

Janna Hansen, David Herbert

## Chapter 12

# Life in the Spotlight: Danish Muslims, Dual Identities, and Living with a Hostile Media

**Abstract:** We examine ethnic Danish and ethnic minority Muslim (n = 15) responses to the negative media frame they experience, and their efforts<sup>1</sup> to build viable dual identities – ways of being Danish and Muslim. The reported media negativity is triangulated with evidence from ECRI media reports, public opinion surveys, and reports on government policies and institutions. We find that interviewees' experiences vary with their visibility as Muslims, so hijab wearing women and men of colour report most negativity in public environments. We also find that efforts to pro-actively project a positive social media image of Islam vary by time since conversion, gradually declining. Danish Muslim challenges in forming dual identities are compared with those of Swedish (Malmö) and British (London) Muslims. We examine why London Muslims more readily construct dual identities than Malmö Muslims – despite greater negativity in national surveys and barriers to voting. The implications for cultural conflict in Scandinavia are discussed.

**Keywords:** dual identity, media framing, social media, visibility, conversion

Across the Western world, and especially since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, Islam and Muslims tend to be viewed through a hostile, conflictual frame in media and public discourse, a frame only reinforced by the rise of the so-called Islamic State (IS) in the Middle East, and the series of recent IS inspired terrorist attacks in European capital cities, including Copenhagen in 2015. Such conditions create a challenging public environment for Muslims throughout the West. However, judging by reports from the European Commission Against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), it seems that the media frame in Denmark is particularly negative, even by comparative European standards, a situa-

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<sup>1</sup> We recognise that the conditions facing Muslims in Western societies vary greatly, and that talk of 'the West' includes hugely diverse societies. However, we use the term while recognising the risks of over generalisation for three reasons: it was used spontaneously and often by our participants; it is cumbersome to constantly qualify the term; and we contend that there are features shared by many Western societies – market economies, democratic institutions, an emphasis on the importance of freedom of speech – that are relevant to the topic.

tion exacerbated a lack of representation of, and hence 'voice' for, Muslims in public media (ECRI 2012, 28). Furthermore, the situation is also longstanding. Thus, as early as its second report on Denmark (2001) ECRI expressed concern about the climate surrounding Muslim and Islam in Denmark (2006, 25).

By the time of third report, 2006, in the wake of the Muhammad cartoons controversy (2005), this concern had grown, to the extent that ECRI was expressing 'deep concern that the situation concerning Muslims in Denmark has worsened since its second report' (ibid.). In the fourth report (2012) these concerns persist, evidenced by accounts of bias in reporting of criminal cases: 'some media report the ethnic background of a suspected criminal when this is not necessary for understanding the information, but that criminal offences committed by Danes against groups of concern to ECRI are underplayed' (ibid. 28), and by a continuing lack of opportunities for minorities to express their views in the media.

Judging by these reports, there is clearly a negative media climate for Muslims in Denmark; this is not to say the media is exclusively negative towards Muslims or that all sections of the media are negative, but that negativity is sufficiently prevalent to be of concern for human rights groups, and part of the everyday experience of our interviewees (see also Jacobsen et al. 2013). How, then, do Danish Muslims experience this hostile media frame, and how do they cope with it? In particular, given the capacity of social media to enable 'media contra-flow' (Cottle 2006), whereby individuals and groups can respond to stigmatization by developing their own counter-representations and counter-narratives, how far and in what ways do Danish Muslims engage in such practices? And, in terms of the work of self-presentation (Goffman 1959) needed to maintain group- and self-esteem in the face of stigmatization, how do they represent themselves and construct a viable public identity? In this chapter we address these questions using data from interviews with 15 Muslims from mixed ethnic majority and minority backgrounds from the Greater Copenhagen area. We also comment on the conditions which structure the formation and public acceptance of dual and multiple identities, and on how this might be linked to positive integration outcomes.

## 12.1 Context: Public Attitudes, Culture, and Public Institutions

In mediated societies – societies where media institutions have a dominant role and most, if not all, of our information about what’s going beyond our immediate locality comes from media – it is impossible to separate the recognition individuals get from each other and the way that media resources are distributed. (Couldry 2011, 48)

How Danish Muslims experience the negative media frame is likely to be significantly shaped by their interactions with ethnic Danes and by how they are treated by Danish public institutions. There is not necessarily a perfect fit between dominant media frames and public attitudes; audiences are active, bringing their own experiences and thinking to their interpretation of media representations (Livingstone 2015). However, as Couldry (2011, 48) points out, on issues where the public is largely dependent on the media for information, media frames are likely to play a decisive role. So how widely shared is the dominant negative media frame in Denmark by the Danish public?

Widespread negativity towards immigrants in Denmark in general, and especially towards Muslims, is evident in European Social Survey (ESS, 2014) data. Thus, 46 percent of Danes agree with the proposition that the government should allow ‘few or no Muslims’ to come and settle in their country, a finding consistent the YouGov figure of 45 percent of Danes having a negative impression of Muslims (Dahlgren 2015). Furthermore, 42.3 percent of Danes agree with the proposition that ‘immigrants take out more than they put in’ in terms of taxes and services, suggesting a competitive framing of the relationship between immigrants and the majority amongst a substantial section of the population, which is likely to reinforce societal divisions.

Danes also score highly on measures of a sense of cultural superiority. Thus, 59.9 percent of Danes agree with the proposition that ‘some cultures are much better than others’ (ESS 2014, second only to Norwegians, at 64.4 percent), an attitude which might provide fertile ground for forms of ‘cultural racism’ (Blaut 1992), and provide weak foundations for practices which value the contribution to society of culturally different others. Furthermore, 29.8 percent of Danes agree with the statement that ‘having a law against ethnic discrimination in the workplace is bad for the country’, the highest in Europe, with those considering having such a law as ‘extremely bad’ in Denmark (12 percent) more than twice that of the second placed country (Switzerland, 5.9 percent). Such strong public rejection of anti-discrimination laws may impact on Muslim minorities if they seek to challenge workplace discrimination, and contribute to a climate where Muslims feel unwelcome.

Of course, opinions expressed confidentially in surveys do not necessarily translate into publicly expressed attitudes or behaviour. However, the CoMRel survey (see Chapter 2) found that 18.2 percent of the Danes agree that ‘hostile attitudes towards foreigners should be tolerated’, suggesting that public expression of xenophobic views is acceptable for a significant minority. Further evidence suggests that the challenging public environment extends to Danish government policies and public institutions. Thus, researchers have argued that government policy discourse has contributed to reinforcing a binary division between ‘Muslims’ and ‘Danes’ by de-legitimizing conservative Muslims voices through an overly broad official discourse on radicalization (Kühle and Lindeskilde 2012). In this process Muslims who hold conservative views on gender and sexuality, which overlap with those of some in the majority population and had been previously considered part of legitimate difference in values, are grouped together with extremists.

Barriers to inclusion in public institutions are caused not just by overt hostility, but produced also as an unintended consequence of strongly marked difference arising from a history of relative homogeneity. As Nielsen comments in his introduction to *Islam in Denmark: The Challenge of Diversity*, if one is not Lutheran or of Lutheran heritage then:

in the Danish context, the institutional structures are such, however, that it is difficult to avoid being reminded that one is somehow different. Although one of the most secular societies in Europe, Danish society and institutions are thoroughly impregnated with Lutheran Christianity. Normally less than 3 percent of the population is in church on Sundays ... [but] 80 percent are members of the state-sponsored Lutheran church. (2012: 3–4)

Nielsen describes Danish Muslims as caught in the crossfire between ‘a nationalist populism with right-wing tendencies and a more outward-looking spectrum of pluralist and cosmopolitan perspectives’, which results in ‘a continuous challenge for Muslims – and others, but especially non-Christians – to take advantage of the freedom of assembly and organization guaranteed by the Danish constitution’ (Nielsen 2012, 4).

We interviewed Muslims from Copenhagen, the largest and most diverse city in Denmark. Although it is not necessarily the case, a range of evidence suggests that minorities in large cities often take the lead in developing new institutions and identities which help to establish a sense of belonging in society, which then spread to groups in other parts of the country. One of the reasons for this is the diversity of minority communities in large cities; whereas in small cities minority religious communities might be dominated by a single ethnic group, this is less likely in large cities, meaning that if groups are to create institutions based on a shared religious identity, they need to cooperate on multi-ethnic lines. In Copen-

hagen, there is evidence of this; for example, the Grand Mosque in Copenhagen (Hamad Bin Khalifa Civilisation Centre), opened in 2014, and the feminist oriented Women's Mosque, which opened in August 2016, are both organized on multi-ethnic lines (The Local.dk 2016). Reciprocally, the public authorities in large cities often also take the lead in recognizing diversity and developing practices and policies which enable migrant integration (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010). And, as shown in Chapter 9, anti-immigrant sentiment tends to be lower in large cities. Given these conditions, one might expect Muslims in Copenhagen to be at the forefront of developing strategies to negotiate the hostile national media frame.

## 12.2 Sampling, Sample, and Method

This chapter draws on qualitative interviews with 15 Muslims from the Greater Copenhagen area in Denmark. Five were Muslims from ethnic minority backgrounds, while ten were ethnic Danes who had converted to Islam, for periods of between six months and 15 years before the interview. We chose to interview both groups because we hypothesized each may negotiate the media frame and handle identity challenges in different ways. Previous research had located converts on a pronounced fault line in Danish society, where a marked boundary between 'Danes' and 'Muslims' is perceived to exist (Jensen 2008, 390). Indeed, in a striking passage Jensen describes converts as having 'become ... members of the immigrant minority' in the eyes of ethnic Danes (*ibid.*), suggesting a remarkable process of ethnicization worthy of further study. Straddling such a boundary, converts might provide unique insights into ways of negotiating the hostile media frame. Conversely, because of their visibility and 'double otherness' (ethnically and religiously other), and potential to draw on a range of (including media) resources from transnational networks, ethnic minorities also promise to provide distinctive insights.

Among the converts, six were females and four males. Their ages ranged from 18 to 42 years, with three of the males being in their forties, the other 21. Among the females, one was 18, the others in their twenties – between 21 and 29. The three older males all converted to Islam near the millennium, one in year 2000 and two in 2002 – shortly after 9/11. One female converted in 2007, while the others had converted within the past four years. Among the ethnic Muslims, one is female and four are males. The female was 29 years old, while the age of the males ranged from 19 to 29. All five ethnic Muslims were born in Denmark, but have diverse family backgrounds from Turkey, Pakistan, Palestine, and Lebanon.

Interviewees were chosen because of their active media engagement – such as in local newspapers, and on Facebook and Instagram – where they deal in different ways with the negative media frame in Denmark in relation to Muslims and Islam. Through these media practices they publicly engage in discussions and debates about Islam and Muslims, or in other ways display their Muslim identity, e.g. by posting pictures of their hijabs and/or quotations from the Quran and Muslim teachers or philosophers on Facebook and Instagram.

The study used semi-structured interviews, conducted between August 2015 and March 2016. After initial questions about name, age, and date of conversion (where applicable), all respondents were asked the same four main questions: 1) how do you view the Danish media, especially the representation of Muslims and Islam? 2) what social media do you use? 3) how do you use social media? 4) do you think that the ways in which Islam and Muslims are presented in the Danish media has any impact on your life and/or on how you behave in public? These main questions were followed by several ‘follow up’ questions, e.g. about the strategies the interviewees adopted in relation to the negative media frame in Denmark.

In the following sections, the responses will be analysed around two themes. First, how Muslims from different backgrounds attempt to construct a viable identity in a hostile media environment, and second, the uses and forms of self-representation developed, both in person and using social media.

## 12.3 Discussion: ‘In-Betweens’: The Struggle to Construct Viable Identities

Based on our data, we can initially state that being a Muslim in Denmark – regardless of ethnic origin – is to a high degree to be ethnically marked. Or in other words: you are considered (and consider yourself to be) part of an ethnic minority when you are or, more strikingly, become a Muslim. Such is the binary distinction prevalent between being Muslim and being Danish experienced by our convert interviewees, and attested in previous studies (Jensen 2008), that becoming Muslim trumps being ethnically Danish; as one of our interviewees, Henrik<sup>2</sup> (see further below), puts it, ‘Henrik ... used to be Danish – or still is Danish – but in cultural terms is not Danish anymore because he is Muslim.’ (Henrik, 40-year-old male convert, Copenhagen).

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2 Subjects’ names have been changed to protect their anonymity.

This is very different to the findings of studies in some other locations. For example, Alydreessey (2016) interviewed 36 converts contacted via central London mosques, and while most reported considerable tensions with their families and other difficulties (indeed a quarter gave up their Islamic faith), none expressed this in terms of a change of ethnicity. We shall return to this puzzling contrast in the conclusion.

Further, we can initially state that all respondents have basically accepted the social fact of the mutual exclusiveness of Danish and Muslim identities as a starting point, even though they continued to struggle to overcome it. The visible Muslims (marked either by dress, self-presentation, or skin colour) experienced many tensions in this regard, mainly due to resistance from their own families and friends and/or due to the conflictual public environment towards Muslims in Denmark. In this section, we will consider how this ethnic minority status affects our respondents' identity construction.

## The 'Invisible Muslims'

To construct a viable dual (Muslim and Danish) identity in a 'hostile' or 'conflictual' public environment and to negotiate the tensions between these identities is, for most of our respondents, an ongoing struggle. First, we address those respondents (white, male) whose Muslim identity was not publicly apparent to ethnic Danes (either through clothes or skin tone), hence 'invisible' Muslims. Of these, only one did not feel conflicted in his identity: 21-year-old Brian from Copenhagen.

In April 2009, at the age of 16, Brian converted to Islam, and as he stated, he has never looked back since. Prior to his conversion<sup>3</sup> to Islam, Brian was, in his own words, 'a wild young man', whose primary focus and favourite activity was to 'party and chase ladies'. At some point during his 16th year, he got tired of this lifestyle, and began to search for 'something' – he did not know what he was searching for, only that he wanted and needed 'something new to fill out my life with'. During this process Brian began to chat with a male convert to Islam from his neighbourhood. Every Friday the neighbour went to Friday Prayer in a local Mosque and after a couple of weeks, Brian decided to visit the Mosque. Since that day, Brian has considered himself a Muslim. He began to study Islam

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<sup>3</sup> Most of our interviewees preferred the term 'reversion' to 'conversion', because the former implies a return to Islam understood as the original faith of all humanity, and hence better fits their theological view. We use 'conversion' for ease of understanding.

daily – and still does. He began to pray five times every day, he stopped drinking and chasing ladies, he stopped eating pork, and lastly, he changed his name. For Brian, there is no ‘middle way’: either he is a Muslim, with all that it entails, or he is not. Therefore, Brian claims that he does not experience tensions in negotiating between a Muslim and a Danish identity – simply because he has, in his words, erased his Danish identity, symbolized by his change of name:

When I converted I was like ... the identity that I had before, I left it behind me. Because when you are convinced of something, you cannot only commit to half of it – that is, if you are convinced that this is the right thing for you. Then you have to embrace it. So, for example, if there is a discussion about ‘us’ and ‘them’, I feel I belong to ‘them’ in some way. I feel I belong on the other side, in a way. Because the other identity is in a way left behind. And a new identity has been constructed, in a way. And now I am Muslim. And I have changed my name. (Brian, Danish convert, 21 years old)

Like Brian, both 40-year-old Henrik, 40-year-old Jørgen, and 42-year-old John are ethnic Danish males who have converted to Islam. However, unlike Brian none of these claim to have completely erased their Danish identity, and unlike Brian, all three say that they sometimes or often experience tensions in relation to their dual identity – not so much due to *direct* hostility towards them and their religion, but more due to what Henrik calls ‘the hostile atmosphere in general in Denmark’. He says, ‘The media and especially the politicians spend most of their time trying to split people. That is what burdens and saddens me’. Additionally, Henrik, Jørgen, and John say that this tension is rather new.

As mentioned in the previous section, the three male converts in their forties all converted to Islam at the beginning of this century, one in year 2000 and two in 2002, that is, shortly after the September 11 attacks on the US. Likewise, all three male converts in their forties tell that they, during the first eight to ten years after reversion, did not think so much about their ‘Muslim-ness’ and ‘Danish-ness’, or rather, their ‘Muslim-ness’ as opposed to their ‘Danish-ness’, simply because they very rarely did get confronted with their dual identity as problematic. For example, during our interview with Henrik we had a long talk about how things had changed for him as a Muslim since he converted to Islam prior to the September 11 attacks on the US. According to Henrik, he never thought about his identity during his first years as a Muslim – about whether he was Muslim and/or Dane, because ‘of course, I am both’. However, during the past five years or so, with politicians, the public, and the media all focusing on the contradictions between Islam and ‘Danish-ness’, Henrik, as well as Jørgen and John, has been forced to reflect upon his identity in a new, different and deeper way. And for all three this reflection has meant that they all today consider themselves as belonging to the Muslim minority in Denmark – as belonging



to another ethnicity and culture. However, even though Henrik does not consider himself Danish in cultural terms anymore, he still considers himself to be a Dane. That is also the reason why he experiences tensions between his Danish and Muslim identity, and why he often tries to show those around him that he is not a dangerous man – just a normal Danish man, at least by birth, who also happens to be Muslim. Thus, he expressed a wish to:

show who you are as a person, tell the world that Henrik, who used to be Danish – or still is Danish, but in cultural terms is not Danish anymore because he is Muslim – is a good person. He is still a human being, he still has good values, he does not adhere to ISIS or other oppressive worldviews. (Henrik, Danish convert to Islam, 38 years old)

In similar ways, this is also what the two other male converts in their forties said during the interviews.

## Visible Muslims: Part 1

Our data indicates that it is *especially* – though not entirely – the visible Muslims, that is the Muslims from ethnic minority backgrounds and the female converts, who all wear the hijab, who experience tensions in relations to their religion and construction of a viable dual identity. Or put differently, the data indicates that the visible Muslims face resistance in a more *direct* way than the invisible Muslims, i.e. the male converts.

Unlike Brian, Henrik, John and Jørgen, the six female ethnically Danish converts, the one female minority Muslim, and the four male minority Muslims are visibly Muslim. All females wear the hijab, and all males are dark-skinned and have dark hair, two have long beards and one wears an Islamic rope and a turban. Besides being highly aware of their visibility as Muslims, all 11 visible Muslims expressed frustration over not being fully accepted as Danes due to them being visible Muslims. However, the focus of the concern this causes, among the female converts on the one hand and the Muslims from ethnic minority backgrounds on the other hand, and the consequences the lack of acceptance has for the two groups, seems to be different. Thus, our data indicates that especially the female converts are highly preoccupied with issues related to their own families – to resistance and lack of acceptance from their own family members and their own belonging in their families – and not with lack of acceptance from society in general. This – lack of acceptance from society in general – was on the contrary what most concerned the minority Muslims. Some examples can help demonstrate this tendency in our data.

In 2008, at the age of 15, Sonja converted to Islam, meaning that, when we met Sonja at a café in Copenhagen in January 2016, she had been a practicing Muslim for eight years. With a smile on her face, Sonja referred to herself as some kind of ‘Danish-Muslim closet-feminist’ – in this context meaning that she silently fights for the rights of other female Muslims in Denmark, inside the Muslim milieu as well as (maybe especially) outside. When we explored this theme further, Sonja began to talk about her family and about the resistance she had met in her family during the last eight years. Sonja, like several other female converts, told us about episodes in her family, at family dinners, etc., where relatives had reacted quite strongly to her conversion to Islam. When faced with reactions like these, the female converts often feel that their identity and ‘belonging’ is being challenged, that they do not belong anywhere – neither in their families, nor in Denmark. In this regard, Sonja said:

Some family members of mine do not like Muslims, and say disgusting things about them. That makes me sad. Because I am also Muslim, I am just like ‘them’, because I have the same understanding of Islam as ‘they’ have. In addition, it is obvious that there is a division between me and the others in my family, because they do not like Islam. They do not know how to deal with the situation, what to say to me. (Sonja, age 23, female convert to Islam)

Even though Sonja does find it unfair that some family members and others outside her family treat her differently – or badly – because she is a Muslim, she has accepted that being a Muslim in Denmark can be challenging. Likewise, Sonja has accepted that being a Muslim includes an ongoing negotiation about identity and belonging. However, basically, Sonja does not consider Islam and Muslims to be ethnically marked, meaning that she *basically* does not consider herself as part of an ethnic minority – just a Danish Muslim. Though, due to the anti-Islamic atmosphere in Denmark in general, and specifically within certain circles in her own family, Sonja feels that she has been forced to take a stance in this regard. Therefore, for the most part, Sonja feels like an outsider, as one of ‘them’ – that is, as belonging to the Muslim minority in Denmark.

Like Sonja, all female converts say that they consider themselves as belonging to the Muslim minority in Denmark. But unlike Sonja, not all consider this an ‘unwanted necessity’, but rather something they have chosen as part of the package of being Muslim in Denmark. This is especially the point of view of recent female converts such as Kirstine and Louise, who converted six months and one year before the interview respectively. These recent women converts are also the most eager to ‘fight’ or try to counterbalance the hostile atmosphere towards Islam and Muslims in Denmark (see more below). Contrary to Louise and Kirstine, both Sonja, 20-year-old Kathrine and 29-year-old Maria, who converted

three and five years before the interview respectively can be said to have largely given up this ‘fight’, or at least to have grown tired of trying to counter negative stereotypes about Islam and Muslims. The same goes for the Muslims from ethnic minority backgrounds we interviewed during this study.

## Visible Muslims: Part 2

Twenty-three-year-old Omar from Copenhagen is a lively Islamic debater, who often participates in public discussions and debates about issues related to Islam and Muslims. During our interview with Omar we both asked him why he spends so much time debating these issues, and how the often negative atmosphere towards Muslims in Denmark affects him in any way. To this, he answered:

It is ... difficult not to really belong anywhere. You know, when I am in Turkey, I am not fully accepted as a Turk. And when I am in Denmark I am not fully accepted as a Dane. So, who am I and where do I belong? I mean, this is not a question I am struggling with today. But I used to. (Omar, ethnic Muslim, 23 years old)

Similarly, 29-year-old Hadyia told us that she, due to this ‘in-betweenness’ straddling a Danish, ethnically foreign, and Muslim identity, had spent her entire teenage years figuring out who she is and where she belongs. Today she has come to peace with her dual identity, even though she is aware that this dual identity might not be accepted in society generally.

Due to the Danish media and her visibility as a Muslim, Hadyia is very keen on keeping some of her Islamic values – those that she knows are at risk of being labelled ‘radical’ – to herself, e.g. her views on the Islamic veil, halal meat, homosexuality, etc. As such, she expects that she never will be able to fully blend her two identities.

## 12.4 Self-Presentation: Islam as ‘Project Identity’

Even though the Muslims from ethnic minority backgrounds and the female converts experience tensions in relations to their dual identity, due to their visibility as Muslims, their religion is at the same time both one of their most prominent identity markers and a means through which they can articulate their identity, feminist standpoints, and political values; in short, Islam presents as a ‘project identity’ in Castells’ (1996) sense, meaning it is a source of critique of existing

societal arrangements, pointing to an alternative social order. Our first example in this regard is 19-year-old Amman from Copenhagen.

Amman was born and raised in Copenhagen. His parents are from Palestine, but have lived in Denmark for the past 26 years. We met Amman at a small Mosque in Copenhagen, where he spends much of his free time, studying Islamic law and literature. One theme that Amman particularly focused upon during the interview was the way in which many journalists, politicians, and ordinary people see terrorism and Islam/Muslims as synonymous. For Amman, as well as for 29-year-old Adil, it is important to try to counterbalance this tendency. Therefore, Amman has decided to grow a long beard. By letting his beard grow, Amman wants to show the Danish people that the fundamentalist branches of Islam do not have a monopoly on the long beard, quite the contrary – young, well-integrated Muslims can also wear a long beard:

Just because the Wahabi branch of Islam have long beards, that does not mean that they have a monopoly on the beard ... or that I, for that reason, have to shave off the beard. On the contrary, I have the beard to show that they do not have monopoly on specific Islamic values. (Amman, ethnic Muslim, 19 years old)

Like Amman, Adil is also very conscious about his physical appearance. Adil wears an Islamic robe and a turban every day. This was a conscious decision he made some years ago – that he is a devout Muslim, who will not hide his religion to appease the public. Thus, Amman and Adil seem to handle tensions about their religion in the same manner: They try to disrupt the stereotypical connection between displays of Islamic orthodoxy and a sense of threat by showing that devout Muslims, who wear Islamic clothes or grow long beards, can be, and should be seen as, good citizens.

In different ways, several female converts use similar strategies. For example, in the previous section, we saw that Sonja called herself a ‘Danish-Muslim closet feminist’. Also, the views expressed by Louise, Kristine, and Maria suggest that they can appropriately be labelled ‘Danish-Muslim feminists’, even though they do not use that word to describe themselves. However, through what they say, what they do, the makeup they put on, the colourful headscarves and garments they wear, the pictures and statements they post on Instagram and Facebook, etc., they all try to express both who they are and what they believe in, and in particular that it is possible to be both a Muslim and what they see as a free, modern, woman at the same time.

During our six interviews with female converts, all six talked about the hijab/veil, and oppression and freedom. Contrary to popular opinion, our respondents maintain that wearing the hijab or veil is not the same as being op-

pressed, quite the opposite. For example, according to Maria, she was often treated as a ‘sexual object’ before she took on the hijab. Today, wearing the hijab, Maria feels relaxed and free. This was also something Louise talked about. Like Maria, Louise also felt that especially young males often used to treat her as an ‘object’, prior the taking on the hijab. Today, that is not the case anymore. In addition to this – and to some degree due to it – Louise also considers herself more special and feminine today than prior to conversion and especially before taking on the veil; as well as making her feel special (in the sense of positively distinctive – noticed, in a good way – but also better respected), wearing the hijab has also made Louise more conscious about her appearance in public.

When we met Louise, she had been wearing the hijab for two months. We therefore asked her whether this visibility had changed her identity and/or public appearances in any way. This she confirmed:

After I began to wear the veil and I sit on a train ... I can put some Arabic music on, on my headphones, and then turn the volume up, so that people around me can hear it. I do not know why, but I just want people to see that it is OK – nothing bad will happen, just because I am Muslim. Moreover, if I greet someone on the train, when I get in or on my way out, then I greet them in Arabic. I probably just have a need to say, that it is OK to be a Muslim, that it is not dangerous. I just want to tell the positive story about Islam in public. (Louise, 24 years old, convert)

And lastly, besides making her feel more distinctive as a woman and as responsible for counterbalancing stereotypes about Muslims, the hijab has also become a fashion item for Louise, and, again, a tool through which she can show the public that she is still a ‘normal’ woman with normal interests – e.g. fashion:

Louise: I sometimes use Instagram now that I wear the veil. Because there are so many pictures of how to arrange the veil. Therefore, I use Instagram to see how others arrange their veils and what style they have.

Interviewer: Do you post similar pictures?

Louise: Yes. Or no, not of clothes in general, only pictures of my veil, face and so on. I mean, after I have taken on the veil, I have become like, ‘Oh, now I have to take a new picture and post it’. So that people can see that it is actually really beautiful to wear the veil.

The last example we will discuss is 18-year-old Kirstine. Kirstine is a very energetic young woman, with a fast and sharp mind and tongue. She is politically volunteering, active on several boards at school, in her neighbourhood, etc. Like several other women converts, she has faced strong resistance from within her own family. Thus, to show both her parents and surroundings in general that she is still the ‘same, good old Kirstine’ regardless of religion, she is still doing

volunteer work at the Christian congregation where she formerly was a member and her parents still are members. In addition, she also has a feeling that people often consider her to be a ‘dumb’ or suppressed, young woman now that she has become a Muslim – or as if ‘the veil had shot down my intelligence’. This annoys Kirstine, as she is an elite student at her school and in general is very devoted to her studies and to getting a higher university degree after high school. She considers herself to be a ‘normal’ young girl, and she uses Instagram to show that to her followers. Several times every day Kirstine posts pictures of herself wearing the hijab, red lipstick, and heavy makeup around her eyes. Sometimes she lets the ‘pictures do all the talking’, and sometimes she writes a short text to the pictures, about her being a young, modern, and free woman – certainly not a repressed or foolish woman.

## 12.5 Danish Muslims in Comparative Context

The impact of negative media framing seems to be dependent on the interviewees’ visibility as Muslims, with those who are more visible (whether by dress or ethnicity) experiencing it more strongly and relentlessly. It is experienced as frustrating and tiring, with tiredness shown not only in reported feelings, but in a tendency amongst converts gradually to become less active in attempts to pro-actively combat negative stereotypes. However, the very visibility that results in a sense of being permanently under scrutiny can also be mobilized as part of a strategy to combat stereotyping, both amongst ethnic minority males and female converts, by combining the adoption of markedly Muslim styles of dress and grooming with behaving in exemplary ways, both by ethnic Danish and Muslim standards. For women, this includes combining hijab with makeup, using fashionable styles, and excelling in studies; for men this may mean being scrupulously polite and considerate. Thus both genders use strategies to subvert stereotypes which link Islamic dress to insularity and radicalism (for men) or submissiveness and stupidity (for women).

Our interviewees were not key organizers of online ‘counter-publics’ (see Chapter 9), but all belonged to and to differing extents were active in such groups (e.g. for hijab fashion), and drew social and emotional support from them. This support, as well as mosque attendance, the example of the Prophet, prayer and private study, helped them to cope with the psychological strain of ‘living in the spotlight’.

Finally, we compare our findings with that of a study conducted partly on the far side of the Øresund Bridge, in Malmö, Sweden, which may shed some light on why the formation of dual (Danish and Muslim) and multiple (e.g. Danish Turk-

ish Muslim) identities are proving so hard to achieve, and on the conditions which might more readily enable their formation. It may also illuminate the interplay of media with other factors shaping both identity formation and the integration of contemporary European societies.

Scuzzarello (2015) compared participation in elections and the formation of dual identification amongst Somalis and Poles in Ealing, West London and Malmö, Sweden, municipalities of similar size (between 310,000 and 340,000, and with high proportions of foreign-born population; 31 percent in Malmö and 57 percent in Ealing; *ibid.*, 1221). We shall focus on the Somalis, who, as Muslims, are the most relevant comparison group for our sample. Somalis, in both municipalities, have low economic activity rates (20 percent employment), and tend to be portrayed as poorly integrated in national media. While voter registration and access to polling was easier in Malmö than Ealing, Scuzzarello found that ‘Somali participants in Malmö tend to vote to a lesser degree than those in Ealing’ (*ibid.*, 1224). She concludes that this was because Somalis in Ealing were more readily able to form multiple identifications, because Muslim, Somali, and British identities were experienced as compatible, and this in turn made them feel entitled and motivated to vote (*ibid.*, 1228). In contrast in Malmö, Somalis felt they were still viewed as immigrants and not accepted as Swedish: ‘Somalis’ identification with the superordinate group (i.e. Sweden) has not been socially validated by the majority society.’ (*ibid.*, 1229). For example, one interviewee, who had lived in Sweden from age three, stated:

When I am [in Kenya] they call me Swede because I haven’t lived there for years, but when I am in Sweden I’m an immigrant. [...] I cannot feel wholly Somali or wholly Swedish. (Somali man, 20–29 years old, Malmö)

The formation of multiple identities in Ealing seems to relate to a sense of acceptance into the host society mediated by what is practiced and perceived as normal at neighbourhood level, and recognized by local state institutions, for example:

There is something called British Muslim [here] and that’s normal for [the English]. Muslims having the mosque and halal meat, Eid celebrations and that’s a normal thing. [It makes you feel] comfortable and ... recognized ... and that means you’re also going to be part of that [country]. (Somali man, 50–59 years old, Ealing)

In Ealing culture and religion define what you do, how you do it. I think this has a lot to do with British society allowing multiculturalism. It’s not like that in other countries in Europe. (Somali woman, 20–29 years old, Ealing) (*ibid.*)

Acceptance at a local civic and state level seems to translate into an identification with British national identity, an identification which leads to positive affect and a desire to participate:

What does it mean to be a UK citizen? To contribute to society and to be part of it, really, not just sitting back. (Somali woman, 20–29 years old, Ealing)

To be a UK citizen [means] I don't know ... I'm quite proud of being British. (Somali man, 20–29 years old, Ealing)

This identification occurs despite a very negative media frame in the UK (similar to Denmark), and much higher levels of negativity towards immigrants and especially Muslims; 38.6 percent of Swedes agree the country should 'allow many Muslims to come and live here' compared with 11.4 percent of British; only 18.7 percent of Swedes said 'allow few' or 'no Muslims to come and live here', compared with 46 percent of British.

It may be that Scuzzarello's findings are an artefact of comparing a district in a global city (London, with 9 million population, of which white British are a minority, 2011 census), with a medium sized Swedish city; perhaps a comparison between Stockholm and a medium-sized British city with a large minority population would reverse the result. The findings for Poles support this; few Poles voted in either city (three from a total sample of 30, *ibid.* 1223), and their national identification remained wholly Polish; but they felt more at home in London (pre-Brexit) than Malmö. The dual identification they had developed was with London rather than Britain; in contrast with the Somalis, none of the Poles described themselves as Polish-British. But then British institutional multiculturalism, developed from the 1970s to 1990s, and still largely maintained in schools and public institutions despite its rhetorical rejection by national governments since 2001, was not built to accommodate white Europeans (a possible factor in Brexit), but South Asian Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs, and was influenced by an American black empowerment movement which celebrated dual and multiple identities. So, battles won in previous decades – over accommodation of dress, food, and public celebration of various religious festivals – and discourses developed then – e.g. British Asian, Black British, and later, British Muslim and British Hindu – may have created a legacy from which British Somali Muslims now benefit.

This legacy is not limited to London or the UK; while specific civic and national histories shape the form which institutional multiculturalism takes (and support for it), its varieties are found globally, including in Sweden (Vertovec and Wessendorf 2010). However, a multiculturalism rooted in collective struggles for equality (UK) may prove more resilient, and have wider societal resonance,



than one imposed by a liberal welfare state (Sweden). Furthermore, in more historically homogeneous societies, it may be more difficult to prevent the formation of the binary us/them, immigrant/native distinction which works against the formation of multiple identities.

## 12.6 Conclusion

Returning to Denmark, here we find a combination of UK level negativity towards Muslim immigrants (46 percent in both the UK and Denmark support the statements ‘allow few’ or ‘allow no’ Muslim immigrants compared with 19 percent in Sweden, ESS 2014), with a history of Lutheran hegemony and homogeneity, but less mitigated by government-led attempts to introduce institutional multiculturalism than in Sweden. Hence the challenges facing ethnic and new Muslims witnessed in this chapter. In relation to furthering understanding of mediatization in a comparative context, our findings suggest that while media are powerful structuring forces, other factors also shape national dynamics, e. g. government support for institutional multiculturalism, the historical legacies of Lutheranism (Scandinavia) and Empire (UK), and the influence of civil society-led anti-racist struggles, as seen here. This suggests that to properly understand the dynamics of mediatization in specific cases, media dynamics need to be rigorously contextualized by broader processes of historical and social change, and are best viewed comparatively.

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