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Paul David Beaumont

Strategies of resistance: How Muslim women challenge representations in the Norwegian public.

Sophie Eliassen

MSc International Relations
Noragric

“Above all, be the heroine of your life, not the victim” – Nora Ephron

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Eihpos92@hotmail.com

Noragric

Department of International Environment and Development Studies

The Faculty of Landscape and Society

P.O. Box 5003

N-1432 Ås, Norway

Tel.: +47 67 23 00 00

Internet: <https://www.nmbu.no/om/fakulteter/samvit/institutter/noragric>

Declaration I, Sophie Eliassen, declare that this thesis is a result of my research investigations and findings. Sources of information other than my own have been acknowledged and a reference list has been appended. This work has not been previously submitted to any other university for award of any type of academic degree.

Signature..... Date.....

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This thesis is dedicated to all those who stand up and fight for freedom every day, and for a better future for us all.

Abstract

Islam and Muslims are considered to be the most obvious out-group in Norway, today, and recipients of racism, prejudice and discrimination. Muslim women are often thought to be the most marginalised group, just because of their identity as both women *and* Muslim. This is all happening in a society which often refuses to recognise said marginalisation, racism and prejudice, despite the fact that it permeates every level of society. The aim of this thesis is therefor to challenge the mainstream representation of Muslim women as victims, as homogenous and as controlled by Islam. Rather than doing what many other research papers have done before it, it will look at these women as individuals with autonomy and agency, rather than victims and non-active agents in society. It will look at the strategies Muslim women uses to challenge and resist mainstream representations of themselves, that are based on stereotypes and myths with roots in colonialism and orientalism. This is also why this thesis will utilise a post colonial feminist approach to the analysis, in order to recognise the complex and intersectional situations of these women. The results show that multiple strategies are used, some religious and others not. Some from a feminist perspective and some from a legal perspective. However, two similarities are that they all use their multiple and fluid identities to navigate the debate, and they all try to diffuse the dichotomy between 'Us' and 'Them'.

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“The time to be passive has passed; more have exercise their voices and the ceiling must be raised”

– Sumaya Jirde Ali (Razaq et als. 2017: 28)

1. Introduction

The current political climate of Europe is that of a rise in far-right movements and growing anti-Muslim prejudice. It is in the wake of an Arab spring that has extended far beyond its intended 'spring', and which has led millions of refugees to the borders of Europe and Norway. It is also in a climate where the effects of 9/11 are still present, and where violence and Islam is still seen as one, by some. Muslims have become *the* clearest out-group—or “Other”— in the Norwegian society (Eriksen 2012; Bangstad 2014), where racism and stereotyping is pervasive. Here, Muslim women experience a double burden, one as a result of patriarchal structures and one of colonial legacies. This is partly what motivated this thesis; the female Muslim resistance to representations constructed by the two former systems. In recent years there has been many articles researching women’s well-being and perceptions of being part of the out-group, most of which positions the women as victims. *However*, remarkably little research has been done to challenge this victim-role and to investigate further into how the women themselves resist and challenge stereotypes, racism and prejudice. This is what this research will investigate further, and by doing so, it places itself within a lively discussion on the agency and autonomy of Muslim women. The thesis is written within a climate where Muslim women are often seen as helpless, oppressed and controlled by religion and religious men. Thus, the analysis will inquire into how they challenge these roles and stereotypes that they are too often given by the mainstream public. It is relevant *and* necessary, because the women’s movement in Norway, or what I will call the feminist movement, tends to ignore minority women. Not because they do not care about them, but because it has a universal sisterhood mentality. This mentality has a norm that is white and non-religious or Christian, and which does not recognise the multiple and fluid identities of many women who fall outside this. Such as women who are Muslim. Therefore, it is important to look at what these women are fighting for, which is the same core values; emancipation and empowerment. It is also important to understand that not only white, non-religious, ethnic Norwegian women, are the only ones fighting and standing up in society¹. The analysis will demonstrate this by looking at various strategies of resistance used by six public women, who are Muslim, and who daily challenges public representations of Muslim women.

¹ When representing other women, I recognise the power and implications my subjective analysis and approach has on the end result. Words are political, and as part of the white majority I realise the power imbalance when trying to communicate a minority voice. It is important that this is not seen as a chance to save Muslim women, or 'give' or 'allow' them to speak. Lastly, it is important to not assume differences or similarities, reproduce essentialised identities.

Norway provides an interesting case study as a dedicated and self-declared leader within global movements for social equality and freedom. It is also traditionally a very egalitarian society, that has experienced very little ethnic, religious and cultural diversity in its historical roots. Norway has a political system that encourages difference, by allowing far right and far left parties to join government, thus setting themselves apart from for instance the UK or the US. Despite several studies indicating that many Norwegians are in denial about their own racist and prejudice attitudes², it is a widespread problem that few are willing to bring up. It makes for an interesting case then, to see how Muslim women, who are often marginalised and discriminated against in society, resist within a society such as Norway where we have "racism without racists" (Helland 2014). It is also interesting, because of the low number of Muslims in the country (SSB 2017), compared to the amount of attention they receive in the media and public, which is often problematised. All in all, the Norwegian society poses a fascinating example, much also because it is not the obvious first choice of a society which would have widespread anti-Muslim prejudice. Therefore it is necessary to increase the knowledge and research around these issues, to make sure they are not ignored or minimised. One way to do this, is to look at one of the more marginalised groups; Muslim women, to see how they challenge and resist all the above.

The aim of the study is to explore how Norwegian, Muslim women challenge and resist mainstream representations of themselves in the mainstream public. To do so, I chose to do one interview, as well as analysing nine texts, having in total six Muslim women as 'participants'. These representations are based on stereotypes and myths that has a basis in colonial and oriental thoughts, and which views and judges others through Western lenses. The aim is to look at the strategies these women chooses, intentionally or not, to challenge these representations, and thus attempting to re-produce a new liberal space that allows and supports diversity and intersectionality. The objective was also to provide a qualitative analysis that looked beyond numbers and statistics, to really understand the women's perspective, as well as to understand how a post colonial feminist approach to this topic plays out in a Norwegian context. Even though Norway was not a colonial power per say³, it was interesting to investigate how colonial mentalities are still present, and how the theory can therefore be utilised beyond its obvious usage, such as in for instance a British or Dutch context.

² For further discussions on this, see: Melhuus 1999; Bangstad 2014; Helland 2014.

³ Norway is certainly not innocent in the ordeal and has certainly participated in colonialism through for instance slave trade.

Within this, it is worth mentioning that the term liberal public and counter publics will be used in this thesis to refer to the different spaces that are occupied by various individuals and groups. Muslim women occupy a counter public, due to their decision to challenge hegemonic discourses. The liberal public is reserved for those that maintain status quo through their discourse and does not disrupt the peace. Minority women who try to challenge and change the nature of the debate and its assumptions and stereotypes, do not fit within this status quo. By trying to destabilise the particular discourse that represents Muslim women a certain way, they also destabilise and challenge the homogenous nature of the liberal public. The hope is that these women's voices will eventually not be seen as voices of resistance, but voices of the masses, and that the liberal public will be open for everyone; regardless of your ethnicity, religion, sex, gender, race and so on.

Research question: How do Muslim women in Norway resist and challenge mainstream anti-Muslim representations of themselves? What different strategies of resistance are used by public Muslim women?

Answering the research question, this thesis indicates that Muslim women choose a variety of strategies that are both religious and non-religious. Most utilise their multiple and fluid identities to challenge the notions that Muslim women are either oppressed, homogenous or controlled by religion. Common for many of the women, is that they try to blur the lines between the 'Us' and 'Them' dichotomy, by demonstrating that there is no such thing as one type of liberated woman, one kind of Norwegian woman or one kind of Muslim woman and that they are no different (or just as different) as the ethnic majority women. The destabilisation of the mainstream representation of Muslim women as an obvious 'Other' and as part of the out-group, are seen to be constantly challenged by these women, throughout the analysis. There is also the collective idea that women need to stand together and fight, despite their differences or exactly because of their differences, which is what makes them stronger.

When doing research on this particular topic, there are a few things that need to be cleared up and acknowledged. The first is the use of the term 'Muslim women'. By using this I acknowledge that I am doing exactly what I am saying in this thesis, should not be done. I simplify their identity down to a religious one, and thus reproduce the image of them as religious and nothing else. However, this was necessary in order to refer to the religious aspect of their identity as the one receiving prejudice and racism, and not their identity as i.e.

Norwegian, Somali, woman, sister or writer (etc.)⁴. Thus, I do recognise that their identity consists of much more than their 'Muslim' identity, but for the sake of the thesis, it was necessary. Another issue is the use of ethnic Norwegians and minority women. The term 'ethnic Norwegians' is highly contentious, because when is one considered ethnic or foreign? How far back does a person's heritage need to go, in order for them to be ethnic Norwegian, and thus part of the majority society? Should for instance the Norwegian king, Harald V, qualify as ethnic Norwegian, despite his parents being from Sweden, Denmark and England? It also implies a separation between Norwegians and minorities, assuming the former is not part of the latter. However, this too is not something I believe is true, but it was the best way to demonstrate my points through the thesis. Despite its contentious nature, I have chosen to use it, because I deemed it appropriate to 'separate' between women who in the public are represented as the majority, which is white, Christian/non-religious and culturally egalitarian, and those that are none of the above. I recognise the political power behind the word, and I am not attempting to answer who should be referred to as ethnic Norwegian or not, I am merely reflecting how the mainstream public view it.

1.2 Structure of the thesis

This thesis is structured into seven main chapter, excluding the introduction. **Chapter 2** is a literature review, which looks at previous research done on Muslims in Norway, and generally about the Muslim experience in terms of anti-Muslim prejudice, resistance and identities. It will also look at studies done on Muslim women in particular, in terms of institutions such as marriage, social control and the hijab. This chapter will also help to place my research within the field, and to demonstrate where there is a gap in the current academia. **Chapter 3** is the theoretical framework which will set the frames for the analysis. In this chapter I will discuss three theories, though the main one is post colonial feminism. This is the most appropriate theory for this analysis, because of its focus on both patriarchal structures as well as colonial structures. The chapter will also briefly discuss post colonialism, in order to better understand what post colonial feminism is, as well as to understand why *only* post colonialism would have been too limited. The final 'theory' is counter publics, and this is mentioned in order to understand more about the space that the women in this thesis occupy, and why it is important to challenge the liberal public (which is what the counter public does). **Chapter 4** is a discussion on the anti-Muslim sentiments, debates and discourses that are frequently used today, and which

⁴ Though these too receive prejudice, racism and discrimination, I am sure, but it was not the focus of this thesis.

forms the environment in which these women navigate within. I have chosen to look at the European context, as well as the Norwegian context, because I believe it is important to see the the whole picture in order to understand that nothing happens in a vacuum. This chapter will also discuss the representations that dominates how Muslim women are viewed in society, and which is what the women in my analysis challenges. **Chapter 5** is a brief discussion on the situation of Muslim women in Norway, in terms of who they are and their previous resistance in Norway. **Chapter 6** is the methodological chapter, which will outline my research process, limitations of the thesis, as well what I think could have been improved. **Chapter 7** is the analysis chapter, and the main chapter of this thesis. It is structured into two main sub-chapters: **7.1** How are Muslim women represented in the mainstream public and **7.2** How do Muslim women challenge these representations. The first sub-chapter is briefly looking at how the women themselves view these representations, and which ones they consider to be the most persistent. The second sub-chapter, is the most interesting, and it looks at the strategies the women uses to resist stereotypical and prejudice representations of themselves. This sub-chapter is divided into three representations, where the first discusses the idea that Muslim are not free, and it looks at this from both a religious and a non-religious strategic perspective. The second looks at the strategies Muslim women use to resist and challenge the idea that they are irrational or unable to make correct and rational decisions about their lives, because of their religious affiliations. The final section looks at strategies that counter the idea that all Muslim women are the same, and are lacking the fluid and multiple identities non-Muslim women are given. **Chapter 8** is the conclusion, which discusses the main findings from the analysis, its meaning and value for society, as well as looking towards future research.

2. Literature review

This thesis is written in the context of growing migration and multiculturalism in Norway, and Europe in general. With this comes issues such as integration and discrimination, where often the concern for the former and rise of the latter is frequently discussed. It is also written in a context of growing concern for the rise of nationalist and right-wing movements in Europe. They spread hate and fear towards immigrants and non-immigrants, because of their allegedly threat to the nation's values and culture (Strabac and Listhaug 2008). Strabac and Listhaug (2008) argue that fear and prejudice is a common reaction when a privileged position is threatened, such as the current position of the majority. This approach to prejudice, as a consequence of the relative positions of groups and threat perceptions, is still widely used in research (Bobo, 1999; Bobo and Hutchings, 1996; Quillian, 1995; Smith, 1981; Weitzer and Tuch, 2004 *in* Strabac and Listhaug 2008).

Integration, immigration and its accompanying debates, have been discussed by politicians and media with high and low intensity throughout different periods in a Norwegian context- much since the 1700s when Norway received their first refugees (SNL 2017). Following 9/11 however, and the Arab spring, the debate has gained new momentum and interest, much as a result of the many refugees seeking refuge in Europe. However, it is also a result of the problematisation of Islam in the public (Helland 2014), in terms of radicalisation and terrorism. This thesis then, is placed in an environment where minority Norwegians, and especially Muslims, are greatly debated in terms of integration, compatibility with the majority and a problematisation of their religion. In the process, their religious and cultural identity is routinely essentialised. By essentialised, it is meant that all Muslims are fixed in a certain identity (Jones 2011), and that this identity "reifies culture as an all determining structuring force" (Scharff 2011: 130). Though Muslim men are also experiencing a great deal of discrimination, racism and exclusion based on their identity as Muslims and men of colour, my thesis will focus on women. This is because they are dealing with different forms of resistance and discrimination, due to their identity as a woman, person of colour and Muslim, which is why it is analytically useful to separate between them, and focus on one [Muslim]. The focus is also on women because they are often represented as victims and passive agents, despite their own representation of themselves, is completely opposite (Roald 2010). This is why the aim for this

thesis is disrupt this trope and produce an alternative reality of them, as is in the interest of a post colonial feminist. It seeks to construct realities that are determined by the women themselves, and based upon their own experiences.

Considerable research has focused on Muslim women in Muslim countries and their emancipation (Brooks 1995; Chaudhry 1996; Jawad 1998), as well as on Islamic gender inequalities among women and men in regards to marriage and other institutions (Thorbjørnsrud 2001). There are also those who write about resistance to stereotypes about Muslim women, such as Shabana Mir (2009) and Somaya Sami Sabry (2011), who examines American Muslim women's resistance to gendered discourse (Mir 2009). Mir's research shows that stereotypes feed into how both the majority and minority, construct "Muslim women's gendered identities" (pp. 237). It also shows that Muslim women's ability to construct "multiple, shifting, contextual identities is limited, and multiple identities become burdensome, not emancipating" (pp. 252). Indeed, later in my analysis, similar findings exist, indicating the difficulty these women face in trying to live out multiple identities.

There is also focus on racial stereotypes (Sabry 2011), and the use of hijab as a strategy of resistance in a minority versus majority Muslim country (Wagner et als. 2012), as well as in Europe (Shirazi and Mishra 2010). Shirazi and Mishra's research shows that women in the study chose to wear the hijab as a personal choice. It also highlights the different social and cultural environments of the US and Europe, where the former is considerably more multicultural, whereas the latter has more focus on assimilation. Lastly, they argue that "one must take into account historical and socio-political factors" (ibid. 2010: 57), to be able to determine how Muslim women view the veil, rather than forcing its meaning upon them.

Lutfiye Ali and Christopher Sonn (2017) studies strategies of resistance against anti-Islamic representations among Muslim women in Australia. Their study builds upon similar lines as this thesis, by looking at Muslim women's resistance to anti-Islamic discourse in the majority-society. Their conclusion is that women use discursive and performative strategies to challenge representations of Muslim women as veiled and oppressed. It also demonstrated, as will this thesis, that the women drew on diverse and intersecting power and social locations, such as race, ethnicity and gender (ibid. 2017: 1167). Whereas the former focuses on Australia, Tania Saeed (2016) on the other hand, focuses on the similar topic, only in Britain. She looks at Muslim women who challenge dominant anti-Islam discourses though silent dialogue. Her

research discusses how women use dialogue to raise awareness about Islam, as a strategy to resist anti-Muslim representations, and to normalise Muslim presence. The goal for the women is to be able to identify with multiple identities, such as Pakistani, British and Muslim. However, little research has been undertaken yet on any of these particular issues in Norway: of how Muslim women resist through discourse and dialogue, which is where my thesis will aim to contribute. Therefore, the next section will elaborate further on why Norway makes for an interesting case study.

As explained in the introduction, what makes Norway an interesting case, as well as different from Britain, is that they have had a relatively low history of immigration, a relatively small percentage of their population are Muslim, and they do not have a long or in-depth history of colonialism-. Also, Norway's political system allows controversial parties into power, such as the immigrant critical party Frp, as well as the other side of the controversial scale, the left, who are loud voices of a very open society. Lastly Norway attempts to create an image of themselves as the champions of equality, freedom and a humanitarian force, which makes for an interesting case when there are indicators that this may not be the case⁵. This can prove to be an interesting hegemonic discourse to challenge and disrupt, and seeing as not much has been researched in terms of Muslim women's resistance in such a context, this is a gap this thesis aims to fill.

Muslim women and debates in Norway

However, that is not to say that there is no research on Muslim women in Norway. Roald (2005) wrote a book about Muslim women in Norway, where she asks the question whether Muslim women are oppressed or not. Common for much of what is written in a Norwegian context however, is with a focus on their lives and struggles in Norway in regard to issues such as marriage (Thorbjørnsrud 2001), discrimination (Mile 2004), public participation and work life (Predelli 2003; Craig 2004) as well as social control (Bile et als. 2017). With particular emphasis on the head scarf (Høstmælingen 2004; Larsen 2004; Furseth 2014). Below, there will be more details on each of the above themes, to get a better understanding of the oppression and representations that has been written about Muslim women in Norway. They focus more on the lived experiences of women, whereas this thesis focuses on how they challenge and resist

⁵ E.g. the persistent need for feminism for both majority and minority women.

these lived experiences which involves certain representations. This makes for an interesting and original approach from a Norwegian point of view. It is also interesting to understand the power relations and how the majority views the minority, in order to challenge and improve the problematic situation.

Marriage and Muslim women is not an uncommon topic in Norwegian debates, or in academia for that matter (Eide and Orgeret 2015). The topics are often centered around the norms and laws of marriage, and especially the difference between the Norwegian law and the Sharia and the hadiths (Høstmælingen 2004; Roald 2010/2005). Topics such as arranged marriage, polygamy and forced marriage are often debated in the public, much because it is seen as a non-Norwegian problem, due to the focus on inequality and female oppression (Thun 2012; Strandbakken 2004). Yet, as Predelli (2003) and Winther (2005) have pointed out, these studies tacitly presume that it is an exclusively Muslim problem, conjuring away in the process such practices in non-Muslim communities (i.e. Mormons for polygamy). Winther's (ibid.) article on forced marriage argues that this form of abuse is not a Muslim problem, nor any other *one* religion's problem, but a cultural phenomenon that exists around the world, even within Christianity and Norway (2005).

In regard to Muslim women and participation in public life there are a few academic articles. This research lends itself somewhat to my research, as it discusses Muslim women's agency. Predelli's research (2003) indicates that women's participation in the mosque as well as in public debate and general public, is increasing. The level of participation varies depending on the context, in terms of ethnicity, culture, region and social context, seeing as these are all things that affects one's habitus (Predelli 2003). It is also important to note that a religious identity does not indicate that, that identity determines everything that happens in a person's life. Being Muslim does not automatically render all actions Islamic or Muslim. This will also be demonstrated in this thesis, where Muslim women use their agency to resist the idea that Muslim women are nothing but that, by using both a religious and non-religious based approach. As participants in public debates, their identity varies, and it cannot be assumed that their discourse or arguments come from their religious identity, which is another point that is important to get across in this thesis.

The topic of “social control” is what initially made me aware of the movement in Norway that eventually led me to the women in this thesis. They are three Arab girls, who call themselves the shameless Arab girls, who discuss issues of social control within Islamic communities, as well as the importance of not making it a 'Muslim problem' (Bile et als. 2017). Research that addressed social control, also discussed what it was, and though some discussed it as a minority or -Muslim problem (Fekjær; 2006; Jagmann 2012), others were more careful to avoid the pitfall of generalisation and essentialisation (Helseth 2015). This could be due to the lack of agreement in Norway of what exactly social control is, and is not. Fekjær (2006) for instance, argues that minority parents are stricter and has a more gendered upbringing than those belonging to the majority society, and refers to this as social control. This is assuming that there is a line of strictness and gendered upbringing that can separate something as social control from 'normal healthy upbringing'. Its definition as essentially a Muslim, Arab or 'immigrant' problem (Bangstad 2012), has become naturalised in the public debate, which has resulted in a convenient ignorance of it as also an ethnic Norwegian problem. When an ethnic white man uses violence to control his daughter or wife, it is often explained as an individual family tragedy, with no affiliation to Norwegian culture. Whereas if it is done by a man with a minority background, it is quickly linked to his culture or religion where the term 'social control' or honour is often used (Iversen 2012; Helseth 2015). The former is discussed as an individual one-off incident, whereas the latter is discussed as a systematic problem. There are studies showing that there are about 20000 Norwegian women each year who are exposed to serious violence or threats in close relations (NOU 2003), which is most likely a highly underreported number. However, "ethnic Norwegian men's violence against women does not fit in with ski wax, Sunday walks in the forest and Olympic-pins from 1994" (Helseth 2015: 68). Therefore, it is kept out of the liberal public space.

One topic that has received a disproportionate amount of attention in books, academic articles and media, is the veil, and in general how Muslim women dress. Lentin and Titley (2014) argues that those wearing the hijab tends to be racialised, to the extent that all you see is the veil and that it, and therefore the woman, represents a certain culture. The debate often revolves around two arguments; the woman's right to practice religion as she pleases, and the oppressive nature some believe the veil has (Helseth 2015). These debates often follow political, feminist or religious lines. Though some, also take a more practical approach to the issue, such as Høstmælingen (2006) and Haugseth (2009). Høstmælingen (2006) discusses the possible ban

on hijab and niqab, where he argues the latter is more plausible to ban than the former, by using a strategy based on a rights-approach and by comparing it to the successful ban of the hijab at universities in Turkey. Haugseth (2009) uses a strategy of discrimination and -equality laws to argue why it is problematic to ban either of them. She argues that it is an interesting debate, because it deals with both issues of discrimination against religion and discrimination against women, thus demonstrating the intersectionality of discrimination. For her, refusing women to wear the hijab at for instance work, will only harm them further because it will only exclude a group of women who are already heavily discriminated against at the work place (2009: 49). As will be demonstrated later on in the analysis, all of the women agree that most wear the hijab for personal reasons, and that it should not be abolished, because it does not define their capabilities or identities as a person. This demonstrates another reason for why this thesis is relevant, because it makes inquiries into how the women themselves view the hijab and can thus challenge those who refuse to listen to them when they raise their voices.

Common for most of the above debates, is that they discuss *outside* Islam and *for* Muslims, rather than inquiring how Muslims themselves think and perceive Islam and themselves. Where my research fills in a gap – is that though the extant research has successfully highlighted the challenges Muslim women face, living in Norway, they have so far paid little attention to female Muslim agency. Few have inquired into how ordinary Muslim women experience anti-Muslim discourses and its effects, and how they precede to deal with it. Similarly, the argument about social control focuses upon the extent of the social control Muslim women endure, without paying heed to Muslim women's agency in the matter, as a potential locus of change. Hence, they essentialise Muslim women across time and space as all suffering the same social control and representation. By not acknowledging alternative representations of Muslim women, through researching their resistance towards anti-Muslim representations, the breeding of stereotypes, fear and ignorance will only continue. Much of the existent work represent Muslim women as weak victims and not in control of their own lives, which is argued to not be found in 'Norwegian culture'⁶. These are the representations of Muslim women, that the women in this

⁶ This is however, not accurate, there are also issues of social control, victimisation and inequality problems in the so-called 'Norwegian culture' (Read Magnussen et als. 2012 for a study of the religious regions in Southern Norway and gender equality). Though this is not something my thesis will address, there certainly is a need for more research on the topic of social control among majority women in Norway.

thesis challenge and resist, through various forms of strategies. They try to demonstrate their diversity, their individuality and their 'normalness' in a Norwegian context.

Resistance in Norway

To round up this literature review, the final section will look into research undertaken on women's resistance to negative representations of themselves in Norway. This is relevant to the thesis because it underlines how the norm of resistance is in Norway, as well as demonstrating how majority women tend to exclude minority women in female struggles. There is a substantial amount that has been written about majority women's resistance in Norway; from fighting nazis and wars (Vernø & Sveri 1990; Eriksen 1993; Nøstdal 2000), to fighting for equal rights and freedoms (Beer 1982; Erichsen 2018) to feminism (Thun 2011; Predelli et al. 2012). But there are also minority women resisting in Norway, and they fight everything from Norwegian feminism, patriarchy within minority communities, and for a space in the liberal public (Thun 2012; Bile et al. 2017; Erichsen 2018). Thun's article on Norwegian feminist discourse is especially relevant, because it addresses the issue of "majority feminists' difficulties in addressing minority women activists' claims in contemporary Norway" (Thun 2012: 37). According to Thun, minority women, including Muslim women, are not included in Norwegian feminism, thus they cannot use it to resist and counter dominant anti-discourses. Indeed, this may explain why there has been substantial research done on ethnic white, female, resistance and struggles, but little on that of minority women. Thun (ibid.) also indicates the need for a postcolonial feminist perspective on these issues, because previous Norwegian feminist research has displayed a tendency to ignore racial and religious aspects. Their focus is solely on a universal patriarchy, and ignoring minority women because they often feel there is no common ground between them. This is an issue Zuhayr Abdi, one of the women in this study, demonstrates in the analysis; the importance of not letting anyone separate women in the struggle for emancipation and equality (pp. 52).

Another Norwegian woman who has attempted to resist and counter certain negative, anti-Muslim sentiments among fellow Norwegians, is Bushra Ishaq, also one of the women in this thesis. In her book, *Who is talking for us?* (2017), there is a large study of Norwegian Muslim's thoughts on issues and values that many majority Norwegians have stereotypical ideas of; such as gender equality, terrorism and freedom of speech. This was done in the hopes that it would

increase tolerance and knowledge of a much silenced, but often debated, minority group. However, as will be seen in the analysis, Ishaq argues that her book was criticised and silenced, because it challenged 'established truths'. Two other books that were written in 2017, by young, Norwegian Muslim women (and a few men), were *Skamløs*⁷ (Bile et als. 2017) and *Skal liksom liksom-passet ditt bety noe?*⁸ (Razaq et als. 2017). These are books that not only use discourse to resist negative social control within the Muslim community, they also resist Muslim stereotypes and myths, anti-Islamic discourse and the idea that some Norwegians believe they can never be 100% Norwegian. This relates to my thesis because they demonstrate different strategies used to resist mainstream representations of Muslim women, and some of them will also show up in my analysis.

⁷ Translated 'Shameless'

⁸ Translated 'Is your pretend-passport supposed to mean anything?'

3. Theoretical framework

This chapter will elaborate on how post colonial feminism points toward the research question, in terms of how to destabilise hegemonic 'truths' and Western representations. It is concerned with how the norm is white, and thus why women of colour and of other religions are racialised in a way that creates stereotypes and essentialised identities. The idea is that Muslim women are facing both colonial structures as well as patriarchal structures, which is rarely recognised and acknowledged in the West [and Norway]. There is a critique of Norwegian feminism as being too white, and lack inclusiveness towards those that do not fulfil certain Western norms. This thesis explores how Muslim women resist these norms and stereotypical representations, through a focus on women's agency, strategies of resistance and personal experiences. It is sensitive towards not permitting the essentialising pathologies that is often part of a liberal feminist perspective, thus allowing for fluid and multiple identity formation.

The first sub-chapter will look at what post colonial feminism is and why it is a necessary and appropriate theory for this thesis, as well as the benefits of using a combination of the two - post colonialism *and* feminism. The second sub-chapter will look at post colonialism, because much of it is still highly relevant for this thesis, despite its incomplete nature in regard to a feminist lens. The third sub-chapter will deal with the use of counter public. The counter publics is a space for those that are excluded from the liberal public, which is reserved for those that reproduce certain hegemonic values and discourses, which works to maintain the societal and political status quo.

3.1 Post colonial feminism

Post-colonial feminism is a reaction to Western feminism (Mohanty 1988) and the male-dominating field of post colonialism. Post-colonial feminism can be read as a double critique, correcting a blind spot in both feminism and post colonialism. "Therefore, it is important to use feminist theory to look at the intersections of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in colonial and postcolonial ways of organizing the world" (Jones 2011: 2). It is a lens in which to view women who are situated within a double colonialism; where both post colonialism and patriarchal power and inequity affects their lives (Jones 2011; Tyagi 2014). One major criticism

post-colonial feminism has, of 'Western feminism'⁹, is their universalisation of women and their struggles (Mohanty 1988; Spivak 1994 *in* Jones 2011). There is a construction of a West versus the rest mentality, which "creates a false sense of easily definable identities for women whose lives are hybrid and complex" (Jones 2011: 33). Often minority women in the West are produced as a singular group, despite the variety of class, ethnicity, religion, and race and usually in a binary relationship with Western majority women (Mohanty 1988). The former is often characterised as traditional, developing, ignorant, and not to mention, victims (Jones 2011). The victimisation of women is based on a colonial discourse, that sees them as passive recipients of religion, culture and patriarchal oppression, whereas the West is seen as saviours due to their self-conceived superiority (Mohanty 1988; Chatterjee 1993; Spivak 1995 *in* Deepak 2011). An example of this is in the Norwegian context where Muslim women are told that their hijab is oppressive, or that they cannot be both Muslim and liberated women at the same time. Mohanty (1988) argued that the goal then, for a post colonial feminist, is to dismantle these Western representations of women, and especially that of non-Western women, which does not account for intersectionality and fluidity.

How Muslim women are now represented as a homogenous group of victims, is how many Western women were discussed and portrayed by Western men before their 'freedom'. This is interesting, because the debate is often skewed towards how certain 'problems' are seen as essentially non-Western, which means that the lack of equality within the majority society is often ignored by focusing solely on minority women. One of these is the issue of social control, which is often specified as an 'immigrant' or 'foreign' problem, rather than a universal problem. A consequence of this type of rhetoric is that it becomes very hard for women to break out of them, because those that do, are seen as the exception rather than the norm. Though one would assume that they help to break out of stereotypes, they instead become tokens of the so called 'individual heroine syndrome' (Afzal-Khan 2015 *in* Zubair and Zubair 2017). The syndrome "is promoted by celebrating individual women like Malala and Mukhtar Mai, who somehow rose above these limitations by virtue of their extraordinary capabilities, strength and drive" (*ibid.* pp. 18). Thus, it only works to further stereotypical representations of Muslim women, rather than breaking them completely. It also builds on the discourse of 'good' and 'bad' Muslims, where the heroine becomes the good Muslim, and is therefore given access to the liberal public due to her criticism of Islam and Muslims (Bangstad 2013). This is why post colonial feminism

⁹ There is not *one* Western feminism, but for the sake of the argument- there are generalisations made.

seeks to destabilise these Western hegemonic discourses and 'truths' that has determined what a Muslim woman looks like, and to reconstruct and reproduce the image of them. Representations should be based on their own multiple and fluid identities, and not as victims or tokens of a larger group, problem or system.

As part of this project, post colonial feminists' interest also lies in deconstructing the idea that 'one patriarchy fits all' (Sa'ar 2005). Rather, female emancipation and resistance adapts according to the particular patriarchy that is their reality (ibid. 2005). Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) coined the term "the patriarchal bargain" (*in* Sa'ar 2005: 680), to show "how women living under patriarchy strategize to maximize security and optimize their life options" (ibid. pp. 680). This could either be through cooperating and defending patriarchal rules in order to survive, or maneuvering around the system as a way to resist. How women are empowered is contextual and up to each individual, as Jones (2011) argues, there are no formulas for how, or what it means to be liberated or empowered. Western majority feminists may tend to forget some of the constraints other women face, in terms of security, culture, family and so on that limits their space for resistance. Thus, becoming blind to much of the ongoing resistance many women are fighting on a daily basis. What post colonial feminists must try and convey then, is that multiple forms of resistance, patriarchy and desires exist, and that there is not one-glove-fits-all when it comes to emancipation and empowerment. Indeed, this is what will become clearer later on in the analysis, where women not only choose different strategies to resist, but also focuses on different aspects to resist, such as freedom of religion, social control or racism.

Often their social, cultural, racial and political circumstances are ignored, and substituted with a white, Western perspective through a movement that can be referred to as a "false sisterhood" (Tyagi 2014). This is where Western culture, concerns and strategies become representative for everyone (Mohanty 1988). However, though it is important to recognise women's various personal experiences and contexts, it is also important for a post colonial feminist not to assume cultural differences (Hinterberg 2007). By this it means that not only should essentialisation of difference be avoided, but highlighting differences based on racial, cultural, ethnic or religious grounds, also runs the risk of reproducing the eternal 'Other'. For instance, by representing Muslim women as victims or oppressed, rather than saying Norwegian women, they are singled out as the only ones being oppressed in Norway. The result is also that they are alienated and

'Othered'. Even referring to someone as non-Western, minority or Muslim, runs the risk of reproducing and naturalising the 'Other'¹⁰. This means researchers need to be aware of the implications this may have (Giri and Tope 2016) and how "...assumptions of oppression and empowerment play out in their representations of 'Others'" (Hinterberg 2007: 76). Though intentions may be pure, too often women become victims or tokens of said culture, religion or race, which reduces them to stereotypes stemming from colonial thoughts (Giri and Tope 2016). One way to counter this, is to make sure that when representing the women in this thesis, they are not generalised or seen as representing their 'sisters', nor are they given simplistic or binary identities¹¹.

Along these lines, Alcoff (1995 *in* Hinterberg 2007: 75) argues that speaking for others has implications due to the political power they hold, though she also sees it as acceptable as long as it empowers those being spoken for. However, the problem with this is that it ignores the assumptions being made through such a representation; that those speaking for others have full knowledge of the oppressed, and their desired outcomes (Hinterberg 2007; Giri and Tope 2016). In a post colonial feminist analysis such as in this thesis, it is therefore important to acknowledge the political and ethical implications of representing others, by avoiding a Eurocentric perspective, as well as making general assumptions. For example, all of the women in this thesis have experienced being represented by others, who have had their own agenda, and who were not willing to *actually* listen to their voices. Spivak warns us to "...suspend the mood of self-congratulation as saviors of marginality" (1992: 204 *in* Hinterberg 2007). This refers to the importance of not seeing this thesis as an opportunity to 'save Muslim women', but rather a chance for them to help themselves, and avoid the victim mentality that is so ingrained in Western societies.

3.2 Post colonialism

Lastly, a brief discussion on what a post colonial criticism entails, mostly because post colonial feminism also includes a post colonial criticism, just with the additional focus on women and patriarchy. Post colonialism and feminism is similar in that both are interested in dominance, power and hierarchies (Jones 2011). Where a feminist scholar is interested in looking at power

¹⁰ As I have already discussed in the introction.

¹¹ To read more on how to best represent others, see methodology page 36 and 39.

relations in a gendered perspective, post colonial scholars are interested in colonial hierarchies and power relations between those at the center and those at the margins (Jones 2011). Fanon (*in* Jones 2011) brings up issues around race, and how racism and discrimination is ever present in society. He argues that the "Historical weight to the colour of his skin [...] meant no matter how educated he became in the best French schools he could never be "French" (Ibid. 2011: 26). He also described how he was always "... overdetermined from without" and "... dissected under white eyes, the only *real* eyes. I am fixed" (Fanon 1986: 116). This reflects the points made earlier well; how white is the norm in the Norwegian society and they are the ones deciding what 'Others' are or should be. This is important in a post colonial feminist critique as well, in order to remember to analyse outside of white, male, Western perspective.

Said is best known for his discussions on 'orientalism', where he argues that the world is divided between the Orient and the Occident. The former is India, its surrounding states and the Muslim and Arab world, whereas the latter is the 'West' (*in* Jones 2011). According to him, the occident succeeded in creating an "imperial regime of truth", where the Orient is in a dichotomous relationship with the Occident. The former is always characterised as a homogenous and inferior group in relations to the Occident. Indeed, this is the point made several times in this thesis; that Muslims are everything majority Norwegians are not, and the former is always inferior to the latter. Bhabha (1994 *in* Jones 2011) continues on this and argues that because of this regime of truth, the West can justify their interference in other's lives. This is due to the construction of a world where the Occident is seen as civilised and rational, whereas the Orient is the opposite; uncivilised and irrational. The goal of post colonial scholars then, is to break up these colonial categories, such as racial hierarchies and fixed identities, as well as deconstructing stereotypes and myths about the 'Other'. They are interested in showing how colonial and orientalist perspectives and arguments are still being used in the media, in education, politics, popular culture and all other layers of society, and the consequences this may have. This is also very much what a post colonial *feminist* perspective is seeking to do, but with a more female centered focus, especially because post colonialism has very much overlooked concerns relating to women. Not to mention the lack of female post colonial scholars, which certainly has an affect on the nature of post colonial debates.

3.3 Counter publics

Nancy Fraser is one of the first people who criticised the republican public sphere for being male dominated, and exclusively masculine (1990). However, it is not only women who were/are excluded. Though the public sphere is said to be a space where everyone can come together to debate and discuss a variety of affairs (Habermas 1989), the reality is that the space is far from open to everyone (Fraser 1990; Salter 2013). The exclusion from the liberal public, is not only gendered, it is also racial, class and culturally -biased, and this is what counter publics contest (Fraser 1990). A reason why it is so important to challenge the liberal public is that its dominance allows it to define and reproduce hegemonic values and ideals, which often discretely reproduces orientalist and colonial values as well. A post colonial feminist critique demonstrates the importance of challenging hegemonic 'truths', because they are often based on a colonial discourse that benefit the white majority and creates unequal power relations. Indeed, the analysis in this thesis will demonstrate that this is exactly what the women are challenging, and which therefore excludes them to the counter public. Their 'new' representations of themselves in public, destabilises the current position of majority Norwegians, thus resisting dominant power relations. One important and influential actor in the liberal public, is the mass media. They are not able to remain unbiased, which often comes through as a white, masculine lens (Elmore, 2007; North, 2009; Ross and Carter, 2011).

However, with the internet gaining popularity and accessibility, it has opened a new, and some argue, unparalleled space for marginalised people to partake in public and to dismantle hegemonic discourses found in the public sphere (Salter 2013). Whereas before they were restricted by others representing them, or not, in the media, they are now free to construct their own stories through social media. Here they can produce discourses that traditionally would be completely delegitimised and silenced by powerful individuals and groups in the public (Powell 2015). However, that is not to say that everyone has access, the ability to express themselves or to be heard; the reach and influence of counter publics are often impeded by hegemonic values and cultural reproductions that are still present in both discourse and society, by which at a certain point they will be intensely resisted and constrained by the mainstream public (Wajcman 2010; Salter 2013). Asen (2000) argues that power is always present in discourse and thus usually advantages some and disadvantages others, which affects counter publics as well, because it is situated in a relationship with the wider public space through its constant competition and struggle for hegemony. In this context, the women in this study use this counter

public to resist and challenge dominant representations of themselves in the public, through social media, or the internet in general. Whereas before they were severely underrepresented and invisible in the media picture, they are now far more visible. This is because it is difficult to ignore their collective voice in a world where social media is readily available, and in an environment such as in Norway, where freedom of speech and religion is appraised. Later on, in the analysis, this will be demonstrated through the use the women make of Twitter, Instagram, letters to the editor and books that creates collective movements that are difficult to ignore.

4. The anti-Muslim discourse in Europe and Norway

This section will briefly introduce the nature of anti-Muslim discourse, to understand more what it is Muslim women seek to challenge. By anti-Muslim discourse, it means discourse that utilises different strategies to argue against Muslim presence in Europe and Norway. Some are more direct than others, and some are more hateful than others. A common thread however, is the use of values and security to justify the reduction of their presence, and the use of gender equality to promote stricter control. Either way, this section will go through some of the more common ones, beginning with a European context and moving on to the Norwegian context. The reason why the European context is also included, is to demonstrate that what is happening in Norway today, is not happening in a vacuum. The idea is to show somewhat of a political trend, that seems to be interested in alienating the Muslim population.

4.1 The wider European context

In Europe today, as well as in other parts of the world, there is a clear focus on Muslims when immigration and integration is discussed in the media, in debates or in politics (Kundnani 2007; Strabac and Listhaug 2008; Meer and Modood 2009; Elchardus and Spruyt 2014). Malik (2009) argues that Christianity has, and still is, playing a large role in facilitating prejudice and divisions between 'us' Europeans and 'them' non-Europeans. Often it plays on a rhetoric of good versus bad, where it facilitates a colonial-type rule where the 'Other' needs salvation and civilising (ibid. 2009). Though the debate about 'us' and 'them' is nothing new in terms of integration and immigration, there has been a slow shift from focusing on race to focusing on religion (Eriksen 2012) and from 'immigrant' to 'Muslim' (Elchardus and Spruyt 2014). Elchardus and Spruyt (2014) refers to the increasingly widespread anti-Muslim discourse as an 'Islamisation of the stranger' (pp. 75). The public sphere has been dominated by alarmism, simplification and sensationalising of negative stereotypes and myths about Islam, Muslims and Arabs (Strabac and Listhaug 2008). The sentiments that render Muslims a threat to the European society and inherently incapable of adapting to the cultures and norms found here, are no longer reserved for extreme right-wing groups, but has become part of the mainstream discourse (ibid. 2014).

Vaisse (2008) discusses some of the common myths about Muslims in Europe, though they are relevant to the Norwegian context as well. The first myth he discusses is that "Being Muslim constitutes a fixed identity, sufficient to fully characterize a person" (ibid. pp. 1). People assume the religious identities trump other identities, granting everything that person does to religion. Another widespread myth, also relevant and often believed in Norway, is that "Muslims in Europe are, in one way or the other, inherently foreign, the equivalent of visiting Middle-Easterners who are alien to the "native" culture" (ibid. pp. 1). Later on, in the analysis, it will become clear that the women too have experience with this in the Norwegians anti-Muslim discourse. They are represented as the opposites of ethnic majority women and are seen as guests who are inherently 'different' to the rest. The last myth that will be mentioned is that "Muslims in Europe form a "distinct, cohesive and bitter group," (ibid. pp. 2). This reflects the current debate on integration, with those that claim Muslims have no interest in integration or interacting with the majority society. It is problematic not only because it is in most cases not true, but also because it reproduces the idea that the Muslim identity trumps other identities, such as ethnicity or social belonging. It also represents Muslims as a monolithic group, something the women in this study tries to challenge and change.

Lastly, there is an ever-increasing debate about racism, and how Muslims are becoming more and more racialised (Meer and Modood 2009; Thun 2012; Elchardus and Spruyt 2014; Carr and Haynes 2015). Meer and Modood (2009) argue that it is not only the hostility towards Muslims that is alarming, but the "... derision by otherwise self-avowedly anti-racist intellectuals or politicians who either remain skeptical of the scale of the problem, or, indeed, of its racial content altogether" (pp. 338). The argument is often that anti-Muslim sentiments and islamophobia is not racist, because Muslims not only voluntarily choose their religion, it is also not based on a biological idea of race (Carr and Haynes 2015). The problem is that they argue for an especially narrow definition of the word, which only includes extreme right-wing groups with intense hatred (Meer and Modood 2009; Helland 2014). Rather than focusing on the problem of racism and Islamophobia, the debate has "... conversely and frequently, invited criticism of Muslims themselves" (Meer and Modood 2009: 339). On the other hand, many scholars do recognise that this new form of cultural hierarchy and discrimination is in fact racist. Not only because the Muslim identity is often equated with a non-white/non-Western identity (Kundnani 2007; Meer and Modood 2009; Carr and Haynes 2015), the identity is also essentialised as a group of people with monolithic and static cultural and biological

characteristics (Helland 2014; Carr and Haynes 2015). They operate through a colonial discourse by representing Muslims as homogenous and inferior to 'the West' (Carr and Haynes 2015). There is no recognition of neither the cultural, ethnic or racial diversity, nor the social and historical context that Muslims live in (ibid. 2015). Their identity is not represented as multi-faceted, but rather their Muslim identity becomes the sole focus, where faith and piety is prioritised (Kundnani 2007). Instead of recognition and empathy, what is often happening is that Muslims are being accused of adopting a victim mentality, and are turned into perpetrators of violence, oppression and cultural decay (Malik 2009; Meer and Modood (2009).

As the following will show, what is described above is very much true for the Norwegian context as well, but the next section will go slightly more into detail regarding the specifics of the current anti-Muslim discourse and public sphere in Norway.

4.2 The Norwegian context

Immigration is not a new phenomenon in Norwegian history, however the extent of it and the global character, is (Alghasi 2011). There is also a shift in the public sphere of how immigrants are discussed, and Alghasi (2011) argues that the most noticeable shift was after 9/11, when Islam became the obvious 'Other' marker, and Muslims replaced immigrants (Eriksen 2005 *in* Alghasi 2011: 647). Since then anti-Muslim sentiments have become widespread in the Norwegian public, and they have been singled out as the clearest out-group, the 'Other', in society (Eriksen 2012; Bangstad 2014). It often focuses on the differences between 'Muslim culture' and 'Norwegian culture' (Eriksen 2012), where the former should be learning from the latter. It becomes a marker between 'good' and 'bad', 'them' versus 'us' (Thun 2012; Bangstad 2013).

A problem with the public discourse is that politicians and the media often take it upon themselves to enlighten the broader public what Islam 'really' is, and what Muslims 'essentially' feel, think or do (Bangstad 2014). This is problematic because earlier research indicates that the media tends to represent immigrants and ethnic minorities in a negative light (Gullestad 2002; Eide and Simonsen 2004; Lindstad and Fjeldstad 2005; Eriksen 2012). Bangstad (2014) supports this in his research, where he argues that the substantial extent of anti-Muslim sentiments in Norway is impossible to deny, and political parties such as Frp has contributed to the normalisation of such anti-Muslim discourses, especially by relating discussions on

Muslims with violence and misogyny (Andersson 2012). The normalisation of anti-Muslim discourse could also be why few Norwegians consider themselves racist or anti-Muslim, despite a discourse that is in fact heavily racist and Islamophobic (Helland 2014: 142). It is important to recognise that Norway is not exempt from racism, discrimination and anti-Muslim prejudice, despite what majority Norwegians themselves believe. The disbelief Norwegians have in their own racist, discriminatory and anti-Muslim prejudice is dangerous, because it allows it to go unchallenged. It is also important in order to understand the challenges facing these women in resisting mainstream representations, in an environment that is already somewhat hostile towards them.

This thesis will not attempt to answer to what degree these representations are true or not, but it takes as its point of departure that Muslim women are discriminated against based on certain representations of them. The debate in Norway is often centered around gender equality and the desire to liberate Muslim women from their religion and oppressive men (Kunst et als. 2012; Helseth 2015). Seen from a postcolonial feminist perspective, there is a tendency to reproduce racist and prejudice representations of minority men and women, where the former represent the abusers and the latter represent the victims (Helseth 2015). Hirsi Ali¹² was quoted saying that “[Muslim] Women are not at all free. Religious people and especially Muslims do not think independently. They do not create their own future. They are always dependent on Allah and the Prophet” (*in* Jacobsen and Stenvoll 2010: 277). This reinforces the representation of Muslim women as homogenous victims and incapable of rational thinking as a result of Islam. The assumed homogenous identity that racialise Muslim women, also positions them as “... excluded from the category “women” because of their assumed “otherness” in a Norwegian context# (Gunaratnam 2003; Gullestad 2006; Berg et al. 2010 *in* Thun 2012: 42). When this type of discourse is normalised, where things are seen as fixed and essential to the community and culture as just “the way they are” (Razack 2004 :167), it becomes difficult to challenge. Especially for women who wear the hijab, as they are exposed to even more prejudice, stereotypes and negative discrimination (Magnussen and Melinder 2014).

Muslim women are struggling to gain equal access to the public and to be represented as active individuals rather than victims (Helseth 2015). Due to the construction in the public of western

¹² A female Islam critic in Norwegian public debates.

women as liberated and equal, the Muslim woman is constructed as oppressed and as victims of patriarchy (Scharff, 2011). This is because of the frequent construction of the West as everything the 'Other' is not (ibid. 2011). As was seen in the previous theoretical chapter on 'Counter Publics', the reason for the struggle for access to the public space, is that it is reserved for those that reproduce hegemonic realities, such as the former. However, a few have managed to create a space for themselves within the public sphere, but only as a result of them resisting their own communities rather than the Norwegian one (Bangstad 2013), thus conforming to the hegemonic status quo. Arguably this could be why the movement 'Skamløs' have been more visible and debated, than the book *Skal liksom liksom-passet ditt bety noe?* (2017). The former addresses social control within minority communities, whereas the latter addresses racism, discrimination and prejudice within the majority society. Bangstad (2013) argues that those who are deemed 'good' Muslims are those that criticise Muslims, or immigrants in general, thus being granted more recognition and space in the public (pp. 357).

As established above, Muslim women face systematic discrimination based on certain representations of them in the public. This takes place in the public sphere where representations of Muslim women as victims has become part of the hegemonic discourse. The analysis will look at how these representations are challenged and resisted by the women themselves, and some of the challenges they face in doing so. Naturally, because these women are trying to dismantle hegemonic representations and stereotypes, they are met with much criticism, disbelief and hatred. However, that is also an indication that they are actually a threat to the current system, because if they were met with no resistance, it would only mean they were reproducing status quo.

5. Background

5.1 Muslim women in Norway: socioeconomic and political situation

This sub-chapter will sketch out the situation for Muslim women in Norway today. As this thesis is about Muslim women's resistance, it is necessary to see what environment they live and fight in. Who are they, and what is their socioeconomic and political situation. Saying that, this will by no means claim that all Muslim women are either this or that, however, it will sketch somewhat of a general overview. Just as one would not assume to ask *who* majority women are, because of their diversity, the same goes for minority women. This section therefore attempts to demonstrate the diversity that exists between Muslim women. This is because one of the stereotypical representations of them, is that they are a monolithic group, and their diversity is often ignored (Carr and Haynes 2015).

Muslim women practice Islam differently, depending on where they are from and what environment they are currently in (Roald 2010). Islam, just like any other religion, interlinks with cultural and social practices, so there is no reason for why it could not be adapted to a Norwegian context as well (El-Hamel 2002; Predelli 2003). Chaudhry (2011) argues that according to Islam, new ethnicities, customs and laws should be embraced, and it should be encouraged that Islam can be practiced outside of culture. Thus, one cannot argue that all Norwegian Muslim women are the same, despite their common religion. The women in this thesis have backgrounds from different countries, cultures and customs, thus their Muslim identity here in Norway is not necessarily the same. According to Roald (2010) there could very well be more cultural and social difference between different Muslim women, than a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim majority Norwegian.

Few things have been discussed as much, in terms of Muslim women, as the hijab. It has received a disproportionate amount of attention, despite the low numbers of women who actually use it (Vogt 2004; Roald 2010; Mirza 2013). It is an interesting debate, because, though not limited to, when a Christian and a Muslim woman both wears the veil, they are perceived very differently (Roald 2010). The former is pious or kind, the latter is radical or oppressed (ibid. 2010). This has resulted in Norwegian women refraining from using the hijab, because of the discrimination, harassment or judgement they fear they might receive (Roald 2010). The

reality is that most Muslim women chooses to wear the veil for personal reasons. Whether this is for fashion, closeness to themselves or to symbolise their devotion to Allah. Four of the women in this thesis wear the hijab, and for all of them it was a personal choice, not forced upon them. That is not to say that there are not women who are forced to wear it, or who are oppressed, but the hijab is often *only* portrayed as a symbol of oppression or radicalisation, in the Norwegian public (Kjensli 2009¹³).

Lastly, Muslim women in Norway are not new to resistance. In the 90s several organisations were formed to promote their rights, knowledge and information, as well as just being a common meeting place. Some of these organisations were Islamsk Kvinnegruppe Norge (IKN), Norges Muslimske Ungdom (NMU) and Muslimske Studentsamfunn (MSU). One of the largest and most influential organisations today, for all minority women is called MiRA. This organisation works on improving minority women and -girls lives in Norway, especially focusing on integration and equality. Muslim women are also becoming more and more active in organising and participating in demonstrations, where they address both minority and majority societies (Predelli 2003). This is also a use of counter public, where Muslim women can challenge and resist representations of themselves, as well as other social and political issues. With the increasing technological development (Alghasi 2011: 646) demonstrations through solidarity has enabled otherwise excluded groups and individuals, such as Muslim women, a space and a voice. As this thesis will show, there is also an emerging environment for young Muslim women to raise their voice and demand attention for their resistance. They are challenging stereotypical representations of them as weak, victims and oppressed, and promote equality and liberty for all. The following sub-chapter will discuss this in more detail.

¹³ Interview with a Norwegian expert on the Middle East, Berit S. Thorbjørnsrud, who I have also referenced to in this thesis before.

6. Methodology

I chose to use a qualitative method for this thesis, because I was interested in individuals and their personal accounts of living and struggling in Norway. It was not important whether 10 or 3 percent of Norwegian Muslim women disagree or negotiate with the mainstream representations of them, numbers are impersonal and inaccurate in terms of nuances and details. Though a qualitative method automatically lowers the numbers of participants, it increases the participant's individuality and ability to represent themselves. The aim of the thesis is not to generalise or make assumptions based on what the women had to say, it is to disrupt the tendency to generalise and thus essentialise. The problem, which initially made me choose this topic, is that these women are too often characterised as a monolithic group without proper representation of their diversity. Representations of them are often based on stereotypes and the best way to counter this is by allowing the women themselves, to speak up. By choosing a qualitative method, in my case interviews, I hope to demonstrate their voice without too much bias based on myself representing them. I clearly state that these interviews are not in any way meant to represent all, or indeed any Muslim women, other than those participating. It is meant to give a detailed insight into a group of minority women who are often ignored in terms of their resistance and autonomy. And in the process, help contest the un-reflective assumptions of homogeneity of many within Norwegian media and society. Indeed, if the goal is to undermine generalising tendencies then this can be done with relatively few examples. It is only when generalising that one needs to seek large numbers.

I also ended up doing a content analysis of nine pieces written by six Muslim women. The reason for this is that few replied to the interviews, and there was need for additional information to write a purposeful thesis. Using a mixed qualitative method (Ritchie and Ormston 2014: 44), allows me to get more detailed information and from a different context, that an interview would perhaps not provide.

All texts, as well as the interview, was in Norwegian, and all translations are therefore done by myself, and any meaning lost in translation is my fault.

6.1 Interviewing process

My choice fell on semi-structured interviews through email, where I asked five relatively open questions to allow depth and reflection in the answers. [See appendix 1]. There was also a sixth 'question' which allowed the participants to add anything in regard to the questions or the general topic. The questions were asked so that I would get a sense of their role in the public debate on Norwegian Muslim women representation, and their take on how the current representations are. After I had emailed them the questions, they were given the time it would take to reply and email back, with an emphasis that I preferred in depth answers and no need to worry about going off topic. Whatever they felt like saying in regard to the topic, even if I had not mentioned it in the questions, they were encouraged to speak freely. This way they could open up issues, themes and ideas that I had not thought about, and that I did not have access to, as a non-religious, white woman. The importance of providing a space for *all* women to speak and represent themselves, despite race, religion or culture, is key in challenging the status quo of a very much homogenous liberal public space (Fraser 1990).

The interviews did unfortunately not go as I had hoped. I had four women answering me, saying they would like to participate in the interviews, but only one actually replied to the interview questions. The reason for this, I think, is the relatively short time frame the women were given to answer. If I were to do this again, I would start the interview process earlier, and perhaps not do e-mail interviews. If the interviews had taken place face-to-face, I am sure I would have had more interviews in this thesis. Though I am also not sure if the women would have had the opportunity to do face-to-face, seeing as they travel quite a bit for work. Either way, since I did not get as many interviews as I had hoped, 5-10, I decided to analyse some of their written work to complement the one interview I had received.

6.2 Selection of participants

6.2.1 For the interviews

Participants were selected by first identifying movements by Norwegian Muslim women that discussed issues of representation, identity and Muslim women in general. My decision fell on the 'Skamløs' (Shameless) movement which was started by three Arabic girls, to initially challenge the problem of social control. From there I created an overview over active participants in the debate that referred to the movement or the same topics the 'shameless

women' discussed. Then I picked out those I found to be most relevant, which was ten, all relatively publicly known women. The selection was therefore not random, but strategically chosen according to the specific needs of the study, which in this case was based on religious affiliation and gender. This is called a non-probability sample (Ritchie et als. 2014: 113). It is not intended to be representative, which is also why it is suited for qualitative studies (ibid. 2014).

They were contacted first and foremost through email, but where that information was unavailable, I contacted them through Facebook or Instagram. I asked if they wanted to participate in a interview for a master thesis with a very short description of the topic. If they said yes, I emailed them a information document containing more information on the thesis as well as ethical and practical information. The practical and ethical information document included: 1) the purpose of the research and the aim, 2) whether I was doing the study in collaboration with someone, 3) participating is voluntary and can be withdrawn at any time, 4) what the participation will involve, 5) confidentiality and anonymity 6) informed consent (Webster et als. 2014).

6.2.2 For the content analysis

Four of the women in the analysis were chosen from a book called *Skal liksom liksom-passet ditt bety noe?:* Sumaya Jirde Ali, Muniba Ahmad, Fatema Al-Musawi and Linn Nikkerud. They were chosen because they all appear frequently in public debate, and they all discuss issues around my thesis. The book was chosen because it contains relatively long texts, allowing the thesis more content to analysis. The two other women was chosen from two texts they had written about the topic. Bushra Ishaq has written a book challenging stereotypes about Muslim women, and the article I chose to analyse is a reflection of the reception the book received. The last woman, Zuhayr Abdi, is the youngest of the participants, thus I thought it would be interesting to see what the younger generations was thinking as well. Her article is about Islamic feminism, which I thought was a good input to this thesis, seeing as one of the stereotypical representations Muslim women have, is that feminism and Islam is incompatible.

The women were also chosen because they demonstrate diversity; four of the women wear hijab, and two do not; two are from Somalia, three has backgrounds from Pakistan, Iraq and

Morocco; five are young, and one is an adult. There are of course much else that differs them from each other, but these are some that I found to be relevant for the thesis - especially in terms of challenging the stereotype that Muslim women are a homogenous group.

6.3 Analysis strategy

The analysis strategy was a thematic analysis using a post colonial feminist approach. By the former it implies that I sought to discover and interpret patterns or themes that was recurring (Spencer et als. 2014). Part of the analysis was to find the themes that best matched my research question, and what the similarities and differences were. This was applied to both the interview and written text. This kind of analysis is not tied to a specific discipline or theory (Spencer et als. 2014: 271), thus making it applicable and convent for my analysis. The use of my specific theoretical approach and its consequences for the analysis, can be read in more detail on page 21-27.

The coding was done by reading through the interviews and all eight nine texts, to highlight which strategies were used by the various women. They all used a variety, depending on the context and representation they were facing. From there I coded the different strategies, as well as the different representations that was used for different strategies. I divided my analysis in two main sections; one that analysed how the women viewed the representation of themselves in mainstream public, and one that analysed how the challenged these. The latter was again divided into two main parts; one that discuss the representation of Muslim women as un-free with two different strategies. A religious strategies and non-religious strategies. The other is divided into stereotypical representations, where I have analysed different strategies used to challenge those specific representations.

The analysis could have been improved with more time, and with an even number between interviews and written texts. Ideally, I would have wanted to use five interviews and five texts written by those five women, to be able to analyse more thoroughly.

6.4 Limitations and challenges

The first limitation is my position within the Norwegian society. I am a non-religious, white woman, which allows me certain privileges. As a researcher who does a post colonial feminist analysis, it is important to recognise not only the power that lies with the researcher, but also the power imbalance that exists between women (and men). I, as part of the ethnic majority, has more privilege than many of the women who are part of the ethnic minority, in terms of societal and cultural recognition. It is important to recognise that my inquiry into this topic was partial and ongoing (Ackerly 2008). Even my intentions for choosing a research question, reflects my bias, and especially the analysis reflects this (ibid. 2008). As discussed in the theoretical chapter, representing others always have its limitations [see page XX]. The thesis is thus limited by my Eurocentric, white privilege, though I try my best to avoid this.

The challenge, from a postcolonial feminist perspective, is to prevent as much bias and assumptions as possible, as it is easy to reproduce stereotypes, differences, essentialisations and the Self vs. Other dichotomy. In an attempt to deconstruct current negative stereotypes and representations, it is easy to fall into the trap of constructing new stereotypes and representations that build on the same essentialist identities, but in a positive light. Hopefully I have been able to avoid this as much as possible, as well as being successful in taking an intersectional stand on feminism. By this I mean recognising and including perspectives of women of colour, women from different religion, ethnicities, cultures and classes - by their own rights.

6.4.1 Limitations in terms of the interview

Another limitation with my thesis is how I chose to do the interviews. The most ideal method would have been face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Then both the participants and I could use probing, follow up questions, and generally have a more conversational-type interview (Yeo et als. 2014). However, due to having chosen relatively public figures to interview, time constraints and organisation of these types of interviews, that would be difficult. The limitations with an email interview, is that it makes it harder to follow a natural flow of the conversation and it becomes more rigid in the route the interview takes. Though follow up questions are possible through secondary and third emails. The advantages however, is that it allows the participants to spend more time on the questions and thus hopefully give more reflected and nuanced answers. Online interviews are appropriate in cases where the topics

could potentially be something the interviewees would feel more comfortable answering not face-to-face with someone (Lewis and Nicholls 2014).

7. Analysis

7.1 How are Muslim women represented in the mainstream public?

This section of the analysis will explore how the women in this thesis view representations of themselves in the public. From the chapter on anti-Muslim discourse, there are several representations of Muslim women that are stereotypical, untrue and generalised, however, this thesis will only focus on three; the representation that they are unfree, irrational and homogenous. The reason not all of the representations that are in the 'anti-Muslim discourse' is part of the analysis, is because it was necessary to focus on a few in order to get more in-depth knowledge of them. The first section will investigate the representation of Muslim women as 'not free', in terms of how they are often portrayed as oppressed and victims of their culture, religion and men. The second will discuss the representation of them as irrational and incapable of knowing what is best for them. Todorov (1992 *in* Hansen 2006: 90) argues that the European discourse claimed that they, and the West, lead the way to civilisation, thus they are most capable of knowing what is in the best interest of others. Indeed, this reflects some Norwegians' attitudes towards Muslim women, which we will see in the analysis. As will be seen in the analysis of their strategies, this is one they often have to resist, in order to be heard and recognised. The last section of the chapter looks at the mainstream representation of these women as a homogenous group, that lacks diversity and shares all cultural traits.

7.1.2 Muslim women are not free

Still there is unfortunately a theological and cultural reality that women in many collective and religious societies usually are subordinated by the male sex. (Rah 2015)¹⁴.

This discriminating attitude towards women can in very many countries be explained with background in strict and backwards religious laws and rules. Many foreign women in Norway fled from these exact patriarchal societies, but we know that persecution and discrimination of women also happens here. (Petsas 2018)¹⁵.

¹⁴ Rah is a Norwegian 'ex-Muslim' who publicly criticises Islam.

¹⁵ Leader of Frp Fauske, here describes immigrant women (the rest of the article makes it clear that she is speaking of Muslim women) as victims of religion and that they are unable to be free because they are constantly under the control of the patriarchy within Islam.

The representation that Muslim women are not free, is reflected in the way they are portrayed as victims of their religion, culture and most of all, 'their' men (Kunst et als. 2012; Helseth 2015). By extension, their role as 'not free', discredits everything they do as forced or a result of their culture and religion. It constructs an image of them as controlled, confined and docile, though they often challenge this representation, as will be discussed in the next chapter. This double standard is described by Muniba below, where she argues that Muslim women who demonstrates their freedom, are not recognised or they are shut down as being too forward.

But when Muslim women begin to take up space and show up in arenas they traditionally have not been represented at, society closes its doors in their faces. "Ops. You were not meant to stick your head out that much. (Ahmad 2018)

What Muniba describes here is the representation of Muslim women as unfree and confined to certain areas of society. However, many refuse to alter their views of Muslim women, even when they demonstrate the inaccuracy of their prejudices, so they adapt their anti-Muslim discourse, rather than their prejudice, as seen in above quote. This indicates that they are not interested in the liberation of Muslim women, though why this is, is impossible to discuss now without proper empirical research. However, Linn also writes about this representation, as can be seen below, where she confirms the point that many are not interested in changing their views, because their societal bias has already constructed an idea of what a Muslim woman is.

This indicates that you as a Muslim woman can never be a free individual while at the same time be religious. ... You are the poor victim, or you are the direct source of the evil. These labels are given to you despite that you say you do not feel oppressed or support oppression. (Nikkerud 2017: 83)

Zuhayr describes the situation from a slightly different point of view, as a hijabi, arguing that they are the most stigmatised group in society, as a result of their veiling. This reconfirms the representation of especially Muslim women with a veil as being not free, as the hijab is often seen as an overt symbol of oppression, radicalisation and the violent side of Islam (Ali and Sonn 2017: 1168). Her opinion, as seen below, on how they are represented reflects a typical oriental argument. The fact that she also promotes Islamic feminism, in a predominantly white secular

feminist environment, confines her to a counter public space, because of her attempts to destabilise hegemonic conceptions of feminism and Islam.

Is there a minority group that is more discussed, disdained¹⁶- and stigmatised than Muslim women, especially us with hijab? ... Muslim women are as disdained as they can get! We are pushed into a stereotype of a woman that is oppressed, lack resources and does not have voice. (Abdi 2017)

By constructing Muslim women as oppressed and not free, by extension, Muslim men are constructed as the perpetrators and Islamic patriarchy becomes the main focus. What this does however, is not only diverting attention towards the Other Muslim woman as being the sole victim of patriarchy, the result is also that "... criticism of Muslim patriarchy may - paradoxically - act as an alibi that leaves non-Muslim patriarchy unchallenged", according to Malik (2009: 209). Thus, there is an incentive to maintain status quo, as it avoids discussions on the destructive and misogynistic structure of patriarchy among majority Norwegians. By extension, feminism is often argued to be unnecessary [in a Norwegian context] because 'we've come so far' and it is more needed in other countries where they have far more grave problems and challenges, such as in the Middle East¹⁷ (Scharff 2011: 128).

7.1.3 Muslim women are invalid(ated) as a result of religion

As a way to silence Muslim women and undermine their arguments, many argue that they are unable to see what is in their own best interest, due to their victim-role and thus the normalisation of their situation. They no longer see the wrong within their own religion and culture, because its values and practices have become normalised¹⁸ From a post colonial feminist perspective this idea that Muslim women are not liberated enough to be rational about their own lives, stem from a colonial time where they were seen as following uncivilised and irrational traditions. As seen below, Sumaya discusses the inferior position she is given, where there is a strong sense of power imbalance, where the guest is seen to be in debt to the host. According to Gullestad 2000 *in* Razack 2004) the host has "a moral basis to instruct and to

¹⁶ Translated from the Norwegian word 'uglesett'

¹⁷ This is not something I support, it merely reflects a current debate on feminism in Norway.

¹⁸ For more discussions on the normalisation of practices and colonialism, see; Deckha 2011; Croft and Cash 2012.

determine the conditions of daily life" (pp. 145). Thus, the guest is incapable of making the same moral instructions.

It felt like the crowd was saying: As the uncivilised person you are, you have to show gratitude towards civilised Norway, that has given you a home. (Ali 2017: 23)

As a result of this power imbalance and the superior position the host occupies, Muslim women are not taken at their word. As Sumaya describes below, unless their words match up to the expectations of the host, they are silenced.

... the problem is not people's curiosity, but rather the fact that one is not happy or respect the answer given to them. Imagine that. You are asked a question, and then you reply as honest as you can, but it is not good enough. Why? Yes, because of people's anchored prejudices and sense of entitlement to know your family's national background. (Ali 2017: 25)

Since the debate in Norway often revolves around how Muslim women dress, it is only natural to address this, as it is used as one of the justifications to silence and invalidate the women's voices. Those that say that the hijab is oppressive and forced upon the women, tend to not listen when the same women argue otherwise. Seeing as this goes against their preconceptions of the meaning of the veil, they instead try to turn the discourse towards a problematisation of Islam and the inability of those that follow it, to think rationally. Because their prejudice is part of a dominant discourse in society they occupy a privileged space in the public, that works to reproduces hegemonic stereotypical representations of Muslim women (Salter 2013). This can be seen as demonstrated by Linn below, where she argues that Muslim women are seen as brainwashed and therefor need others to tell them what to do:

In the debate about Muslim women's choice of clothes we see an increasing tendency to both discrimination and invalidating attitudes. Comments about Muslim women being biased to define their own reality, that we suffer from the Stockholm-Syndrome and that we might as well go back to the Middle East, is also common. First and foremost, these comments give the impression that self-determining Muslim women

cannot think for themselves and that they therefor need someone to think and speak for them. (Nikkerud 2017)

So not only does the societal structures in itself create barriers for Muslim women to speak up, but when they do, they are quickly silenced. Especially since Muslim women challenge and contest hegemonic values and ideas provided by the ethnic majority, they become confined to the counter public where they struggle to dismantle the former (Salter 2013). As a result of the contentious nature of this space, their voice and arguments are often highly criticised, delegitimised or 'mansplained'¹⁹ to them. The counter public is occupied by those excluded from the liberal public, due to their gender, race, class or culture- in other words, those that do not fit the narrow normative of ethnic Norwegians (Fraser 1990). Thus, these women do an important job by challenging hegemonic norms and truths found in the public, rather than allowing it to silence and weaken them. An important aspect of a post colonial feminist research is to provide a space for these women to challenge those who tries to delegitimise them, by being understood on their own terms. If the image was re-produced on their own terms, where "... values were [...] equally objective and sensible, they could not be arranged in a spatial or temporal hierarchy with Western [...] at the top" (Berlin 1990: 79 *in* Hansen 2006: 90).

This week social commentator, Nina Bahar, wrote that the question about where you come from always has an additional message: "You are different". It is a "subtile form of racism", that in academia is called "micro aggressions". Rolness: In another language it can be called delusional interpretations, oversensitivity and paranoia. (Rolness, 2017).

Rolness is a public figure and though he is neither a woman, black or Muslim, he believes he has the right to determine what racism is and to lecture those who experience it. His total disregard for personal experiences and situations beyond his own, demonstrates his white majority privilege. This is a typical example of a privileged explanation (the rest of his article is used to argue why racism is exaggerated etc.), and where a woman of colour and Muslim background is denied space and recognition, because it disrupts the 'peace'.

¹⁹ "When a man "mansplains" something to a woman, he interrupts or speaks over her to explain something that she already knows — indeed, something in which she may already be an expert — on the assumption that he must know more than she does. In many cases, the explanation has to do specifically with things that are unique to women — their bodies, their experiences, their lives. When men interrupt or presume to correct a woman who is speaking of her own experience or expertise, they are implying that she is ignorant, that she is incapable of having authoritative knowledge" (Bustle 2016).

7.1.4 Muslim women are a homogenous group

Another representation that comes up in anti-Muslim discourse is that they are seen as a homogenous group. The lack of acknowledgement of their diversity is reflected in the way the women are often expected to choose between different identities, such as either Arab or Norwegian. Or between Muslim and feminist. It is also reflected in the status women who speak up receive - as exceptions - where they are seen as moving outside of an otherwise silent and oppressed group. Nikkerud (2017) discusses the way that the Ummah²⁰ is seen as a homogenous group (pp. 81), which by extension indicates that they all share the same values, traditions and culture. Not only does this reproduce stereotypes, it also runs the risk of "converting religion to ethnicity" (Naguib 2002: 354). Thus, there is a risk of both racialising and essentialising Muslim women, based on Western ideas of what a Muslim is and looks like. Below Linn (Razaq et als. 2017) discusses the difficulties of having multiple identities as a Muslim woman. She also demonstrates how all Muslim women are either this or that, and all according to Western standards.

It is a stereotypical label that Muslim women are either oppressed or contribute to oppression. This indicates that you as a Muslim woman can never be a free individual as well as religious (pp. 83). ... and non-Muslims who can never see anything but an oppressed woman. Everyone wants to have an opinion on the Muslim woman (pp. 79).

Linn however, also argues that despite the many who tries to generalise Muslim women, by denying them diversity, there are many who does not demand Muslim women to fulfill certain roles. By reducing Muslim women to homogenous labels, one prevents them from living their true and full life.

These are people who stand up for self-determination and human rights. They do not draw generalising lines, and the create room for diversity. With these people one can be a free speaking Muslim woman, without being reduced to a piece of clothing or labels (pp. 84).

²⁰ A reference to the global Muslim community

7.2 How do Muslim women resist mainstream representations?

This chapter will analyse how the women in this study resist and challenge the above mainstream representations of themselves. These representations are often negatively angled, as victims, irrational or homogenous, which will be three representations this analysis will focus on. They are often not given the same diverse and fluid identity that ethnic majorities in Norway are, and thus they are essentialised as Muslims. The analysis is structured slightly different, where the first main section looks at the representation of Muslim women as not free. Within this there two headlines; non-religion strategies and religious strategies. The two remaining sections look at the representation of Muslim women as 'brainwashed' or irrational, and as homogenous. This do not follow a specific religious or non-religious strategical approach, but it is more varied.

7.2.1 Representation: Muslim women are not free

This sub-chapter will analyse how the six women in this thesis, challenge and resist the representation of themselves as not free. The first section looks at a few different strategies without having a religious aspect, whereas the second section looks at strategies that are strictly based on religious arguments.

Non-religious resistance

It is a common stereotype that Muslim women are not seen as free individuals and are restricted by the men in their lives (Kunst et als. 2012; Helseth 2015). Alas they need to be saved, which is why much of the Norwegian debate on gender equality often focuses on Islam, because it sees it as a Muslim problem, and not a Norwegian problem. As Linn Nikkerud demonstrates below, this is one strategy to resist this stereotypical representation of Muslim women, by showing that social control and misogyny are just as much a Norwegian problem, as it is a Muslim problem.

It is also important to recognise that degrading views about women (misogyny) also exists in the majority society. When the public debate give the impression that social control is a Muslim problem alone, it also shows that it is not in contact with the real world. (Nikkerud 2017: 84)

By arguing that a negative social problem is the problem of a foreign religion, and not a Norwegian one, the orientalist idea that the Muslim Other is inferior to the ethnic Norwegians. When Linn discusses the importance of showing that social control and women being oppressed, is also a Norwegian problem, she is challenging established hegemonic ideas or what Said would call the "imperial regime of truth". Sumaya Jirde Ali also recognises this, as demonstrated below, where the Western society deems itself more capable of knowing what a free woman looks like, by challenging this idea using a strategy that utilises theoretical arguments:

The Muslim woman is "the oppressed" while the Muslim man is the dark "oppressor". I would say that this is a result of orientalism and White Savior Complex. The white [Norwegian] man shall save women like me from the brown man, and the religion Islam's, controlling claws". (Interview 1)

However, challenging established truths is not easy, one because it changes the narrative that Norwegians decide and determine what it means to be a free woman and a liberated society. It is also a resistance that blurs the lines of the Self/Other dichotomy which by extension also blurs the lines between the 'good' and the 'bad', where the former is the ethnic majority and the latter is Muslims (Thun 2012; Bangstad 2013). This is a threat to ethnic majority Norwegians' privileged position, because as Hansen (2006) says, when their constructed identities are destabilised, it undermines their position (pp. 100). As can be seen below, Bushra Ishaq (2018) supports the difficulty in challenging this power balance between the good and the bad;

To use one's freedom of speech to speak up against established truths have always been difficult throughout history - especially if it means changing the power balance, and if it comes from a woman. For a society that has never been as knowledgeable as it is now, I thought it would be different if established truths were met with knowledge. (Ishaq 2018)

Her strategy to challenge the representation of Muslim women as not free through empirical knowledge and research was in her opinion futile. As she explains above, she has been unable to interrupt the established 'truth', that Muslim women are not free. Her attempt to blur the lines between majority versus minority women was a challenge. This could indicate that the issue is

not really whether or not Muslim women are free, but whether or not we believe Muslim women when they say otherwise. The refusal to accept that Muslim women could in fact be free (to the extent any woman is free), is rooted in colonial ideas that are still sees the Muslim community as inferior and uncivilised, thus being able to ignore Muslim women's voice (Bhaba 1994). The strategy to 'prove' that Muslim women are free, seem to be something that most of the women in this study has stepped away from. What Sumaya Jirde Ali says below is also reflected with the other women, that they start to give up convincing people, and instead just be themselves and lead by example:

You say you are free, but no one is listening. You say you are not oppressed, but no one is listening. You say it again and again but no one is listening. And one day you stop saying anything. ... The most healthy thing is to just not give a fuck and look ahead, rise above individuals that think they know you and your life better than yourself. (Interview 1)

Fatema Al-Musawi also uses this strategy by distancing herself so far away from the representation that it destabilises the discourse, by presenting 'new' facts (Hansen 2006: 29).

That feeling that she has to fight even harder than others to show that she was good enough. This was actually one of the reasons she became active in politics. She wanted to show that the youths from Groruddalen was not like the media or internet trolls portrayed them as. ... she wanted more understanding for her background. (Al-Musawi 2017: 52)

So, for Fatema entering politics and showing that Muslim women are not like they are portrayed as, was her first strategy to change mainstream representations. Her entering politics in itself is a demonstration of her position as a free woman, seeing as an oppressed woman would not be able to speak up, participate in public life and not to mention political life.

Malik (2009) argues that "anti-Muslim prejudice is often subsumed and hidden within concern for the well-being of Muslim women" (pp. 208). This builds on the arguments above, where despite numerous attempts to 'prove' that Muslim women are in fact free, they are not believed, because arguably, it is only an attempt to discredit Muslims rather than help them. The idea that

Muslim women are not believed and are invalidated will be discussed in the subsequent chapter. However, to finish the line of argument in this section, the women in this study are partly giving up trying to convince people of their freedom through words and are instead aiming at proving this by living their life as free-spoken participants in public and private life.

Religious resistance

This paragraph will discuss the strategy of using Islam and religion to resist the mainstream representation of Muslim women as not free. This was a strategy most clearly used by Linn Nikkerud, who in the book *Skal liksom liksom-passet ditt bety noe?*, based her argument of women as free and liberated on the character of Khadidja. This seems counter intuitive seeing as most of the arguments that claim that Muslim women are not free, do so using Islam and its alleged oppressive values. This stems from the fact that everything is being judged from a Western perspective, which has constructed an idea that there is a specific formula of what it means to be liberated, empowered and oppressed (Jones 2011). Below, Linn argues against this Westernised perspective;

So, Khadidja was my role model when I was growing up. When I thought of myself as an adult, I envisioned a liberated, free spoken, Muslim woman. I never thought about how strong, Muslim women do not fit in to this world. (Nikkerud 2017: 79)

For her, being Muslim was a strength and a moral code that made her a better and stronger woman, and thus an apparent strategy to resist representations of herself as not free. She utilises a post colonial feminist strategy, where her identity as a Muslim, a woman and a Norwegian are not seen in oppositions to each other or where one has to choose between one or the other. The debate in Norway often focuses on the differences between the 'Muslim culture' and the 'Norwegian culture' (Eriksen 2012), as if they are two opposites and not cultures that share certain universal values and principles, such as freedom and equality. This is what Linn tries to argue against by using the very tool anti-Muslim arguments use, to resist the idea that Muslim women are not free because of Islam and its culture. Thus, the sentiments that render Muslim [women] incapable of adapting to European [Norwegian] values of freedom and equality (Strabac and Listhaug 2008), falls short, when Muslim women themselves are allowed to speak up and represent Islam from their own perspective. Below one can see that Linn also discredits the idea that Muslim women cannot be free, because there is not only one way to be free:

For me there is not one way to measure what it means to be a good and free woman, despite what faith- or spirituality one has. (Nikkerud 2017: 83)

This approach criticises the colonial and Eurocentric perspective of what it means to be a free woman, which follows a specific norm. This norm is a white, Christian and European norm of what a woman should be like (Mohanty 1988). When someone tries to divert from this norm, they are criticised and delegitimised, which is what is being done to women who use Islam to claim they are free, because they are not always conforming to the Western hegemonic ideas of freedom and equality. From a post colonial feminist perspective, this strategy could also be a resistance to Norwegian feminists and the idea that Tyagi calls a "false sisterhood" (2014). By this I mean that some Norwegian feminists use their own experiences and convictions to argue that Muslim women are not free, because their experiences and desires are not always the same. Sisterhood implies that there is one struggle and one goal, which is not true:

In other words many so-called Muslim critics become their own worst enemy when they expose me, and other women, for the same hostility and endless demands... They become exactly what they criticise. This is because they force their own personal convictions and experiences, as if there is one pattern for all. At the end of the day women's perception of reality is reduced to a joke. (Nikkerud 2017: 83)

Continuing on the feminist strategy, Zuhayr Abdi uses her identity as a hijabi feminist, to resist mainstream representations of her, and other Muslim women. For her misogyny and patriarchy is not a Muslim problem, but a global one, and being religious, a hijabi, a feminist and a woman is not a problem, in fact it is the opposite.

Islam and feminism is not opposites, on the contrary. Muslim women were perhaps the first feminists in the world with Khadidjah RA and Nana Asma'u on the forefront. We have to complete Islamic feminism and conquer this patriarchal and misogynistic society that characterised large parts of the world. (Abdi 2017)

Not only is she resisting the idea that feminism, and thus equality and freedom, does not belong in Islam, she is also resisting the idea that Western feminism should be the norm. Her argument

that Islamic feminism was perhaps the first feminism demonstrates this, while also arguing that all women have a common foe- misogyny and patriarchy. This is important to emphasize, because even though the two former takes different forms, Hinterberg (2007) argues that [post colonial] feminists "...need to be concerned with how they participate in constructions of cultural differences upon which assumptions of incommensurability are often built" (pp. 80). What is taken from this is that though women are different and have different experiences based on the culture they are from/in, there are also similarities that allows us to work together. An example is the lack of freedom as a result of the patriarchy and prevalent misogyny reproduced in the society, that affects both religious and non-religious women. Which Zuhayr reinforces when she argues that divisions are not the solution, because it will only benefit those who try and work against women's emancipation.

The fight for immigrant women cannot be used to create divisions in the feminist movement, and we cannot become a target for dirty political games. (Abdi 2017)

Though the media often present it as if Muslim women are the only victims of oppressive men and culture (Kunst et als. 2012; Helseth 2015). As a result, Muslim women often feel more pressure to defend themselves and Islam, because they are assumed to not be free, until otherwise is proven, and thus have to constantly resist this representation. As can be seen below, both Muniba Ahmad and Nora Mehsen have personal experiences with this, and they both demonstrate the hegemonic representation that Muslims are bad, abnormal, oppressive- as seen in the latter example.

Reality is that when meeting new people I feel I almost always have to take the first initiative and that this initiative is to prove my normality. Reality is that I feel like I always have to walk around and show my humanity. (Ahmad 2017: 37)

"If only all immigrants were like you". It was meant as a compliment [to my father], because he was a hardworking and honest man who paid taxes, had not had problems with the law and avoided forcing his daughters to wear the hijab. (Mehsen 2017: 61)

To end the section, we will turn to that topic in the public sphere that receives substantial attention, namely hijabi women²¹. Muslim women's freedom is often centered around this piece of clothing²², and they are therefore given a disproportionate amount of attention, despite the low number of Muslim women who actually use it (Vogt 2004; Roald 2010; Mirza 2013). As is discussed in the literature review, Lentin and Titley (2014) argues that hijabi women are often not seen beyond their veil, but merely as a symbol and a representative of a certain culture. It is often represented as an oppressive symbol (Macdonald 2006; Helseth 2015), as well as a symbol of submission and radicalisation (Bartkowski and Ghazal-Read 2003; Bilge 2010). Nikkerud (2017) argues below that the current representation of hijabi women is damaging, because it essentialises them by confining their whole identity to this one piece of clothing.

I used the hijab for two years. For me it was a tool to become more aware of God and myself. But after a while it became more and more of a mental strain to wear the hijab. Something that was strongly connected with how aware I became of what attitudes that existed towards women dressed in a hijab and Islam in general. (Nikkerud 2017: 82)

Many seem to be unable to see beyond the hijab, and hijabi women are therefore at a risk of being harassed, judged and discriminated against, which leaves many to not wear it at all (Roald 2010). There are several ways to resist this representation in order to allow women to be free to wear what they want, one way is what the current public hijabi women are doing, namely just living their lives, while wearing the hijab. This is demonstrated by the mere fact that these women are out in public, using their voice, fighting for their rights, participating in politics and in general doing what any other woman would do- only they wear a hijab. This does not match the mainstream representation of hijabi women as oppressed and unfree. Another way to resist this, is more actively emphasising what the hijab really means, though this seems to be futile looking at the discourse discussed earlier. Despite numerous attempts to 'prove' that they are free, many are not willing to listen, and insist that they are incapable of seeing their own oppression and thus reproducing the disempowerment of Muslim women in public. A third strategy is as Nikkerud (2017b) demonstrates below, by taking advantage of 'Norwegian values'

²¹ Muslim women who wear a hijab or veil.

²² Freedom and equality being two values highly used in debates by many Norwegians, and especially in anti-Muslim discourse when discussing Islam and Norway.

such as equality (Skarpenes and Nilsen 2015), liberty and democracy (Bangstad 2013), to argue for openness, freedom and the right to be treated as everyone else:

Meeting each other with dialog and openness, it could be that one eventually look past the barrier the niqab [and hijab] represent, and see the human the Muslim in the niqab is. (Nikkerud 2017b)

My fight is mainly about human's right to self-determination and that all citizens in a society shall be judged according to the same principles in a free democracy. (Nikkerud 2017b)

In the Norwegian society there should be room to dress in both niqab [hijab] and bikini, be a office worker in hijab or a nurse that also works as a glamour model. (Nikkerud 2017)

What she is doing in all three of the above examples, is using a strategy of working from within the system to resist the representation that Muslim women are less free than Norwegian women. She is utilising Norwegian values that are often used against them and turn them around to demonstrate that Muslim women are not so different than ethnic Norwegian women. Thus, her strategy is based on logic, and takes a right-based approach to resist non-logical arguments that represent Muslim women as not being free. From a post colonial feminist perspective, she is using the system of the oppressor, the Self, to create a counter space where each woman, regardless of background, have the power to define and represent their own lives. As opposed to the current situation, where the power to define and represent tends to lie with the host, which is the ethnic majority in Norway, and they determine what is just or free (Jones 2011: 17).

7.2.2. Representation: Muslim women are invalid(ated) as a result of religion

As have already been brought up quite a few times in this analysis, Muslim women are often being silenced through a number of strategies, such as invalidation, victimised, ridiculed, ignored, questioned etc. What this section will therefor look more closely at, is how women resist the mainstream representation of themselves as ignorant and incapable of having authoritative knowledge despite their personal experiences and knowledge. They are in general seen as someone who is disempowered and because of their representation as 'not free', they are seen as unable to speak for themselves. This is not only a problem for Muslim women, but for Muslims in general, where especially politicians and the media believe they are more suited to

educate what Islam is and who Muslims are, than Muslims themselves (Bangstad 2014). This reflects an oriental perspective, where the Orient [Muslims] are denied self-determination, because the Occident [Norwegians] believe their ways are superior and thus judges all others according to those beliefs (Said 1978). To quote Said (1978): "Power here means that 'we' refuses 'it' - the oriental state - self-determination, since we know it and it exists in a way *as* we know it" (pp. 44). This power imbalance does not go unnoticed by Muslim women, as shown in an earlier quote from Sumaya (pp. 44, 49). It is also reflected in two other quotes by her, in the book *Skal liksom liksom-passet diet bety noe?* (2017), where she talks about the persistent phenomena of invalidating Muslim women, as well as women of colour.

Donkor wrote about the 'everyday racist' that has tried to convince her and make her realise how beautiful the word 'negresse'²³ – really is. (2017: 24)

Is it really expected that one should accept that a person that can neither recognise themselves in your experiences or your pain, to lecture you about what you can and cannot cry over. (2017: 26)

Both of these quotes reflect how some people feel entitled to lecture those they deem inferior. This is a well-known phenomenon within feminism, where men feel the need to explain and lecture women on issues they are clearly less knowledgeable about (Everydayfeminism 2015; Bustle 2016). There is also such a thing as 'whitesplaining', and generally other types of privileged explaining (ibid. 2015). Because of their privilege status and position granted to them by society, their truth prevails and thus they feel entitled to invalidate Muslim women on issues concerning them. For a woman of colour, such as Sumaya, who also happens to be Muslim, this invalidation becomes even stronger due to the 'double' racism. Her experiences of racism are brushed off as oversensitive or exaggeration, because white majority Norwegians are privileged and have never had to deal with racism themselves (Helland 2014: 108). In Norway, the fear of being called a racist, trumps the act of being racist (ibid. 2014).

The invalidation of Muslim women is happening by the same people who argue that they are too passive and fragile, yet when the women do speak up, they quickly shut them down. When

²³ The feminine version of the n-word.

the hegemonic representation of the Muslim women as silent and irrational is challenged, it blurs the lines of the 'good' versus 'bad' discourse. It also, as discussed earlier, challenges the representation of the Muslim woman as the 'Other', which again substantially weakens the colonial discourse of the 'Other' being inferior to the 'Self'. Below, Muniba resists the discourse that represent Muslim women as incapable of speaking for themselves. She uses a strategy that ridicules the hypocrisy of those that pretend to want to help the women, by ironically arguing that the women are doing exactly as they are told; which is to stand up and take more space.

Are the same people who shouted so loudly about how oppressed Muslim women are, unable to withstand that they are now showing that they are not? Does freedom of speech not count for Muslim women? Was it not intended that Muslim women became THAT liberates?. (Muniba on Twitter 12 Feb 2018)

This tweet builds on the idea that the discourse on the liberation of Muslim women has nothing to do with helping them, but merely an attempt to maintain the hegemonic idea of 'us' versus 'them'. Those who are anti-Muslim have no interest in these women's freedom or voice, which Said also argues in his book, *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the Orient (1978)*: "It would not cross [his] mind to let the Egyptian speak up, since any Egyptian speaking up, is most likely the 'agitator that wishes to create problems', than the kind native that ignores 'problems' with the alien ruler" (pp. 45). For when Muslim women speak up, they will challenge and create 'problems' to the current status quo [current rule], which for many can be problematic. The challenge of challenging this representation of Muslim women as invalidated is reinforced by the reception of Bushra's book, *Hvem snakker for oss? (2017)*, where she attempts to resist mainstream representation of Muslim women. However, because she is challenging Norwegian hegemonic ideas of Muslim women, her voice is silenced, undermined or simply ignored.

For me it cannot become any clearer: Because my work gives a more positive image of Muslims than what powerful people believe in, many wishes to not listen to what I have to say. It is not okey to be Muslim and the free women I feel I actually am - it is expected that I am either Muslim or a free woman. ... As long as my findings are not in line with the simplifications those in power wants, it is not good enough. (Ishaq 2018)

Thus, Muslim women who does not actively challenge and resist the stereotypical image of Muslim women, Islam or the 'orient', are more likely to be silenced and criticised themselves (see; Bangstad 2013). However, Bushra continue to use the strategy of taking advantage of the system of the oppressors, by using free speech and democracy to change current power imbalances.

[About Muslim women not being able to be both Muslim and free] But I will not comply to these expectations. Because it represents a dangerous wind, both because it is populisms fight against knowledge - and because it has a clear front against free speaking women. And I stand against that wind, completely mounted. (Ishaq 2018)

Bushra utilises 'Western' constructions of freedom, knowledge and rationality to argue against anti-Muslim discourse. This strategy makes their discourses less stable, because of the inconsistency in their arguments. Though the discourse argues that part of a Norwegian identity is to be free and rational, when challenged by free and knowledgeable Muslim women, they are still not willing to grant them recognition and public space. It is a disruption of the colonial discourse that does not grant them autonomy, self-determination and self-rule, and which reproduces the Us/Them dichotomy where "they are incompletely modern and shackled by tradition; we are free and able to exercise choice" (Razack 2004: 156).

7.2.3 Representation: Muslim women are a homogenous group

Muslim women being represented as one, homogenous group, is not uncommon (Ali and Sonn 2017). "The western discourse on Muslim women remain reductive by ignoring the wide variety and diversity of women as individuals within any given culture by constructing a monolith Muslim 'other'..." (Zubair and Zubair 2017: 18). They are becoming more racialised (Meer and Modood 2009; Thun 2012; Elchardus and Spruyt 2014; Carr and Haynes 2015), despite their diverse backgrounds and identities (Mohanty 1988). This is an important post colonial feminist goal; to dismantle the representation of women as a homogenous group. Muslim women not only come from a vast variety of Islamic interpretations, they also come from a variety of countries, cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. Roald (2010) argues that there are often more social and cultural differences between Muslim women, than between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim woman. However, as has become quite clear in this analysis, e.g. many are unable to see the person underneath the hijab, is that they are often not seen as anything *but*

Muslim. It represents their whole identity, and it becomes a struggle to be allowed multiple identities. For instance, when a woman, who is also Muslim, enters a debate, it is expected that she does so as Muslim and as representing her minority background (Helseth 2015). Below, one can see that Fatema resists this homogenous and essentialised identity, by referring to her lived experiences which is informed by multiple identities.

She is Norwegian, but has a unique Arabic background. She knows a language many in Norway do not, which is an advantage. What other chooses to call her, does not really concern her. She is Norwegian. Born at Rikshospitalet, brought up at Haugerud in Oslo, and studies in Stavanger. (Al-Musawi 2017: 56)

However, it is also quite clear that she has struggled with her identity. This reflects the fixed identity Muslim women have in the eyes of the West (Scharff 2011), the 'fixed' identity of what it means to be Norwegian and the inability to see how these two can co-exist.

Fatema spoke, read and wrote fluent Norwegian. She felt belonging to the Norwegian culture but also the Iraqi. Norwegian values were human rights, with freedom of speech and freedom of religion, it was said. But they were universal, not specifically Norwegian. What would Fatema then call herself? Norwegian born Iraqi that was without identity?. (Al-Musawi 2017: 54)

This quote brings up another important issue, especially from a post colonial feminist perspective. The difficulty for women who do not conform to the hegemonic identities in the Norwegian society [white cis ethnic-Norwegian Christian], to not only locate their identity, but also their place within the women's movement (Aapola et al. 2005). The lack of acknowledgement of the diverse range of class, race and ethnicity, in Norwegian feminism, creates a discourse of the 'normal' woman as white, ethnic Norwegian and non-religious (or Christian). "The understanding of 'women' seems to be 'equated in practice with 'white women', where whiteness is treated as an 'unmarked category' and normative claims are made as if this category represent the whole" (Ferree & Mueller 2007: 580, *in* Thun 2012). A way to challenge and resist the homogenous representation then, is through what Fatema does in the above quote, "demonstrate the diversity of the spectrum" (Ali and Sonn 2017: 1173). However, she is also more actively trying to change the 'normative Norwegian identity' as seen below:

She always took with her some Arabic cultural traits and used them in everyday life. Because even though she defines herself Norwegian, she has with her her Arabic roots. No cultures were perfect, and therefore it was good to have been brought up with to different ones, so she could develop her own new, Norwegian culture. (Al-Musawi 2017: 54)

The active construction of a new culture is also a way to challenge the idea that the Other's culture is static and set in time. Scharff (2011) argues that "Culture is essentialised and reified only in discussions of cultural difference, producing an image of Western culture as fluid and other cultures as deterministic" (pp. 131). This could explain why Muslim women struggle to challenge the homogenous representation they are given, because their identity is essentialised as part of the Islamic culture, and because their culture is seen as static, by extension, so is her identity. The dominant discourse reflects the normative Norwegian identity, which to an extent also reproduce an image of majority Norwegian women as homogenous. The difference however, I think, is that ethnic Norwegian women are not essentialised in the same way, thus their identity only represents themselves, whereas Muslim women's identity is seen as representing the whole of Islam and/or Arab culture.

8. Conclusion

The aim for the research question was to explore how Muslim women resist and challenge mainstream representations of Muslim women in the Norwegian mainstream public. The Muslim women in this thesis utilise different strategies and are by no means bound to their religious identity. Rather they use multiple and fluid identity negotiations, to adapt to a discourse that frequently changes its rhetoric. An example is Sumaya. She started out by trying to convince people that Muslim women are free, believing her words would be respected and acknowledged. However, her strategies changed when she realised people were not willing to change their opinion if it went against what they already believed. Her religious identity is rarely used, rather she builds her arguments based on Norwegian values and norms - thus using her 'oppressors' rhetoric against them. Zuhayr uses her religious identity to a greater extent, by promoting Islamic feminism as compatible with Norwegian feminism. Common for all the women is that their strategies challenge representations of Muslim women by trying to blur the lines between the 'Us' and 'Them' rhetoric. They try to challenge the anti-Muslim discourse that constructs essentialised and generalised identities, in order to re-produce identities that are fluid, multiple and more than their religious affiliation. This means that it is important for feminists or women's movements not to be afraid of coming together, in apprehension of 'stepping outside their lane'. With this, I refer back to the 'false sisterhood' rhetoric that too often becomes superficial and generalising, and that ignores differences while using Western standards as its norms. However, a sisterhood is exactly what is needed according to these women, though its terms and conditions need to change. It needs to recognise differences between women and patriarchies, and instead of comparing values and resistance strategies to see which is best, the focus needs to be on the end goal; female emancipation and empowerment. The women in this thesis challenge the idea that there is only one kind of liberated woman, for instance wearing a veil is not a symbol of liberation; or that there is only one way to achieve this, for instance through promoting productive work over reproductive work. It is also expected, that when a woman who is also Muslim, enters a debate or an organisation she does as Muslim and as representing her minority background (Helseth 2015).

This analysis shows the increasing need for an intersectional approach to all levels of society. It also demonstrates that the norm can no longer be white and Western, and that we need to

listen to those that does not fall into that category. Most importantly it demonstrates that these women are more than their Muslim identity, and the importance of seeing them as more than their religion. In terms of strategies, it demonstrates that counter publics can be effective with numbers, and especially if they use the liberal public's own rhetoric against them. An example of that is their rational use of freedom of speech, feminism, equality and Norwegian values that blurs the lines between a rational and free 'Self' versus the irrational and oppressed 'Other'.

Lastly, this analysis and thesis demonstrates the challenges of challenging the hegemonic status and representation of Muslim women in Norway, despite the refusal of many Norwegians to accept this. It shows that even social, liberal and democratic Norway, have troubles accepting and recognising others that are not like them. If people are *too* culturally different, there will be a problem (Thun 2011: 47). The name of Frode Helland's article²⁴, *Racism without racists* (2014), says it all. Majority Norwegian feminists have led a white feminism for too long, and they are unable to recognise the racism and prejudice that permeates the Norwegian society (Helseth 2015). This then prevents women such as those in this analysis, to be seen as anything but victims and passive actors. Much of the silencing and invalidation of these women, is based on these prejudices which for instance deem Muslim women unable to think rationally. Thus, they are constructed as *too* different from 'Norwegians', though the women in this thesis are constantly challenging this through their use of fluid and multiple identities.

The insights from this thesis can be used by non-Muslims to gain a better understanding of the diversity and fluid identities of Muslim women. As well as to understand that they are more than their public mainstream representations. It can also be used to avoid certain pitfalls such as generalising or essentialising, which is often done without many being conscious of how their words or actions affect others. For instance, thinking of Muslim women as a separate group of women, who are different from the rest, is damaging not only to Muslim women themselves, but also the women's movement and strive for emancipation and empowerment. It should especially be used by those who fuel fire to the hostility Muslims encounter, to open their eyes to their own bias, privilege and harmful attitudes. They should recognise that women who are Muslim, are not to be silenced or ignored.

²⁴ Mentioned earlier in this thesis, to read more, see pages: 9, 21, 31.

8.1 Future research

In terms of new research, there is much to discover. This thesis has focused on women who have managed to demand space in the counter public, and who is forcing people to listen to them. They already have attention. Though, it would be interesting to investigate how different Muslim women experience the public space, depending on nationality and ethnicity. Just from my short introduction to the field, it became clear to me that Sumaya experienced more hate and prejudice than for instance a white Muslim from Serbia. *However*, there are many Muslim women who neither desire nor are able to access this space at all. There would be much to learn by studying their everyday forms of resistance, especially among Muslim women who are in a position where they are forced to work within very controlled environments. The academia could also greatly benefit from empirical studies on Muslim women's resistance within Islamic communities, in order to further challenge the idea that Muslim women are docile or too controlled by their religion to say anything against it. However, it is necessary to not only focus on Muslim women. I believe in order to make sustainable changes for women, men need to be included. Thus, research into their perception of how Muslim women are represented in the mainstream public, as well as within Muslim communities, would be very interesting, and not to mention, beneficial to the debate. Are most men resisting these stereotypes, and if so, why are they doing so? Does men who are Muslim use similar strategies as women? And do they encounter the same difficulties? These and many more questions would be interesting for future research. If I were to do a new study, I would focus on Muslim men. To understand more about their lived experience and struggles in Norway, as well as to challenge their stereotypical representations as oppressors and controllers. Common for all this, is that there should be more studies on the public and counter public in Norway, and how it works to exclude and include certain individuals and groups of people.

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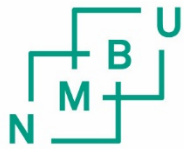
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10. Appendix

Interview questions²⁵

1. Why did you decide to participate in the Norwegian, public debate around this topic?
2. In your experience, how are Norwegian Muslim women are represented in the mainstream public?
3. What consequences do you think these representations have for Muslim women?
4. How can they be challenged and resisted? In terms of strategies of resistance.
5. Why have you chosen those particular strategies or methods?
6. What challenges, if any, presents itself while using them?
7. Anything you want to add? (You are free to add general thoughts or comments about both the questions and the topic in general, if you so desire).

²⁵ Prior to the questions, she was provided with a descriptive document of the topic and purpose of thesis.



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