an example of Islamophobia from the side of the municipal authorities.

8.6 Comparative cases from Europe

The general reaction to the news of a future mosque in Reykjavík is in many ways comparable to when new mosques have been built in other Western countries (Cesari, 2005) and consequently when the religious life and practice of Muslims has become visible by moving from basements and industrial locations to purpose-built mosques. This visual manifestation is a symbolic confirmation that Islam and Muslims have become a permanent fixture in the Western public, physical, social and symbolic space that the locals have historically perceived as theirs (Western, European, Christian, secular) being invaded by strangers (Bowen, 2007; Salvatore, 2004). In most European countries, the process of mosque construction has followed more or less similar patterns, often being labelled the Islamification of European public space (Cesari, 2005). The movement from private to public space by Muslims, in the form of a mosque – a physical manifestation, both of Islam and as a demonstration of the "we are here to stay" – has usually caused some temporary moral panic in the societies concerned. A mosque is a concrete, visual symbol and manifestation of Islam in the public space and of the social and communal life of Muslims. As Cesari (2005) discusses, the process of constructing mosques in several urban areas in Europe seems to have developed in similar ways. The construction of a mosque always indicated negotiation between Muslim community leaders and local, regional or city authorities. Often, the process takes place in a hostile atmosphere, with gradual acceptance, where Islam goes from being unwanted to being tolerated. Most of the time, the strongest resistance came from the local community, usually in accordance with the degree of acceptance or hostility, and importantly, familiarity (based on a historical timespan) with Islam and Muslims. Sometimes, the application process suffers from disagreements and tensions between conflicting interests of local Muslim associations and/or Muslim community leaders (as in the tension between MAI and ICCI), making the issue strongly politicised, externally as well as internally. In countries like France and the UK, where Muslims have resided for a relatively long time, the process of application and construction of mosques has been facilitated by long-time communication and more or less friction-free cohabitation (often good) between local Muslim representatives and non-Muslim community members. In some other countries, with shorter history of immigration of Muslims and Muslim communities among them, like Germany, the Nordic countries, and Iceland, as well as Eastern Europe, the resistance and hostility has been markedly more prominent (Cesari, 2005; Maussen, 2009).

Apart from the often obvious and sometimes unspoken Islamophobia, several reasons are given for resisting mosque construction, the most common being traffic problems, noise (from the call to prayer), security problems (especially post 9/11 and 7/7 [the London terror bombings], and so on), while the main reason is the meta-narrative about Islam, engendering Islamophobia. The presence of Islam and Muslims in the community is therefore frequently seen as a security problem and as a threat to public and domestic order

(Cesari, 2005). Accordingly, resistance is sometimes connected to the marginal social and economic position of Muslims and therefore to the financing of the construction of a mosque, fearing unwanted influence in the local community from radical Islamic elements with economic clout from abroad (for example Saudi Arabia). This is a concern that some people in Reykjavík share because the Muslim community in Iceland is not particularly financially well off. The question whether the construction of a mosque should be considered as a plain urban policy about building permits or as a religious issue has been raised (Cesari, 2005). The former leader of the MAI has similarly discussed this topic, where he maintains that the issue is (or should be) purely about municipal and urban planning and should not be framed in a religious discourse. Some politicians tap into the moral panic of the public and seek to define their planning policy in religious (Islamic) terms, something that other (religious) building projects do not have to go through. Some Muslim community leaders see this as a regulatory mechanism for and of Islamic community institutions, as well as having negative effect on the perception and identity of Muslims as citizens.

8.7 Media discourses and the mosque affair

Michel Foucault claimed that: "Power is exercised on those who are known through discourse. Those who produce discourses, therefore, have the power to enforce its validity so it effectively becomes truth" (Foucault, 1980, in Poole, 2009, p. 101). From this perspective, the media contributes to discursive environments and has the power to reproduce moral norms, theoretical explanations and consequently techniques of social control (Foucault, 1982, in Poole, 2009, p. 102). According to Poole (2009), Muslims have long been concerned about media coverage of themselves and Islam. At the same time, academic interest has grown, wanting to explain the negative images of Muslims in Western media. One explanation is the shift from communism as the main threat to Western hegemony to political Islam and the oil-power of some Muslim states. This ideological shift has prompted the media to demonise Muslims and present them as a threat to Western interests and "Western civilization" (p. 17). Poole argues that the concept of orientalism (Said, 1978) is crucial to these representations, with roots in the historical and political construction of colonialism and the Orient as alien, where the opposition of "us" and "other" is essentialised and stereotyped, and in that way, having a definite function. According to Knott, Poole and Taire (2013), media coverage of Muslims and Islam, rather than contextualising the subject matter historically or politically, focus primarily on negative, reductionist stories. Most of the coverage concerned issues like terrorism, religious fundamentalism and fanaticism, and other negative stories, ignoring the diversity and heterogeneity of Muslims societies. Because of this, whole social groups and individuals are criminalised and made suspect and by association conflated with extremist activities.

Peter Hervik (2011, 2019) has shown how the Danish media was politicised in promoting negative images of Muslims and Islam to such a degree that Islamophobic and racist discourses became normalised in Danish society, eventually leading to law-making aimed at discriminating against Muslims and restricting their civil liberties. This played its part in

bringing a right-wing government to power in 2001 (Hervik, 2011, pp. 70-71). The Danish authorities created designated "ghettoes" in areas inhabited predominantly by Muslim immigrants, where laws that are different to laws for the general population are established. Apparently, this can easily be characterised as an apartheid system (Versi, 2020), This demonstrates the immense power the mainstream media can wield in shaping public opinion and affecting political processes, and Hervik (2019) has argued that by politicising the mainstream media, a process of racialisation takes place in a public environment of commercial interests, xenophobia and Islamophobia, creating accessible narratives based on racism and racialisation through effective management (Hervik, 2019, p. 3). According to Sindre Bangstad (2014, pp. 136-143), like the situation in Denmark, most of mainstream media in Norway corroborated with right-wing views concerning issues of immigration, particularly Muslims, by presenting narratives on their outlets that were in concert with these viewpoints. The main TV stations and most of the larger newspapers were part of constructing images of Muslims that were primarily negative, where some of them had positive endorsement of Islamophobic publications as Eurabia (Ye'or, 2005), which foretells the taking over of Europe of Muslims in the near future. Similarly, the Norwegian mainstream media helped pave the way for Hege Storhaug's book Islam: The Eleventh Plague (2015), a bestselling book which presents a very negative image of Muslims and Islam, and which was funded by right-wing political parties, as well as by wealthy businessmen, (Bangstad and Helland, 2019). This media coverage of Muslims in Norway gradually normalised anti-Muslim sentiments in the public sphere, as the "dinner-table-test" was passed (Batty, 2011). Bangstad (2014) suggested that this mainstream Islamophobic media discourse in Norway played its part, along with other controversial online platforms, in radicalising the Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik, who murdered 77 people in 2011, which is an example of how hate-speech can lead to hate-crimes.

The Norwegian journalist, writer and far-right activist, Hege Storhaug, mentioned above, self-published Islam – The Eleventh Plague (2015), which became a widely read book and a best seller in Norway. It was translated into Icelandic in 2016 by Magnús Þór Hafsteinsson, a former parliamentarian in Iceland, and published by Tjáningarfrelsið (Freedom of Expression) company, a far-right entity. The Icelandic version was distributed in the thousands to high-school students, financed by anonymous actors for generating anti-Muslim sentiments among young people about to embark on their university studies (Áslaug Karen Jóhannsdóttir, 2016). The Norwegian anthropologists Sindre Bangstad and Frode Helland (2019) have shown how Storhaug's project was facilitated by the mainstream media in Norway in cohort with influential and powerful politicians and strong financial interests. Bangstad (2014) has argued that the anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant agendas of these actors, together with more shadowy elements online had strong effects on the terrorism of Anders Breivik. With her book Storhaug helped to normalise extreme right-wing rhetoric in the mainstream media in Norway so that anti-Muslim discourses became accepted, or as Baroness Warsi said, "passed the dinner-table-test" (Batty, 2011). Even as the book is part of discourses in Norway, it is part of a wider context of ideological currents taking place in

Europe, sowing the seeds of anti-Muslim sentiments, general xenophobia, and right-wing nationalism. Storhaug was a regular guest in the mainstream media in Norway, and she was in alliance with the Progress Party (a right-wing nationalist party). Her activities were lavishly funded by both governmental institutions and diverse wealthy sponsors (Bangstad and Helland, 2019). Thousands of copies were bought by business actors and delivered to public libraries. In her book, Storhaug emphasises the class of civilizations thesis (Huntington, 1993), claiming the West was in the middle of a civilizational battle of "us" against "them", i.e., the Muslims, who she likens to Nazis. Her narrative is strongly in the mould of far-right populist rhetoric, which has been gaining growing momentum in recent years.

The Icelandic publication of Storhaug's book calls itself Tjáningafrelsið (The Freedom of Expression), as many xenophobic actors who use and publish rhetoric that can be characterised as hate-speech (Eyrún Eyþórsdóttir and Kristín Loftsdóttir, 2019), do so in the name of free speech and freedom of expression. The Islamophobic enterprise addressed in this chapter frequently appeals to free speech and freedom of expression, usually in an absolutism manner, when publishing anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim material. The Mohammed cartoons in Jyllands Posten in 2005 were claimed to be an exercise in free speech, yet the paper rejected "provocative" cartoons involving Christ, as they might offend Christians (Fouché, 2006). Before the Muhammed cartoons, Jyllands Posten had regularly published negative coverage of Muslims, thus this anti-Muslim policy of the publication had history (Hervik, 2011, chapter six). In Norway, mainstream news editors proudly called themselves "freedom of expression fundamentalists" (Bangstad, 2014, p. 146) and approached freedom of expression in an absolutist way. They rejected the idea that freedom of expression is but one branch of general human rights and elevated it almost to a "sacred" status, independent of and above other rights. Yet, in most Western democracies, freedom of expression has limits when it comes to causing harm to targeted minority groups in society based on race, skin colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and so on, as is the case in Iceland, seen in paragraph 233a of Icelandic civil law (althingi.is). A right-wing Icelandic politician and parliamentarian even suggested that this paragraph should be abolished, calling it a political game played by politically correct actors. Also, the editor of the xenophobic radio station Útvarp Saga (Radio Saga) similarly claimed to be victim of political correctness and demanded that paragraph 233a was abolished or amended (Eyrún Eyþórsdóttir and Kristín Loftsdóttir, 2019, pp. 264-265).

As was said at the beginning of this section, Muslims have been concerned over media covering and portrayal of Islam and Muslims, and that applies equally to Muslims in Iceland I have talked to who are aware of this concerted and biased representation of themselves and their religion and it often caused them considerable concern, having an effect on their self-esteem and identity, as well as colouring their relationship with their "other", that is "us". The images scattered over many different media – newspapers, television series, films, books, blogs, and so on – are seldom in accordance with the image the Muslims have of themselves or their faith. As one Icelandic Muslim pointed out, this negative stereotyping cannot hide behind freedom of speech:

> [On the defamation of Muslims] … this is not freedom of speech … to hurt others … if the message is that all who believe in the Prophet and the Qur'an … are just terrorists and unwelcome in this society … well then that's not good.

There have been a few seminal and widely published events exacerbating this relational sentiment, such as the attacks on New York and Washington on September 11, the Salman Rushdie affair in 1988, and the so-called Danish Cartoon Affair in 2005, to name a few. These events have brought various underlying relational factors to the forefront between the West and the Orient, between the Christian/Secular liberal world and the Islamic world, and between "us" and "them" (cf. chapter two). These events were also frequent subjects of conversations with participants during my fieldwork, especially in the initial stages, as catalyst for misunderstanding, misrepresentation and prejudice. As is well known, the 9/11 attacks brought massive military operations to the majority-Muslim countries of Afghanistan, Iraq, others. These military campaigns, in return, provoked extensive reactions in the form of militant groups as the Taliban, Al-Qaida, and recently IS (Islamic State), to name a few. This "schismogenetic" (Bateson, 1972) relationship helped magnify the making of mutually negative stereotypes, one being simplified and stereotypical presentations of Muslims and Islam in the form of what is generally termed Islamophobia. This image-making in fact goes back many centuries (Kazi, 2019; Kumar, 2012; Said, 1978) and is still quite prevalent, and it must always be seen in the light of the historical, economic and political dynamics of imperialism/colonialism, post-colonialism and neo-colonialism. Two of the events mentioned above, the Rushdie and Cartoon affairs, had a very profound effect on many Muslims and seemed to have caused considerable "moral hurt" (Mahmood, 2009) and indignation, as repeatedly expressed by some of my participants.

Now, I turn my attention towards the Icelandic context, using references from the media and other public outlets, emerging in the wake of the so-called mosque affair, mentioned above. The printed press, television channels, and most dramatically social media, mainly Facebook, covered the case, with multiple opinions and different degrees of fear mongering or support. An example of an opinion published in the news media was by a former mayor of Reykjavík, (Ólafur M. Magnússon, 2013) who was worried that what he called "the institutions for spreading Islam from abroad", who wanted to strengthen the position of Islam in Iceland as in other countries. He said was threatening for "our national culture and security", and that it therefore was necessary to stop this as soon as possible. He said that the present "disgusting" authorities in Reykjavík were "selling the nation" Ólafur M. Magnússon, 2013). From 10 July to 26 September 2013, this former mayor (Ólafur F. Magnússon) of Reykjavík wrote several newspaper articles warning against the presence of Muslims and the coming mosque and attacked the Social Democrats as being "cultural Marxists", the same formulation as the Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik used (Bangstad, 2014), demonstrating the transnational, ideological links embedded in this discourse. From the opposite viewpoint, the editor of Fréttablaðið emphasised freedom of religion and

general human rights safeguarded in the constitution and various international treaties and that a mosque would be a visible symbol of the multicultural society Reykjavík had become in recent times (Ólafur Stephensen, 2013). He also pointed to an opinion poll from October 2013 showing around 40% public opposition to the mosque construction (MMR, 2013).

In the same period, a priest for immigrants and a religious scholar published an article in visir.is, where they expressed their support for the mosque building (Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson and Tosiki Toma, 2013). In the article, they claimed that many religious societies in Iceland support the Muslims and that it was a matter of human (and religious) rights. Yet, the authors claimed that some actors had expressed their opposition to the presence and the religious practices of Muslims in Iceland, among them the aforementioned former mayor of Reykjavík, Ólafur M. Magnússon. The authors point to the "We protest against a mosque in Iceland" movement and state that the rhetoric of the movement has crossed all lines of decency, as they call Muslims "idiots", "scoundrels", "sexual perverts" and "murderous outcasts", and "bastards between monkeys and pigs". The members of the anti-Islamic group have recommended "killing them all" and to "rape all their women", adding "may they rot in Hell". In addition, the authors mention the admiration the Islamophobic group has for the Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik and his worldview. The authors ended by telling of the close cooperation between the Muslim societies and other religious denominations, both Christian and others, and they declared their full support for the right of Muslims to build their own house of worship (Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson and Tosiki Toma, 2013).

In a special electoral edition of the news-outlet visir.is (and Fréttablaðið / the Newspaper) during the municipal elections in May 2014, there was an interview with one of the two candidates, where she said she wanted to revoke the granting of the plot for the mosque building (Kjartan Atli Kjartansson, 2014a). She said that "While we have a national church, we should not grant plots for houses as mosques or the Russian Orthodox Church", adding that "I have lived in Saudi Arabia and this opinion is not based on prejudice, but experience". One parliamentarian from the conservative Independence Party (Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn) argued that it was unlawful for the City to provide plots for religious societies, but, according to the constitution, it was the lawful duty of the state to support and protect the National Lutheran Church, something that could not be transferred to other denominations (Segir ólöglegt, 2014). One commentator, discussing this issue, pointed to the fact that churches are provided with free plots by the state, and, according to the principle of equality, other denominations should likewise be. He also mentioned the perpetual struggle of minority groups against the power of the majority and that Muslims were a minority in Western societies. He also stated that the prejudice they suffered came as racism and xenophobia, which made the fight against those prejudices a matter of human rights. Many different religious societies have received plots for constructing houses of worship, without any opposition, but when it involves Muslims, protests break out and fierce discussions take off. The author insisted that human rights should apply equally to all and that they should naturally apply to Muslims, as well as all others (Bjarni Halldór Janusson, 2014). Shortly after the municipal elections, the Facebook page of one of the candidates (who had been more

prominent in her opposition to the mosque construction) had been shut down. But the main organiser of the "[We] Protest against a mosque in Iceland" declared his support for the Progressive Party in the coming Parliamentary election (2017), as he (and his followers) had done in the municipal elections. He thanked his followers for their support for the success of the two candidates and he urged his like-minded Islamophobes to vote for them. He said that by focusing on the mosque construction, the candidates managed to "[…] smash the glasshouse of Islam and Muslims and crash the silencing and the "regime of fear" […]" (Jacob Bjarnar, 2014). Thus, it became clear that the two candidates would not have managed to get seats in City Hall without the help of these actors, and it was interesting that the chairman of the party, who was also Prime Minister, declined to comment on the issue, while he had criticised the opponents of the two candidates before the election, which must be seen as support (Símon Örn Reynisson, 2014). During this period, Muslims received support from the Bishop of Iceland, who declared that Muslims were welcome to have a place of worship, even if Christianity was the ruling religion in the country. She insisted that freedom of religion reigned in Iceland, and everyone should be able to worship his or her god: "It is a natural matter that people have a place to gather and worship their god. I have no opinion on where the mosque should be in Reykjavík. I find it natural for Muslims to have their own sacred place". She insists that Icelandic society is "built on Christian custom", and that should continue to be the case, but adds that the cooperation between the Church and the Muslims is very good (Kjartan Atli Kjartansson, 2014b).

These are just a fraction of the discussions that swept the mediascape in Iceland during the period when the "mosque affair" was in the public domain. They show that there was considerable opposition to the construction of the mosque and all that it implicated: Muslims, Islam and everything thus related. Yet at the same time there was equally support and positivity for the project and good-will towards the Muslim community. I see this case as an apt example of moral panic, where sizable part of society geared itself into heated debates and arguments on all levels: in the public domain, among politicians, academics and journalists, not to mention the "micro-debates" on the street, in bars and cafés, in the workshops and work places, or in the homes, where "ordinary" people discussed, debated and argued about the position and presence of Muslims and Islam in Iceland and about foreigners and immigrants. This is something I witnessed along the way, as "informal research", undocumented, but important. A few opinion polls were conducted, which told part of but not the whole story. All in all, it looks as if people´s standpoints concerning Muslims and Islam in Iceland are divided; some of the polls referred to earlier show notable differences in age, gender, education, profession and demography, where younger people in urban areas seem to be more positive towards Muslims, Islam and the mosque, while older people and those living in rural areas, seem to be more negative.

8.8 Two well-published events – the politics of art and finance

Following the mosque affair, the Muslim community was not only reacting to external pressures but contributed in an active and creative way to promote Icelandic cultural

interests abroad by participating in the Venice Biennale 2015. The Icelandic contribution was an installation of a mosque in the 10th century Santa Maria Misericordia Church in Venice. It was a corroboration with the Swiss artist, Christoph Büchel (who lived partially in Iceland). This installation was a cooperation between the Icelandic Arts Centre and the Muslim Association, (Biennale Arte, 2015). The title of the installation was "The Mosque: The First Mosque in the History of Venice", and it was scheduled to run from May to November but was closed by the Venice police on the 22 of May (Benjamin, 2015; Icelandic Art Center, 2015; Icelandic Magazine, 2015; Icelandic Review, 2015; Munoz-Alonso, 2015). In addition, it was a collaboration between the Muslim communities in Iceland and Venice, engaging thousands of local Muslim residents who originated from 29 different countries. The plan was to offer educational and cultural programs, as well as prayer space for visiting Muslims. The object of the exhibition was to celebrate centuries of interaction between Venice and the Muslim world, as well as to emphasise the institutionalisation of segregation and prejudice, contextualised by current ethnic and religious conflicts around the world. In this way, it could be conceptualised as a social comment on the increasing xenophobic and Islamophobic discourse in Iceland and elsewhere. The mosque also aimed tp stimulate mutual support between the Muslim communities in Venice and Iceland. The then chairman of the MAI cooperated with the artist and acted as a host at the mosque. This project stirred up controversies and heated debates in Iceland and Venice (Iceland Magazine, 2015). Some argued over the financing (by taxpayers) of the project, while others called it "un-Icelandic" and questioned why a foreigner was chosen to do the installation. The defenders of the exhibition stated it was a good example of freedom of expression, something many anti-Muslims use when criticising Muslims. In addition, the project became involved in local political campaigning in Venice, where some politicians utilised it for their case and there were some demonstrations in front of the mosque. The exhibition attracted much attention for being controversial and provoking strong reactions from many sides. On the 22 of May, the police closed the mosque (Benjamin, 2015; Iceland Review, 2015; Kelbaugh, 2015; Munoz-Alonso, 2015). The installation asked questions about nationality, inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue and tolerance, questions that seemed too sensitive to some but a very relevant contribution to current discourses on multiculturalism, Muslims and Islam. Importantly, this project must be understood as a proactive move to counter the negative debates surrounding the Icelandic Muslim community, to connect the community to wider, global contexts and to project a positive image, even if it was not entirely successful.

Another well-published and widely debated case concerning Muslims in Iceland during this tumultuous period of Muslim discourses in Iceland had to do with the funding of some facilities of the Muslim community. Ever since the Muslim Association of Iceland received allocation of a plot for a mosque in 2013, the eyes of the media had been focused on the association. In 2015 a case concerning the funding of the construction of the mosque, as well as the funding of the Foundation of Iceland (FI), which had split from the Islamic Cultural Centre of Iceland (ICCI), reached the public domain. There were rumours of large funds from wealthy Saudi businessmen or even the Saudi state being channelled through the Al-Risala

foundation, which was based in Sweden (Vala Hafstað, 2015). The amount in question was thought to be one million dollars (135 million Icelandic kronas). There were conflicting statements from various leaders of the Muslim community about the funding. The then vice-chairman of the MAI said his association would never accept money from the "fascist" state of Saudi Arabia and that they had never been approached about the funding (mbl.is, 2015). The then-chairman, in contrast, having heard of the funding, said he would not reject this "gift" out of hand if there were no strings attached (Nanna Elísa Jakobsdóttir, 2015). There were ongoing misunderstandings in the case, and it was difficult to know what was really going on (Ásrún Brynja Ingvarsdóttir, 2015b; Bjarki Ármannsson, 2016). The official website of the president of Iceland said that he had discussed this with the Saudi ambassador to Sweden and that the fund was earmarked for the building of the new mosque, and that the president together with the ambassador had visited the ground where the mosque was to be built. The leaders of the MAI said they knew nothing of the fund nor the visit. The case had become more public by the day, and the Mayor of Reykjavik (Eyjan, 2015) expressed his surprise and concern over the story and wanted the Human Rights Office of the City Hall to be informed about the funding, its origins, purpose and possible conditions. Predictably, the comment sections on social media were inflamed, as the case was debated from every angle. Some commentators expressed their concerns that the funding would come with Saudi style Wahhabism, which would consequently take roots in Iceland. The information on the webpage of the President's Office did little to erase the air of misunderstanding (Anna Lára Steindal, 2016). When the imam of the ICCI was asked about the Saudi funding, he denied any connection to the Saudis and claimed the ICCI had not received any money from them (Ásrún Brynja Ingvarsdóttir, 2015a). The imam said the only association with Saudi Arabia was through organising the pilgrimage to Mecca, the hajj, from Iceland. Thus, there were several contrasting sides concerning the Saudi funding. The President, the chairman and vice-chairman of the MAI, the imam of ICCI, the Saudi embassy in Sweden and the Foundation of Iceland, all had their different versions of the story. Not surprisingly, the case was taken to court, and it is still there at the time of writing. Following the public debates about this mysterious funding, the President of Iceland expressed thinly veiled Islamophobic or xenophobic sentiments, where he linked the case to the current movement of refugees into Europe, with references to Islamic extremism and terror. Consequently, the Foundation of Iceland (FI) published an official letter to the President, expressing their dismay over his public remarks (Freyr Gígja Gunnarsson, 24.12.2015). A meeting between the President and the FI was arranged to "clear the air". According to Stundin (stundin.is 2015, 21 June) Wikileaks cables revealed that the Icelandic President had met the Saudi ambassador to Sweden, expressing his wish for closer relations with the Saudi state, and was complimented for its role in the Middle East. Subsequently, the President´s Office denied this (Jón Trausti Reynisson, 21.06.2015). To complicate things, the ICCI and the FI both claimed rights to the building where the ICCI was located. As has become clear above, the FI/Al-Risala bought the building (Ýmir house) with funds from allegedly wealthy individuals from the Gulf states in 2012 and rented it to the ICCI (Haraldur Guðmundsson, 27.11.2015). There is, at the time of writing, an ongoing dispute over the contract conditions for the leasing, and subsequently,

the ICCI was expelled from the building. While this was unfolding, and on a positive note, a winning architectural proposition for the new mosque was revealed (from 63 propositions), and most people concerned were happy with the result (Fontaine, 2015).

8.9 Conclusions

This chapter focuses on the making of images, stereotypes and negative narratives of Muslims and Islam. This is placed in historical and political local and global contexts, where official discourses in the media and among influential actors in society are scrutinised. I examine the way these tropes appear and are instrumentalised by speech, utterances and actions, which aim to essentialise the image of the "Muslim" in a reductionist manner. By denying Muslims the expression of their complex identities, Islamophobia becomes framed as identity politics, a conflict of personal and collective identities of being Muslim. In this sense, Islamophobia is framed in a racializing manner and as a form of governmentality, exerting symbolic (and sometimes physical) violence against Muslims.

In examining this issue, I focus on several events concerning the relationship between the Muslims in Iceland and those who harbour anti-Muslim sentiments. An important case is the allotment of a ground for the Muslim Association in Iceland to build a mosque in 2013, which spurned anti-Muslim reactions from a number of actors in Icelandic society, in the mainstream media and on social media platforms. Some of the actors were politicians, trying to score votes and two candidates managed to become elected in the municipal elections in Reykjavík 2014 by appealing to anti-Muslim sentiments in relation to the planned mosque construction. Thus, the so-called mosque affair managed to trigger sudden, seemingly dormant layers of aversion towards Muslims and Islam, some of these layers being locally historical (as the Turkish raid 1627). The attacks on New York and Washington in 2001 did also provide fodder to these sentiments. The reactions to the proposed mosque construction revealed that the situation in Iceland was an integral part of the situation in neighbouring countries, especially Denmark and Norway. The so-called Cartoon affair in Denmark in 2005 (Hervik, 2011, 2019) and the terrorism of Anders Breivik in Norway in 2011 (Bangstad, 2014) have to be seen in the context of anti-Muslim discourses in the media of these countries. I address this by examining research on anti-Muslim discourses in these countries and how the media was politicised with the purpose of denigrating Muslims and Islam (Hervik, 2019).

Another event examined in the chapter is the joint project by the Muslim Association in Iceland and the Swiss artist Christoph Büchel in the Venice Biennale in 2015. This event attracted attention in the media, in Iceland and abroad. Most of the Icelandic media treatment of this had strong anti-Muslim undertones, while the objective of the project was to educate and inform the public about the centuries old relations of Muslims with Europe, and Venice in particular. It was also meant to shed light on current ethnic and religious conflicts, and as a social comment on xenophobia and anti-Muslim feelings. This case demonstrates that in our globalised times, a small community of Muslims in Iceland, seemingly obscured, is in fact an integral part of wider discourses and historical and political sediments, where the affective dimension of these relations transgresses national and

cultural borders, as they travel across ethnoscapes, mediascapes and mediascapes (Appadurai, 2006). It also shows that much of these sentiments, as based on historical sediments, stand on notions of white supremacy, which is partly formed by relations of Europe with the "Orient", through the colonial encounter up to the current era (Jensen and Kristín Loftsdóttir, 2021). The reaction to the growing presence of immigrants, refugees, of whom many are Muslims, is characterised by anxiety and moral panic. This has, among other things, manifested itself in growing nationalism and xenophobic populism, making the Other, the immigrant, the Muslim, the main target for aversion and racialisation, as a threat to national purity and native cultural values.

The cases I have presented in this chapter demonstrate how particular events can suddenly light the fuse of anxiety towards the Other, the unknown, and how this figure is given the role of the enemy, the undesirable, framed in racist idioms, often based on old narratives and historical trauma. I have also shown that the discourses aimed at Muslims are not only negative, as there are many who work against xenophobic and Islamophobic attitudes, some as activists, others as researchers who study Muslim communities and their relations with the wider society, working to create knowledge and understanding of the Other, making the different common.

9 Concluding remarks

As I mention at the beginning of the Introduction to this dissertation, an important motive for embarking on this research was linked to my own personal experiences related to people I knew when I lived in Copenhagen. These people were my neighbours and colleges, and some of them were my friends, and many of them were Muslims. Shortly before I moved from Denmark, the national mood towards immigrants and particularly Muslims was changing and becoming increasingly hostile in a xenophobic sense, driven by an alliance of right-wing politicians and most of the media (see Hervik, 2011, 2019). After leaving Copenhagen I moved frequently from country to country for many years, but when I finally moved to Iceland, I decided to take on the research which this dissertation is based on. This was partly due to curiosity, as the Muslim community in Iceland was an uncharted territory at that time and also because my experience from my Copenhagen days had haunted me, on and off, as I became increasingly aware of the worsening predicament of Muslims in Western societies. This was linked to geopolitical developments in tandem with right-wing (populist) politicians gaining influence in the political arena in the West. And this growing negativity towards Muslims had begun to appear in the public arena in Iceland, as I examine in chapter eight.

An important objective of this dissertation was to learn about the small Muslim community in Iceland and consequently contribute to the understanding of a social and cultural section of Icelandic society, a section which had been mostly invisible, but at the same time linked to various negative formations connected to discourses on Muslims and Islam in general. Consequently, I have demonstrated the importance of examining the Muslim community in Iceland in its transnational and global context, not least in relation to historical and geopolitical formations. As has become clear in this dissertation, there is a turning point, before and an after, that is, the so-called mosque affair in 2013. As I examine in chapter eight, this turning point affected politics in the Icelandic capital, as well as providing local material to feed anti-Muslim sentiments in Iceland, sentiments that up to that time had been adopted from various neighbouring countries. Therefore, my hope is that this dissertation will help to shed light on the diverse social, cultural and religious situation of Muslims in Iceland, as well as on their faith, Islam, and help to deconstruct enduring stereotypes and misconceptions about this community. This stated objective was carried out by long term ethnographic fieldwork among the Muslim community in Iceland, the methodology being described in detail in chapter Three. During that time, I slowly gained access and insight into this small community, the fruit of which is this dissertation, and I hope I have done my participants due justice in this text.

In approaching my objective, an important theme of the dissertation relates to questions of identity; social, cultural, national, and religious, as well as identification, i.e., the images and

stereotypes imposed on Muslims by external, anti-Muslim actors (Bauman, 2002; Baumann, 2004; Jeldtoft, 2009). These identity politics create tensions and frustrations among the Muslims, who perceive them as attacks on their own sense of self and their religious identity, degrading their faith and self-worth (Bauman, 2004; Bilgrami, 2006), and this topic was the initial theme presented to me by my first participants, a theme which repeatedly kept coming up during my fieldwork. To gain a wider understanding, I address these aspects in local, global and political/historical contexts, discussing the general geo-political roots and discourses formed in that context (Kazi, 2021; Kumar, 2012; Said, 1978). The concerns of my participants were, from the beginning of my research, focused on recent geopolitical events, underlined by the so-called war on terror (post 9/11) and increased Islamophobia in neighbouring countries, with the so-called cartoon affair in Denmark in 2005 at its centre (Bangstad, 2014; Hervik, 2011). As mentioned earlier, this context introduced itself in the initial stages of my research, and continued to be present, in one way or another, as a lasting undercurrent in my relations and communications with the Muslim community.

In the light of the above, this dissertation focuses on the situation of the Muslim community in Iceland, by addressing their religious and social associations, the relations between these organisations, as well as the overall relations of the Muslim community to diverse state institutions in Iceland, religious and secular. This demonstrates that this community has sought to integrate with the wider Icelandic society, and that it has done so without any serious setbacks. I have addressed the characteristics of the religious associations, their differences as well as their commonalities, and shown that the minor differences that exist are structural and political, rather than religious. The religious attitudes of most of the Muslim community became into focus during two separate visits of representatives of contrasting international organisations to Iceland, one leaning to the fundamentalistic, literal type, while the other being "moderate" and expansive towards other religions and the secular state. This is addressed in chapter six. Following these two visits, most of my participants expressed their indifference to the visitors, especially the former, and stated that they saw themselves as "just Muslims", and as Muslims living in Iceland. This "just Muslim" paradigm was also exemplified by the reluctance to discuss religious differences, such as Sunni vs Shia, stating that this small community had no need for such divisions. An exception was the debate concerning the prayer/fasting times during Ramadan in extreme latitudes, which can be characterised as being a technical rather than purely a religious matter. This therefore shows that there is a strong collective will among the Muslims in Iceland to adhere to moderation and to live in harmony with the society they have adopted as their home. Many of my participants expressed their opposition to extremisms of any kind and voiced their dismay of the use of violence in the name of their faith, and accordingly leaders of the Muslim associations co-operate with the Icelandic authorities, monitoring any eventual pointers of that kind, especially following the turbulence in Syria and surrounding countries after 2011.

I organised the dissertation into three main sections. The first section addressed the main theoretical approaches that I use to support the research, as well as the methodological and

ethical aspects of doing ethnographic research on a small and in some ways vulnerable community as the Muslim community in Iceland. In this section, I also accounted for my own position and relationships with my participants, addressing some of the ethical issues in that regard. The second section of the dissertation provided descriptions and analysis of the research subject, the organisation of the Muslim community in Iceland, its religious associations and the relational context, both within the community itself and with the wider society and its institutions. I looked at the religious discourses and practices relevant to this community, and demonstrated that, in cases of discord among the Muslims in Iceland, the main bones of contention have been political and organisational, rather than religious. Among the complex and diverse cultural composition of the Muslim community in Iceland, religion has in fact played a part as a unifying factor, and all religious differences and potential religious frictions have been downplayed. With religion as mostly a unifying force, different political standpoints, especially concerning the running and organising of the associations, have occasionally created tensions in the community, with generational divides also playing its part. Accordingly, the main approach of this community has been to emphasise moderation in religious matters, and to reject any fanatical or radical versions of Islam, where most of the participants expressed the importance of harmonious relations with the secular and/or Christian, Icelandic society. In this section I also addressed questions of identity; religious, cultural and national identity, where the identity of being Muslim, and Muslim in Iceland, seemed to be central in this regard, even if national sensibilities sometimes came indirectly into play within the community itself. The third section focused on and analysed the forming of stereotypes of Muslims and Islam, of image making and (mostly) negative identification aimed at Muslims and their faith. Anti-Muslim sentiments, or Islamophobia, together with latent xenophobia, materialised following the donation of a plot to construct a mosque in 2013, the first purpose-built mosque in Iceland. These formations and discourses took place on many levels in Icelandic society, in the mainstream media, on social media platforms, as well as among common people. To address these discourses, I presented examples from diverse media outlets and analysed their contents, which, among other things, expressed sentiments of moral panic and distress.

Following examinations of theoretical and methodological issues (chapters two and three), chapter four presented the general context of the Muslim community in Iceland, on an organisational and relational level, both internal and external. I discussed the Muslim community in the context of both local, Icelandic history and in the context of wider geopolitical history, framing these relations in asymmetrical and orientalist contexts. The importance of this is, among other things, that these contexts were ever-present in my discussions with my participants, from the beginning to the end of my research, as an important undercurrent of their identity and sense of self. I have shown that the Muslin community has extensive relations with some national institutions in Iceland, both secular and religious, demonstrating that this community is not an isolated social group but, in many ways, an integral part of Icelandic society.

In chapter five I focus on questions of Muslim identity and its formations, how the Muslims see themselves as Muslims and how that sense of self contradicts external identifications (Bauman, 2002, Jeldtoft, 2009; Østergaard, 2007, 2009). These identifications manifest as negative identity politics aiming at reducing their Muslimness to a homogeneous essence, thus reifying their identities and denying them both agency and the right of self-identification and sense of self, with all the diversity and complexity it implies. In that sense, anti-Muslim sentiments are denials of basic human rights, the right of self-expression and self-definition, sustaining negative stereotypes and cultural racialisation (Bilgrani, 2006; Sayyid, 2014). As to the question of Muslim identity, with Islam at its centre, most of my participants insisted that there is only one Islam, with Islam being universal for all Muslims, with the recognition that cultural traditions and customs with diverse origins bring diversity, but also potentially create conflicts (Asad, 1986; el-Zein, 1977). Therefore, many participants stated that religion and issues of cultural identities should be kept from each other as much as possible. When it comes to identity intersections among the community, I noted what I termed "internal othering", where dynamics of othering seemed sometimes to play out in relations between members with different national and ethnic origins and backgrounds (Baumann, 2004). This was frequently expressed by referring to the national origins of those concerned, but these differences were pushed to the side during communal gatherings and rituals, such as Friday prayers and Ramadan, again underlining the unifying importance of religion and the religious community (ummah) for this community.

Chapter six addressed the diverse sides of religious discourses, religious practices and religious authority among the Muslim community in Iceland, where the feelings and religious viewpoints of my participants are expressed. I addressed some theoretical perspective concerning Islam and referred to ethnographic examples to demonstrate various religious rituals and practices, such as Ramadan and the Pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj). I referred to Friday prayers (jumah) as well as to some issues connected religious authority, i.e., what is "correct" Islam and Islamic practice, which in such a small community can be a sensitive factor. One interesting example of this was a dispute between two Muslim associations during Ramadan concerning the praying and fasting times in extreme latitudes. Apart from many practitioners becoming a little confused, this issue was one instance of questioning religious authority, of who has legitimate authority to decide on interpretations and practices for the community (Jensen, 2006; Volpi and Turner, 2007). This issue was never settled, but with time it became a minor issue for most practitioners. Also, in this chapter I presented an account of two very different visits from abroad, one which can be described as radical, or puritanical/fundamentalist, and the other leaning more towards what can be termed as moderate (Bilici, 2006; Olson, 2014). The Muslim community in Iceland received these two visitors with reservations, claiming themselves to be "just Muslims", which indicated their general wish to be integrated into Icelandic society and cohabit in harmony in their newfound home, as well as showing ambivalent attitudes to religious authority.

Chapter seven predominantly focused on the formation of new Muslim identities, in connection with Icelandic converts, where the formation of new religious, social and cultural

identities is prevalent, as the convert seeks to acquire a new habitus in becoming a Muslim (Allievi and Dassetto, 1999; Rambo, 1993; Roald, 2012). This process implies and demands important changes of lifestyle and daily practice, and initially a degree of rupture in relations with friends and family, which most often becomes less evident and important with time. Converts seem to have an open approach towards their new faith, being able to choose their preferred path, free from any cultural baggage that may or may not come with being a born Muslim. Being in some sense liminal persons, converts can be seen as being between cultures, as cultural critiques as well as cultural mediators. They have become different, the Other, bur contextually, also different from the Other (Jensen and Bagge, 2015; Wohlrab-Sahr, 1999). Being better able to choose their trajectory, converts have ambivalent relations with religious authority. As novices, they seek traditional guidance and authoritative structures, while contesting this same authority when individualising their religious positions, often through digital forums. An example of this is when debates around the design of prayer facilities in the planned new mosque took place. These debates illustrated complex differences based on gender, age, as well as between converts and born Muslims, creating tensions across intersections of gender, generations, nationality and culture. What these debates showed was that cultural and generational concerns can sometimes supersede those of gender, demonstrating the fluidity of all these contextual identities. This chapter also looked at a women's group at one of the mosques, converts as well as immigrant Muslim women, a group that holds regular meetings, where they discuss matters both mundane and religious. I addressed the reductive stereotype of the Muslim woman, emphasising their own views on this contested figure (Abu-Lughod, 2013). In this chapter (as in chapter five) I show that not only is general Muslim identity complex and diverse, but that converts have the capacity to attend to their new faith and forming new identities with more openness and choice than is the case with born Muslims. In that sense, converts can be seen as agents of change and as linking diverse social, national and religious spaces, as catalysts of multiple changes.

Chapter eight, which forms the third section of the dissertation, focused predominantly on the production of stereotypical images of Muslims and Islam, both in a wider Western and local Icelandic context, which I examine in the context of Islamophobia (Bjarni Randver Sigurvinsson, 2017; Bleich, 2011; Bunzl, 2007; Kazi, 2019). I examine common images of Muslims and Islam in Western discourses and their social and psychological consequences, and I frame Islamophobia as structural instrumentalization being applied as governmental tactics for controlling certain social groups (Shryock, 2010). I attend to the affects Islamophobia has on the self-esteem and identities of Muslims, and the structural violence implicit in the denial and negation of complex and diverse identities of Muslims as Muslims, and the reductionism inherent in these tactics (Rana, 2007; Sayyid, 2014). I also survey public discourses and media representations of Muslims and Islam, locally and globally, demonstrating how these discourses and representations are framed as anti-Muslim constructs, in utterances, hate speech as well as in actions, as hate crimes (Bangstad, 2014; Hervik, 2011, 2019). I analyse these media discourses in Icelandic media and on diverse social

media platforms, where these anti-Muslim sentiments stand out, especially connected to the so-called mosque affair in Reykjavík (2013-2015), which I used as an example around which these expressions revolved. In addition, I examine two cases linked to the Muslim community in Iceland, cases that became hotly discussed in Icelandic media, albeit with obvious anti-Muslim undertones. These cases were the Icelandic contribution to the Venice Biennale in 2015 (Biennale Arte, 2015; Icelandic Magazine, 2015; Icelandic Review, 2015), which consisted in establishing a mosque in an old church, positioning the Muslim community in Iceland in an international context. The other case was the debates around the finances of mosque building as well as an election of a leader of one of the Muslim associations, both cases catching media attention. In this sense, when Muslims in Iceland stepped out of their invisibility they were immediately met by negative receptions. These three cases demonstrate that when a certain community, often accused of not willing or be able to integrate, goes forward to participate in the local society, they are often met with hostility and rejection by some parts of the same society. Thus, it seems they are damned if they do and damned if they do not (see Rytter, 2019).

This dissertation demonstrates that in our transnational, globalised times, a small community such as the Muslims in Iceland, consisting only of a few thousand persons, has wide-ranging connections with the wider world. This community participates in and is an integral part of the wider discourses on Muslims in the West, migration and racialised discourses in current times. The reaction to the growing presence of immigrants, refugees, of whom many are Muslims, is characterised by anxiety and moral panic. This has, among other things, manifested itself in growing nationalism and xenophobic populism, making the Other, the immigrant, the Muslim, the main target for aversion and racialisation, as a threat to national purity and native cultural values. The dissertation shows how particular events can rapidly stoke the fires of anxiety towards the Other, the unknown, and particularly how the figure of the Muslim (Werbner, 2005) is given the role of the enemy, the undesirable, constructed as racialised idioms, frequently grounded on old historical narratives and historical trauma. These discourses tend to have rather negative undertones, for obvious reasons, but there are positive lessons to be learned from the knowledge that has emerged from the multitudes of research that has been conducted on the predicament of Muslim communities in the West. New knowledge engenders understanding and possibilities, and many actors have contributed to using this knowledge to improve the situation of Muslims in the West and educate both the public and politicians in an effort to promote better relations between groups that in recent history has been characterised by tension and suspicion.

This dissertation is an outcome of a relatively long research process, where I had the opportunity to participate and communicate with members of the Muslim community in Iceland over a long period, albeit with some interludes. In the beginning of my research, I knew little about this group of people, which seemed to be almost invisible to the wider Icelandic society, being beyond the optical horizon of most people. Due to the length of my research process, I have been able to observe gradual changes and growth of this

community, where it has expanded from being around 1200 persons to approximately 3000 (in 2022). During this time, I have seen some persons leave and others arrive, especially following the recent conflicts in Syria and neighbouring countries, which has changed the composition of this community to some degree. I have seen Muslim children born in Iceland become adults, some of them becoming doctors, lawyers or engineers, as fully participating members of Icelandic society, some of them marrying "native" Icelanders. This, among other factors that I have accounted for in this dissertation, demonstrates that most of the Muslims who have chosen Iceland as their home, as a place where they want to belong, want to be integrated members of Icelandic society and to contribute to the common good.

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