Responding to Debates about Oneself

A Qualitative Study of Traditional Muslim Responses to Media Debates about Islam and Muslims

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Abstract

This thesis explores the responses to media debates about Islam and Muslims amongst young adult Muslims. In 2009, Islam and Muslims were mentioned over 77 000 times in Norwegian media, with majority of the media coverage from that year and in recent years having been negative and conflict filled. My aim with this research project is to bring attention to the responses of young adult Norwegians of Muslim background. The research question for this thesis is: How do young adults of a traditional Muslim background living in Norway respond to three specific media debates on Islam and Muslims?

The research design consists of focus group interviews with young adults of traditional, Muslim background living in Norway. These focus group interviews serve as the thesis' source of empirical material. One focus group interview was conducted with male interviewees, and one with female interviewees. In this qualitative study, I had the informants reflect upon the topics of: (1) citizenship, (2) faith, and (3) upbringing. The interviewees were asked questions related to these topics and to the presented media debate-excerpts, with three selected media debates being: (1) the handshake-debate from 2019, (2) the Muslim-ASP debate from 2019, and (3) the mosque-surveillance debate from 2019. The theoretical frameworks for this thesis are previous research on the terms of citizenship, faith, and upbringing, whereas my empirical frameworks are research on how Muslims in other countries have discussed the three aforementioned topics.

While reflecting upon the three topics, the interviewees discussed them from a position of confidence. The interviewees did not allow the othering in the media debate-excerpts, to influence their positions as Norwegian citizens. They were clear about their own claims to cultural Norwegian citizenship, and they had their own views on what norms and values are to constitute being Norwegian. This also carried over to the topic of faith, where they explained how fundamental it is to their lifestyle. Furthermore, they planned on giving their children a religious upbringing, and to balance out their children's daily lives through free time-activities such as football practice, while demanding all of these activities to be of high quality. The responses reflect a clear interconnection between the topics of citizenship, faith, and upbringing.

A tendency in these findings is that the interviewees responded on their own terms, by deciding for themselves whether they would accept or discard any understandings of norms, citizenship, and upbringing. This thesis argues that there are two main factors behind this. One is the combined unit of the research design and the researcher's own positionality. The focus group interview structure and being interviewed by someone of the same age who belongs to the same faith, opened up for conversations in which the informants could articulate themselves as they pleased. The second factor has to do with their interactions with their religious communities. Having interacted with their faith and their fellow believers, has given the opportunity to be as firm and confident in their identity and viewpoints.

Preface

"In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful."

Muslims, amongst other things, were a hot topic in the media in whatever media scene I was actively consuming – be it the one here in Norway, in the United States of America, or the United Kingdom. Muslims and Islam as a whole were talked about to no end, with no evident way or medium to properly respond to these media debates. Being a traditional Muslim who lives in Norway, I had plenty of thoughts on the various media debates about my faith and community that had taken place over the years.

Eventually, I became interested in the views of the rest of my community, and especially the views of young adults who have grown up witnessing all of these debates about us take place in real-time. I decided to be a part of the change I wanted to see, and to provide a space in which young adults of Muslim background could give their thoughts and reflections on the media debates about us and our faith. This led me to writing this master dissertation you are currently reading the preface to.

And so, here we are today. After a year of writing, interviewing, and analyzing, my efforts have come to fruition in the form of this master thesis. During the course of this research project, I have tried my utmost to give authentic insight into the responses of my interviewees. And in doing so, the value of the human response has become increasingly evident to me. There are a few names I would like to acknowledge and give my thanks to.

Praise be to Allah. It feels only natural that I first and foremost express my gratitude towards my Lord. As with everything I have ever accomplished, I am thankful to Allah for providing me with the capability and opportunity to do so. Furthermore, I would like to pay homage to the prophet Muhammad, peace and blessings be upon him – the best of creation who stands as a role model for myself and many others in this world. I pray that this dissertation and its findings, God Willing, will be a source of benefit for the Muslim community of Norway, for Norwegian society as a whole and for the Muslim ummah across the world.

Working with this research project has made it clear to me that seeing the bigger picture of things is *alpha omega* – as a Muslim, as a human being and as a researcher. To have my interviewees express their views in their own words, on their own terms, about how their community and their faith are being debated in the media, has changed my perception of an array of different topics. And, God Willing, perhaps my master dissertation will do the same for you.

Danial Naeem Qadir

10th of May 2021

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Introduction

Over a timespan of 20 years from 1988 – 2008, there has been an increase in the usage of journalistic formats/genres known as editorials and debates (Knut Lundby et al., 2018, p. 205 – 206) within Norwegian newspapers. These two formats are defined as articles written by private individuals, or sometimes, the editors of a specific newspaper, in which such individuals express their opinion on a matter. The accumulation of these debate articles and editorials within Norwegian media outlets, is what can be considered as a media debate. In 2009, Islam and Muslims were mentioned over 77 000 times in the Norwegian media (Directorate of Integration and Diversity, 2010) with most of the media coverage in 2009 and in recent years having been particularly negative and conflict filled (Lundby & Gresaker, 2015, p. 88). This leads to one question, how do the people talked about in these articles respond to such negative media portrayal?

In countries like Australia, we find research on this very phenomenon pointing to there being a variety of responses amongst Australia's Muslim community. A few of these responses included feeling scapegoated by the media, having no faith in Australian media and considering misconceptions about themselves and their faith amongst the public to be the result of inaccurate and meanspirited media portrayal (Ewart et al., 2017, p. 154 - 155). Whether these responses and what other responses to such media portrayal, can be found in other countries with a prominent Muslim community in them such as Norway, is a question well worth asking.

This thesis will focus on how young Norwegian Muslims respond to media debates about Islam and Muslims as they reflect on three specific media debates. For this research project, I have chosen excerpts from these media debates to use as objects of response. These media debates are as following: the handshake-debate from August 2019, the after school-programme (ASP) as a service at a mosque-debate in November 2019 and the debate surrounding mosque-surveillance & terrorism-preventive measures also from November 2019. These media debates will be investigated through excerpts presented during focus group interviews, with young Norwegian Muslims in their 20's.

In this introduction-chapter I will go over the research questions for this dissertation, as well as my research interest and contribution. Subsequently, I will be introducing the three media debates chosen for this dissertation, by providing necessary context and presenting the excerpts from the chosen media debates. The theory-chapter will introduce the theoretical tools used for analysis in this research, as well as present previous research related to

citizenship, faith, and upbringing. This will be followed by the thesis' theoretical and empirical frameworks related to the aforementioned topics, which consist of both Scandinavian research contributions and international research contributions.

In the method-chapter, I will be writing about my research method, that being focus group interviews. I will then continue by writing about my positioning as a researcher, the recruitment process, the sampling of informants and the actual structuring of the focus group interviews. Then I will describe the challenges and ethical considerations surrounding this research project, followed by the reliability and validity of this research contribution, before closing off the chapter with the analytical strategy and coding I have utilized in this dissertation.

Next, in the analysis and discussion-chapter; I will go on to present and analyze my data from the two focus group interviews related to the topics of citizenship, faith, and upbringing. I will then compare my findings from the respective focus groups to each other, followed up with comparisons to the theoretical and empirical frameworks of this thesis. Penultimately, in the findings and conclusion-chapter, I will answer the sub-questions and research question of this dissertation. I will then provide an explanation for my findings and reflect upon my research contribution before summarizing the entirety of this dissertation in the conclusion-sub chapter.

1.1: Research Question

The research question for this thesis is: How do young adults of a traditional Muslim background living in Norway respond to three specific media debates on Islam and Muslims? This thesis will emphasize on how the interviewees respond to particular media cases surrounding Islam and Muslims, and how they reflect upon the topics of citizenship, faith and upbringing, in light of these cases. The sub-questions for this thesis are: How do the participants reflect upon citizenship; how the participants reflect upon faith and how do the participants reflect upon upbringing. My participants' responses will serve as the basis for which I will answer the research question of this dissertation.

When looking at the data from my research it becomes strikingly clear that the topics citizenship, faith and upbringing are all interconnected. The selection of media debates for this dissertation was based on wanting to maintain a common thread between the media debates, and the main topics of this dissertation. The topics of the sub-questions being citizenship, faith and upbringing - having a thematic connection to the chosen media debates, is necessary for the sake of generating interview-data that is relevant to the research question.

It also provides my research project with an element of cohesiveness, by highlighting the interconnection between the topics discussed in this dissertation. It is important to note that the objects of analysis for this research project are not the specific media debates, rather it is the responses from my interviewees that I will be analyzing in this dissertation. Response in this context is to be understood as my informants' answers from the focus group interviews, in which they talk about the specific media debates and the topics brought up during the conversations that were related to these media debates.

1.2: Research Interest & Contribution

My research interest for this thesis is to draw attention to the responses of young, Norwegian Muslims to particular media debates. The package of responses and sentiments from this young demographic of Norwegian Muslims; are very much worth researching. To examine their responses do not only give an idea of the perceived quality of these specific media cases and potentially media coverage of Islam and Muslims as a whole; it also serves as a way to highlight the magnitude of how these cases are covered in the form of the interviewees' lived experiences.

There is an ethical dimension to the importance of my research interest. Members of a minority's responses to how they are being talked about and portrayed, stands as a crucial piece of social commentary that provides insight into perceived realities of Norwegian public discourse. In relation to this dissertation, it is important to research how traditional, young Muslims in Norwegian society reflect upon citizenship, faith, and upbringing, and how it correlates to media debates that touch upon these topics. How members of this demographic understand what it means to be a Norwegian, how they feel about their faith in general and what thoughts they have on providing an upbringing in Norwegian society – not only do we learn of their experiences by looking into these questions, but we also learn more about Norwegian society through listening to these responses.

One of the central characteristics to my research contribution, is the emphasis on the human response, among other things, in which the lived experience or more specifically the *lived religion*-approach is a useful tool. Lived religion is about acknowledging and analyzing how religion plays a part in cultivating their perception of their lives (Erdal and Borchgrevink, 2017, side 131) as well as being an important part of how they live their lives.
This thesis is centered around how young Muslims predominantly from the Oslo-region reflect about citizenship, faith and upbringing in light of Norwegian media debates concerning Islam and Muslims.

What I find essential to my contribution to this research field is the highlighting of a few young Muslims' response to these media debates. As young adults who are part of this much discussed religious minority, I argue that their input on what is being said about them and their faith in addition to how it is being said, is a crucial input for the Norwegian society. In the same regard, I consider the response of both religious and ethnic minorities, regarding how they are being talked about in media debates, to be an input that stands as beneficial to the amelioration of Norwegian society.

Knowledge of such responses can provide a foundation for politicians, journalists, contributors to media debates, as well as other actors in society, to be cognizant of and consider the impact that certain types of arguments and phrasing can have for other people's understanding of reality, regardless of whatever minority they might belong to. The scope of this thesis is particularly limited, as I have only conducted two focus group interviews and one pilot interview. However, I hope that my contribution to this research field will inspire others to conduct similar research projects on a much bigger scale, both related to the Muslim community as well as other minorities represented in Norwegian society.

There is some research on Muslims' thoughts on citizenship and how they view their own faith on a national, Scandinavian or even international level (Bangstad 2015, Ishaq 2017, and Sandberg 2018). And yet Norwegian Muslims' thoughts on citizenship, faith and religious upbringing connected to specific media cases is scarily researched. Particularly, parenting and the upbringing of Muslim children, is a much less researched topic in Norway. There is certainly research literature on the matter in countries such as Sweden, the US or the UK (Haga 2014 and Shavit 2016), and as much as Norwegian society has similarities with Sweden, they are nonetheless very distinct. This stands to reason as to why Norway is in need of research on the matter of Norwegian Muslims' thoughts on citizenship, faith, and upbringing, as these would be cultivated by members of the religious minority's experiences in the social context of Norwegian society.

Secondly, I am recruiting Muslim interviewees from relatively traditional platforms and social networks. I define the term traditional Muslim as a Muslim that adheres to *traditional Islam*. This in turn calls for a definition of traditional Islam. This term can be defined as an understanding of Islam that puts the Qur'an as Allah's word, as well as the Prophet Muhammad's practice and example, known as the *Sunnah*, as the primary foundation of the epistemology of Islam (Nasr, 1987, p. 11 – 16). These together form what is referred to as *Shari'ah,* which is Islamic religious law. An adherence to traditional Islam involves a heavy

reliance on the works, stances, methodology and knowledge of the Muslim scholarship from the last 1400 years, meaning how these scholars have interpreted the Qur'an and the Sunnah.

Not to say that research centered around the thoughts and experiences of traditional Muslims is unheard of within this field of research, but I believe that majority of my participants to be the kind of Muslims often labelled as terms such as salafi, conservative, orthodox, *islamist* and other labels perceived to have similar meanings. This thesis shows that these politically charged labels represent an oversimplification of their identities and religious lifestyles.

Whether or not one or multiple of these labels ring true for each of my interviewees is not what I find to be most important in this case. Even with their religious and/or ideological differences, I believe that my consistent description of my participants as *traditional Muslims* is accurate and allows for a diversity of stances and views on both political and religious matters amongst them. Rather than centering my research around Muslims from a certain religious congregation, who follow one particular Islamic school of thought or jurisprudence, I believe that my contribution will aid in normalizing the term "traditional Muslims", and having traditional Muslims become more visible in Norwegian academic literature.

I would also add that through showcasing the range of different opinions expressed during the focus group interviews, my research contribution will highlight a diversity of opinions amongst both my interviewees as well as amongst traditional Muslims at large.
I find it crucial to recognize this intra-religious diversity of opinions for what it is, rather than reducing certain individuals or opinions to any of the aforementioned labels.
It is also a vision of mine for my own dissertation, that my research project will stand as a positive contribution to the improvement of the conditions under which Norwegian media debates are taking place, and also for the Muslim community itself in Norway.

There are parallels to the research interest of this dissertation and the idea of analyzing the media debates themselves. I would argue that the study of an independent media debate, and the study of its reception amongst the interviewees of a focus group interview, calls for different methodological approaches. The crucial difference between the two, is that the emphasis on the participants' responses is what provides us with the social commentary on media debates and also the Norwegian society at large. These multiple nuances and the idea of a "study of opinions and perceptions of other opinions and perceptions", as well as the highlighting of traditional Muslim voices and a diversity of opinions amongst them, stand as my research interest and research contribution for/with this thesis.

1.3: Media Debates and Excerpts

Handshake

The first media debate I utilized for the focus group interviews is what is known as the "handshake-debate" from November 2019. Part of the reason why this media debate gained so much attention, is the highlighting of the fact that handshaking with the opposite gender (Adam, 2012), or more specifically someone who is a non-*mahram*, is considered sinful in traditional Islam. To explain the term shortly, a *mahram* is someone of the opposite gender whom a Muslim according to the Islamic faith, is not allowed to marry. The mahram-system is a rather big framework (Adam, 2009), but it essentially comprises of specific people a Muslim is related to by blood, through marriage or through a foster relationship.

A *non-mahram* is by extension a person whom a Muslim is religiously allowed to marry, and with whom there are certain frameworks for social interactions. And according to these frameworks, a Muslim is not to physically touch a non-mahram (Ansari, 2012). Another part of this framework involves considering gender segregated spaces as ideal for both Muslim men and women (al-Kawthari, 2014), and attempting to keep free-mixing between both genders to a minimum as much as possible. This term will become particularly relevant during the analysis of the focus group interviews in relation to the handshake-media debate.

The main reason why this media debate was given so much media attention, has to do with the Muslim woman Zeliha Acar and the crown prince of Norway, Haakon Magnus. As shown in the photograph that circulated in accompaniment with this media debate, Acar is shown greeting the crown prince with her hand on her chest, while the crown prince is seen stretching out his hand for a handshake. The excerpt which I have translated myself is from the article from 2019 titled: "Should we respect our guests, or should our guests respect us?", written by Dana Manouchehri:

"A lot of people do not think of this as a big deal, that it is not an issue to put your hand on your chest rather than to handshake. This is at the very least to show tolerance towards intolerant views that should be met with resistance. I do not believe this is about individual cases or certain individuals but about values and mutual respect in a democratic nation such as Norway. This is about the values that lie behind this practice that are incompatible with the values we want in a country such as Norway, patriarchal views on the relationship between a man and a woman, which especially tie women to ideas of chastity, honorability and impurity. By showing this kind of "respect" one is silently consenting to letting violations of principles of equality take root in this society." (Manouchehri, 2019).

In this excerpt, one can find many arguments and claims to Norwegian society's norms and values. This excerpt further goes on to describe the act of not handshaking with a non-mahram, as representative of views that the author herself expresses not wanting to be present in Norwegian society.

Another interesting aspect of this excerpt in regard to citizenship, is in the title of the article "Should we respect our guests, or should our guests respect us?". By taking the photograph that embodies this media debate into account, it is easy to make the connection that Muslims or Muslims who do not engage in physical contact with non-mahrams, are the "guests" that the author refers to in the title of her article, meanwhile the rest of society is meant to be the "us" or the "hosts" in the writer's analogy. Simply categorizing Muslims as "guests" in such a manner, stands as a particularly interesting statement in light of citizenship being a central topic in this dissertation.

Considering how the views behind a religious practice is categorized by the author as "views that should not be allowed to take root in Norwegian society", discussing the accuracy of this statement in itself allows us to learn a bit about the interviewees' relationship to their own faith. One of the questions in the interview guide listed after reading this excerpt is "How is your faith being presented in this excerpt, compared to your own impression of your faith?"

Other questions from the interview guide include whether they view not handshaking with non-mahrams as compatible or incompatible with the idea of equality, and what views they perceive to define the society they live in compared to the ones mentioned by Manouchehri in her excerpt. These questions provide a gateway into learning about the interviewees' thoughts

on the topic of citizenship and how they view their own faith, in relation to the specific media debates on Islam and Muslims.

After School Program

I chose the media debate from November 2019 surrounding an after school-programme (ASP) as a service at the mosque, as the second media debate to be discussed during the focus group interviews. This media debate is centered around the legal and moral permissibility of such an ASP, as ASPs in Norway are a service normally provided by the elementary schools, usually within the perimeters of the school in question. "SFO" is the abbreviation commonly used for the word *skolefritidsordning*, which is the Norwegian word for after school-programme. This "ASP" offers religious education (Spence, 2019), opportunities for the children to receive assistance with and do their homework as well as other social activities, all happening at the mosque during the weekdays after school.

The service itself and the media debate has been referred to by the media outlets as an ASP. Interestingly enough - the mosque in question, the Islamic Cultural Center of Drammen, have never used that name themselves. The mosque allowed the children to spend the night at the mosque during the weekdays, while most ASPs in Norway are open from the end of the school lessons until 5pm. Another notable difference is that ASPs in Norwegian schools are catered to kids from 1st grade until the end of 4th grade, meaning the children attending ASP are from 6 – 10 years old, meanwhile the mosque offered these services to children in the age group 11 – 15 years old (Spence, 2019). The following excerpt is from an article in which the Pakistani-Norwegian politician Abid Q. Raja, was interviewed about the events surrounding the "mosque-ASP":

"This is not some ordinary boot camp or a weekend-trip with the handball-team. This is something foreign that does not belong in the Norwegian society. This is special treatment of non-ethnic Norwegians. We are witnessing an ordinary childhood being replaced by a controlled and religious childhood. This is unliberty in practice." (Spence, 2019)

Just like with the handshake-media debate, there is also an element of norms-centered arguments thrown into the mix. One's thoughts on what it means to be an ideal citizen of a country, is very much connected with what that person considers to be an ideal society. The first question listed in the interview guide after this excerpt has been read aloud is simply what they (the interviewees) think about the excerpt and its contents. The statement made as to what "does not belong in the Norwegian society" by Raja, is one of the aspects of the excerpt that were to be discussed amongst the interviewees, providing insight into their reflections on citizenship.

Another question from the interview guide is centered around the idea of a religious childhood, the question being: "is a religious childhood an ideal or is it something undesirable?" This question allows for conversations that can encompass the multiple topics of this dissertation. By having the participants voice their overall thoughts on the idea of a religious childhood, in terms of what kind of upbringing they would like to provide for their own children, we find leeway into learning about how the interviewees reflect upon both faith and upbringing. Discussions around this question also open for reflections on citizenship, in light of this particular media debate.

Mosque Surveillance

The final media debate I included in my focus group interviews is the media debate surrounding mosque surveillance from November 2019. In this media debate, we find discussions of what kind of surveillance-related security measures should be in place in the mosques and for the Muslim community in Norway, in order to combat terrorism. The excerpt I have decided to include is from an article written by Sophie Maktlary:

"First we must give the imams theological guidance. An imam's education is crucial for the mosque's ideology. There is no imam-education in Norway, and neither is there a requirement for imams to have a formal education. This has to change, and we either have to fly in experienced imams from abroad, or train imams in Norway on our own.

The second point is that the Norwegian Police Security Service (NPSS) and other security services need to conduct more investigations in the mosques. Preferably there should be appointed partners with which we cooperate with in every mosque, who are frequently in contact with the authorities. If this cannot be done, then it is important to recruit more informants in the communities. In addition, the police have to hire more people who are knowledgeable about the religion and who have roots from the Middle East.

The third point is that there needs to be set a framework in place in terms of what goes as an acceptable interpretation of Islam in Norway. It is no easy job, but it must be done. Making the state accountable for their role needs to happen, if one does not prefer a separation between state and religion." (Maktlary, 2019)

Citizenship becomes particularly relevant when assessing this excerpt. I asked a question about whether the excerpt has impacted the participants' views on the national security forces, during the focus group interviews. Knowing/learning that their community and their place of worship, is being treated as an object of fear and suspicion by national security forces, could largely affect how they feel about their claim to being Norwegian. It also ties in with to what extent they feel accepted as Muslims in Norwegian society. There are all entrances provided by this question into learning about the informants' thoughts on citizenship.

In light of the suggestion in the excerpt of making direct interventions into the theological aspect of how mosques in Norway are ran, I decided to include this question in the interview guide: "what do you think about this willingness to change or reform Islam?" Such measures could hypothetically have implications on how the participants, and a lot of other Norwegian Muslims, would view their own faith or practice it in Norwegian society. The idea of reform was especially interesting to hear reflected upon by the interviewees as many of them are rather traditional Muslims, which will be touched upon more later in the sub-chapters surrounding the sampling of interviewees. And so, through this question we get an opening to have the informants share their views on their own faith.

By looking to the future generations of Norwegian Muslims in light of this excerpt, the topic of upbringing also became a relevant discussion during focus group interviews. There was even a question about what kind of implications they (the participants) thought these kinds of statements would have for future generations of Muslims in Norway. It is worth reflecting upon how statements calling for tighter surveillance of Norwegian mosques, increased suspicion as well as direct intervention into the mosques; has or can have an effect on future generations of Norwegian Muslims. As the phrase "future generations" opens up for imagining various age demographics of Norwegian Muslims, there was room to discuss the implications such statements potentially could have for the informants' future children, and how they as parents hypothetically would want to handle such a situation.

Theory

This chapter will be centered around the theoretical framework I utilize in this dissertation. Theoretical frameworks linked to the topics of citizenship, faith and religious upbringing as academic terms will be included. I will also do a literature review, in which I review much of the previous research done on the various fields that my dissertation touches upon through its research question and sub-questions. Ultimately, I will present empirical frameworks for the topics known as citizenship, faith and upbringing, of that which I will compare the findings of to my own in the analysis-chapter.

2.1: Theoretical Tools for Analysis

Citizenship

Citizenship is in some contexts understood as something beyond just a legal concept. As the main focus of this dissertation is the social context of Norway, this Nordic country serves as an effective example. With how citizenship is understood today; being able to claim being

Norwegian on the basis of having been born in Norway, is a related, yet distinct statement from claiming to be a Norwegian *countryman*, in a cultural and emotional, symbolic sense (Tonkens and Duyvendak, 2016, p. 3). An individual may even be perceived to be able to make the first claim but not the second one, as one often has to fit a certain mold to be perceived as a "full-fledged citizen" on all fronts. The requirements of this mold are often unwritten and based on various elements such as culture, values, ethnicity and something which is very relevant to this dissertation's research question – religion.

Tonkens and Duyvendak point to immigrants as a special case in this regard. Immigrants as well as their descendants who are born and/or raised in Western countries, experience having their status as "full-fledged citizens" be put into question, while simultaneously being expected to publicly express a sense of national belonging to their country of residence (2016, p. 1 – 3). In some cases, immigrant populations as a whole or a specific religious minority, are categorized as a total opposition in terms of ideology and sets of values, to what it means to be a citizen of the society in question.

All three of the chosen media debate excerpts contain statements regarding social norms, social values and proper conduct in Norwegian society (cross ref., p. 9 – 13). After presenting each of the quotes, the interviewees were asked about their thoughts on its contents. In relation to the handshake-media debate, the participants were also asked the question "Where do the writer's thoughts on national identity (being Norwegian) stand compared to your own thoughts on the matter?". Through these means we came to learn how they interact with the idea of a "full-fledged Norwegian" or a cultural Norwegian citizen - whether they utilize a learned or inherited understanding of what constitutes being a Norwegian citizen, or if they merely construct their own understanding of what being Norwegian is about.

Faith

Faith has been researched upon from in various contexts, such as looking at the role of this concept within the field of nursing. The professor Susan MacLeod Dyess looks into this matter in her work "Faith: a concept analysis". One interesting fact to take notice of, is that Dyess writes about there being no clear-cut definition or understanding of faith as a concept, that can be utilized in the work of faith community nursing (2011, p. 2724). Though scholars from other fields might disagree with this statement, Dyess' understanding points to a complexity surrounding this very phenomenon.

However, there are still a few attributes that can be assigned to the concept of faith. These attributes include: 1) a focus on beliefs and/or doctrine, 2) an answer to the existential

question of the meaning of life, 3) attempting to live in accordance with one's beliefs and lastly, 4) to interrelate with oneself, with others and in some cases with the divine (2011, p. 2727). As broad and open as these attributes of faith are, these attributes can be applied when examining how Muslims view the Islamic faith, which makes this framework highly relevant for this research project.

This framework will be utilized in the analysis by drawing parallels between these attributes and the data from the focus group interviews. Through asking the informants question such as "how is your faith being represented in this excerpt, compared to your own view of your faith?" and "what do you think about this willingness to change or reform Islam?", I was able to learn how the informants reflected upon faith during the focus group interviews.

Upbringing

What constitutes a religious childhood or upbringing is simple to deduce from the name. A religious upbringing is an upbringing in which a child learns how to behave and interact with their surroundings, with a religious faith that serves an important backdrop (Kupari, 2016, p. 75 – 79). Certain religious beliefs and doctrines are often a central part of the knowledge being passed down from the parents or primary caregivers, to the child during an upbringing of a religious nature. Parents or primary caregivers play an important role in the instilling of religious beliefs (Tratner et al., 2017, p. 5), in addition to the very development of a child's religiosity during the early years of their life.

There are multiple things to take into consideration when raising a child and providing a religious education, as well as other considerations that may arise exclusively when combining these two endeavors. There are also some aspects to consider related to religious upbringing in the household of a religious minority. Some minorities are met with different reactions from the people in their surroundings. While some are met with acceptance to their religious lifestyle (Kupari, 2016, p. 81 – 82), others are met with resistance and have the prejudice directed towards them as members of a religious minority, affect their interactions with the people around them.

Though the conditions for inter-religious and intra-religious minorities may differ, the general principle of either being met with understanding or intolerance can be applied to both categories of religious minorities - whether they are a Muslim or an Orthodox minority living in a Lutheran-majority society. This term was operationalized through looking into how the informants reflected upon upbringing during the focus group interviews, in the form of

questions such as "is a religious childhood an ideal or is it something undesirable?" which had the informants reflect on the topic of upbringing.

2.2: Previous Research

As a part of this research project, I have conducted a thorough literature search both on research literature similar to this dissertation, and literature related to the topics of the sub-questions – citizenship, faith, and religious upbringing. I have also read research literature that talks about the media and mediatization, both related to the aforementioned topics as well as to Islam and Muslims. I will be shortly summarizing some of the research literature that I find to have commonalities with my own research project and findings.

Schmidt 2007 stands as an example of research on Muslims' thoughts on citizenship and their own faith. Schmidt's research project is an analysis of both Danish Muslim youth-organizations, and the Muslim identity in the years leading up to what was another well-known media debate, the debate surrounding the caricature drawings of prophet Muhammad. Schmidt's own informants reflect upon, interact with and take a stance towards what it means to be "Danish", much like my own informants did with the question of what it means to be "Norwegian", and what "Norwegian values" really mean. There are discussions of ethnicization of citizenship, which is not an element of emphasis in my own research.

In terms of previous research on Muslims and citizenship, Willemse and Bergh 2016 is an article worth mentioning. Willemse and Bergh write about the relationship between the media coverage of the Arab Spring 2010, and the complexity of identity and citizenship for Muslims. Some of the nuances related to citizenship brought into light in this article is the matter of belonging to various "publics", as well as the transnational aspect of how to construct an identity. This "multiple publics"-concept is touched upon by my own interviewees, but the research differs from my own in that it focuses on responses media coverage of media coverage of the Arab Spring back in 2010, while I'm researching my participants' responses to contemporary media debates surrounding Islam and Muslims.

Ahmed 2012 is an example of previous research on Muslims' thoughts on religious upbringing. This research project centers around Muslims' thoughts and experiences surrounding faith-based educational institutions, as a means of providing Muslim children with a religious education. The author talks about how socio-economic factors decide the opportunities for parents to provide a religious upbringing. Some of the parents felt that a religious education makes it easier to navigate through the difficult identity-landscape of modern society, in which teenagers have to explore in order to construct their own identity.

My interviewees also pointed out the benefit and necessity of a religious education/upbringing. However, my research focuses on their reflections on upbringing as a whole rather than specifically their thoughts on faith-based educational institutions and their services. The studies presented in the next three sub-chapters will act as the empirical frameworks for my research project.

2.3: Citizenship

Past research in Norway points towards a multifaceted understanding of citizenship amongst teenagers of Muslim background between the ages of 14 - 16. Andrea Tharaldsen's master dissertation is a qualitative research study in which Tharaldsen has looked into belonging and group identities among 2ⁿᵈ generation immigrants, or "descendants of immigrants" as she herself calls it. She interviewed middle school students in Norway of Muslim background for her research. One of the middle school students talked about how he felt like he *is Norwegian* as in the adjective, yet he will never be *a Norwegian* (2017, p. 25 - 27), meaning in the form of the noun.

This distinction points towards Tonkens and Duyvendak's idea of the culturalization of citizenship. It is also pointed out by the author that the participants switch between using the labels that translate to "Norwegian" and "immigrant", depending on the context and contents of the conversation. This method of identity construction has its' similarities to the findings of Schmidt 2007's multiple publics-concept.

And yet, there are multiple levels to this interaction between religious belonging and local belonging. A few of the interviewees allowed themselves to define what religious acts and symbols (2017, p. 30), is and should be socially accepted in regard to their own religious practice and their perception of religious practice amongst other Muslims in Norway. I will be comparing these findings to my own in the analysis and discussion-chapter, where I will compare my participants' reflections on the cultural citizenship of being Norwegian to Tharaldsen's findings.

In Denmark, we also find a bit of research on the topic of citizenship, in David Herbert and Janne Hansen's research for which they interviewed Muslim converts/reverts of Danish descent. The Muslim converts of Danish background talk about the role played by actors who participate in Danish media debates, as they attempt to *define* the identity of these reverts. A lot of Danes consider these two identity markers to be irreconcilable (2018, p. 16 – 18), which has affected the reverts' own self-understanding of their identities.

Amongst the interviewees, most of them mention finding themselves on this cross point between two identities. The reverts still identify as the same Danes that they were pre-conversion, only that they went through some lifestyle changes as a result of having converted to the Islamic faith. One male convert even mentions having somewhat *abandoned* his Danish identity, as a result of the nature of this discourse (2018, p. 16 – 18). It is therefore clear, that media debates have the potential to affect Muslims' self-understanding of their identity when it comes to cultural, ethnic and religious identity markers, to which Muslims respond to in different ways. In the analysis and discussion-chapter, I will be comparing Herbert and Hansen's findings regarding these identity markers to the findings from my own research.

2.4: Faith

In Swedish research on the matter of how Muslims view their faith, we see a unique sense of accommodation perceived to be within the Islamic faith. Ingemar Elander et al. conducted a study by the title of "Swedish Muslims and Secular Society: Faith-Based Engagement and Place", in which they interviewed members local Muslim activists, imams and various Muslim organizations about various topics that relate to their faith. A sense of accommodation is evident in an imam's description (Elander et al., 2015, p. 148 – 149) of how the average Swedish Muslim, might choose to spend their free time.

The imam mentions how the broad scope of religious worship in the mosque to something as working a 9 to 5-job or to play a game of football, can in the grand, religious scheme of things be considered religiously encouraged activities (2015, p. 148 – 149). And so, this description reveals to us that there are Swedish Muslims to whom faith represents a central and accommodating force, as it allows for and often motivates believers to partake in various endeavors. In my own analysis I will be discussing this notion of faith as a central and accommodating force in light of my own findings.

Jonathan Scourfield, Sophie Gilliat-Ray, Asma Khan and Sameh Otri have contributed immensely to the research on British Muslims' thoughts on citizenship, faith and upbringing with their book *Muslim Childhood: Religious Nurture in a European Context*. When asked about their most important identity marker (Scourfield et al., 2014, p. 179 + 188), being "Muslim first" was a common response amongst the participants of this study. What this phrase entails, is that the interviewees who gave this reply grant their religious adherence utmost importance in how they live their lives, and/or how they perceive themselves to be living their lives. This is one of many examples that illustrate how the topics of citizenship, faith and upbringing can be heavily interconnected at times, even if they are presented as

distinct analytical categories in this dissertation. This "Muslim first"-sentiment will be directly compared to the views expressed by my own informants during the focus group interviews, in my analysis.

Research literature from the US has shown that identity and faith can be very much intertwined. The American Muslim organization known as the Yaqeen Institute, conducted a research project with the title "Exploring the Faith and Identity Crisis of American Muslim Youth". The participants for this research project were young Muslims in the age groups of 5 – 9 years old and 14 – 19 years old. Some of the teenage participants felt their religion and religious identity was an obstacle standing in the way of their dreams (Suleiman, 2017). The Muslim teenagers who felt this way, perceived the restrictions of their faith to be a burden. One of the teenagers stated that one needed to compromise one's religious principles in order to "make it in life". The contrast in this study to the more optimistic findings of Elander's research provides a bit of width in the empirical frameworks for this topic. In my analysis I will be comparing these findings from Elander et al., Scourfield et al. and Yaqeen Institute's research contributions to my interviewees' reflections on faith.

2.5: Upbringing

Rannveig Haga conducted research on Somali parents in Sweden and Finland from 2011. In this research project, Haga talked to her participants about their own understanding of their children's overall wellbeing and the pursuit of that wellbeing, directly addresses the matter of religious upbringing in the eyes of Muslim parents. One of the interviewees talk about how as a mother and a Muslim, she has some concerns about the nature of her children's' surroundings. One of these concerns is for children as young Muslims (Haga, 2014, p. 47) to not be met with respect and understanding from non-Muslim Swedes for their religious beliefs.

One of the female interviewees mention fearing that the religious practices and values that her children have learnt at home, could potentially be completely disregarded by non-Muslim Swedes (2014, p. 47). The scenario of her children ending up taking part in religiously immoral activities while interacting with non-Muslim Swedes, is a genuine concern for her as a Muslim mother. Adhering to a religion involves attempting to follow a specific morality, and so it is only natural for a believing parent or primary caretaker to wish for their children to be able to follow the religious morality without facing any obstacles.

Haga's motivation for conducting research on this topic contextualizes the concern of this Somali, Muslim mother. The author mentions noticing back in 2008 that a considerable

number of Somali women who used to live in Europe and North America were migrating to the Muslim-majority country of Dubai (2014, p. 114). The reason for this had to do with the same concern voiced by one of the interviewees in Haga's research project – not being able to raise their children as practicing Muslims in their previous country of residence. The matter of these Somali families moving from the secular country of Sweden to a Muslim-majority country like Dubai can be considered as an example of making *hijrah*.

Hijrah can be translated to migration and can in a historical sense be used to reference the beginning of the Islamic calendar or era (Encyclopædia Britannica, 2020). When someone talks of *the* hijrah in Islam, they are referring to when the Prophet Muhammad in order for him and his fellow believers to escape persecution, left the city of Mecca and migrated to Medina in year 622. When used as a more general noun, to make hijrah means to migrate to another location for the sake of being able to practice the Islamic faith. A Muslim-majority country is often the first choice for when a Muslim decides to make hijrah.

According to traditional Sunni scholars, making hijrah becomes a religious obligation (Meah, 2018) for Muslims who live in locations where it is near impossible to practice their faith. For believers who live in places where it is not impossible to practice the religion of Islam, yet they face a lot of considerable obstacles when doing so, making hijrah is only recommended rather than an obligation. Hijrah as a term will be utilized when looking at the findings related to the sub-question of upbringing, from the focus group interviews. This finding regarding a potential concern for the suitability of raising Muslim children in a specific society, will be compared to my own interviewees' reflections on the topic of upbringing in my analysis.

Additional research from Scourfield et al., shows that attempting to raise Muslim children in a non-Muslim society is not all doom and gloom. Some of the Muslim parent interviewees talk about following a pedagogy model for incorporating religious education into their children's upbringing, based on textual sources and advice from traditional Muslim scholars (Scourfield, 2014, p. 133 – 137). Viewpoints and experiences amongst the participants varied depending on factors such as what kind of religious education the parents would provide for their children, whether their children had attended public schools or Muslim private schools, whether their children had been homeschooled and what previous experiences the parent informants have had with these different options.

Bad influences were generally not a major concern for the Muslim parents during their children's adolescent years and all the way through elementary school. Rather, the one time period in which the influence of religiously incorrect behaviors and activities were a point of

concern, was when the children would be in their teenage/high school years (2014, p. 136 – 137). It is pointed out in the article that two of the parents were even considering moving to a Muslim country, when their children were about to become teenagers. The same parents did not mind for their children to pursue higher education in the UK, implying that their concern was specifically regarding their children spending their teenage years in an environment filled with immoral temptations. The attention paid to the age of children when it comes to upbringing and abstaining from sin, is something I will compare to my own interviewees' reflections in my analysis.

So far in this chapter, we have looked at previous research on the topics of citizenship, faith and upbringing, and I have also established what research literature on these topics that will stand as my theoretical and empirical frameworks for my analysis. The research literature up until this point has displayed a variety of understandings of the aforementioned topics and will be discussed in light of my own findings in the analysis and discussion-chapter.

Method

In this chapter I will discuss the research method I utilized in order to answer my research question. The first sub-chapter will be about qualitative research and focus group interviews as a research method. The second sub-chapter will center around my positioning as a researcher, focusing on certain aspects such: my positioning as a researcher, as a traditional Muslim and also as a Muslim *man*. Then I will discuss the recruitment process and sampling of interviewees, before explaining the structuring of the interviews. This will contain my reasoning for choices I have made regarding the conducting of these interviews, such as my choice of age demographic to recruit participants from, the location in which the interviews were held and what kind of questions I decided to include in my interview guide for the focus group interviews. After that I will discuss the challenges I met and various ethical considerations related to a research project of this nature. Ultimately, I will touch upon the matter of reliability and validity of my findings, before presenting what analytical strategy and coding method I have utilized in this dissertation.

3.1: Research Method

When it comes to qualitative research interviewing, the data the interviewee provides is often centered around the interviewees' lived experience (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 3 – 5), as well as their subjective understanding of their surroundings. The interviewer also plays a part in the production of this knowledge, through for example choosing the topic of conversation

for the interview and setting certain formal or practical perimeters for the structuring of the interview, though qualitative interviewing relies on both the interviewer and the interviewee(s) in order to be an effective research method.

When attempting to research people's perception of a certain aspect of their lives, focus groups are elevated by the professor of theology Henk de Roest, as one of the most effective research methods (2015, p. 239 - 240). A focus group opens up for doing things that one normally only can do during a regular conversation. Being able to elaborate, to form an opinion on a topic as someone else is speaking, and to reply to a question with another question; these are but a few of the possibilities that a focus group interview opens up for. A focus group interview can be described as a crossover between a conversation and an interview. In such an interview, the researcher or facilitator has the informants give their thoughts on one or multiple topics or issues (Roest, 2015, p. 236 - 239), in which all the informants share a form of commonality related to the research project.

Roest goes on to highlight the synergy of focus group interviews (2015, p. 236 - 239), which is very much in consonance with my purpose for going with the focus group research method. The synergy and freedom that a focus group interview allows is something I find very fascinating, as it is directly linked to exploring the responses to Norwegian media debates surrounding Islam and Muslims amongst young adults of a traditional Muslim background in their 20's. Focus groups allow for an authentic insight into the participants' responses compared to a formal interview-setting, in which the interviewees are limited to only answering the question(s) they are asked by the interviewer.

Using focus group as a research method, has the potential of making the reader(s) aware of the reception of media debates as a general topic, and could potentially make the informants more aware of this topic after participating in a focus group interview. A key feature is that the other informants serve as a sort of *audience* when a response is given. This opens up for a dynamic conversation amongst the participants in which different viewpoints are being shared, with no intention of establishing any form of consensus.

I decided to conduct a pilot interview in advance of the focus groups. I conducted this interview with three personal acquaintances in a classroom at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo. I went with the same interview guide and interview structure for the pilot interview, as I did with the focus groups. My decision to conduct a pilot interview came from a need to test out the interview guide.

Prior to this research project, I had little to no experience in constructing an interview guide and conducting individual interviews, let alone conducting a focus group interview. The data from the pilot interview will not be given the same focus in the analysis and discussion-chapter as the data from the two focus group interviews. Rather, the data from the pilot interview will stand as a supplementary material during the analysis of my findings. A key difference between the pilot interview and the focus group interview, is that the informants in the pilot interview were acquaintances of mine prior to the interview, in contrast to the participants of the focus group interviews whom I did not know prior to the interview.

3.2: My own Positionality

When working with other people, being aware of one's own positionality is crucial for all kinds of social interactions. This rings true in the case of my focus group interviews. There are certain markers I possess that provided me as a researcher with a partial insider-status, although my status while conducting these interviews was quite dynamic. The most central marker to this research project is being a Muslim myself, which most likely became apparent to my participants through seeing my full name on the informational document they were sent during the recruitment process of this research project. Another marker of my insider-positionality would be my non-Caucasian physical appearance combined with presence of facial hair – with a beard or facial hair in many contexts being considered one of the standard methods for identifying a Muslim man, as ambiguous of a method as it may be.

Sharing the same religion as my interviewees (Erland & Ezzati 2014, p. 47) did not guarantee that my interviewees and I would respond in the same way to the specific Norwegian media debates surrounding us and our faith. However, the participants were able to draw upon our shared religious tradition as a communal point of reference, during the focus group interviews. This is something I will elaborate on when discussing the ethical challenges of my partial insider-status.

There is also the marker known as cultural competence (Carling, Erland & Ezzati 2014, p. 47). This marker could become be seen as more evident during the conducting of the interviews, both in the form of how the conversation cultivated themselves but also through the social interactions that took place during the interview. As I have specifically interviewed members of a religious minority; there is also an element of religious competence that is not always isolated from this category of cultural competence, as these two categories are often closely interconnected.

They can be connected both in the context of religion and religious practice being woven into certain cultures, as well as the unique culture that takes shape within a religious community, in which religion stands as a primary fundament for the establishing of such a culture. There is also the fact that I am from a traditional Muslim background like my interviewees. This circumstance broadened the scope of religious competence that could be used as points of reference during the conversations, as we would in light of our religious backgrounds have similar if not sometimes identical understandings of how certain aspects of our faith work.

The ethical challenge that comes with the privileges of a partial insider-status, is the burden of representation that comes with any sort of research involving other informants (Carling, Erland & Ezzati 2014, p. 47). Any amount of faith that interviewees have in the researcher is a valuable asset, and it is built upon an expectation from the interviewees for the findings of the interviewer's research, ultimately benefiting the community at large.
As a researcher, I do not believe the findings of my dissertation will have any negative impact on the legal or socio-economic aspects of the Norwegian Muslim population's lives. However, it is interesting in an ethical sense to consider how I could end up being metaphorically *bound* to the expectations of my participants, while it also highlights how I had both a partial insider-status, and a partial outsider-status.

Furthermore, my partial-insider status did not come without its disadvantages. In my case, one very evident disadvantage to this was a natural usage of Islamic terminology, religious concepts and textual references from my participants during the focus group interviews. These terms would often be mentioned by one or multiple interviewees without translating the word or phrase in question, and neither would they be explained or elaborated upon by them. All of these references as well as personal commentary or reflections on the religious subject matter they were referencing, would have been incredibly fruitful data for this research project.

The reason for this circumstance is the primary challenge of partial insider-status – the assumption that you as a researcher are familiar with what they, the interviewees, are talking about at any given point. Because I am also of a traditional Muslim background, they did not feel the need to explain every single Arabic phrase. Interviewees are not to worry about how their responses are gonna be textually presented in a research paper. To take this into consideration cannot be expected of the informants, as telling them to do so would be a hindrance from speak freely during the focus group interview, which would ultimately act as self-sabotage of one's research project.

In addition, I also need to consider the other side of the coin – that being my partial *outsider*-status during the focus group interviews. My outsider-status during the focus group interviews was especially evident when presenting and reading out loud the media debate excerpts for the participants. It was during those points during the interviews that it was almost underlined that in addition to being a fellow Muslim to my interviewees, I am also an academic and a researcher. These represent examples of when I had to "go academic" (Khawaja & Mørck, 2009, p. 30 – 31) during the focus group interviews.

Other examples of when I had to make use of my outsider-status relate to the actual conducting of the focus group interviews. When introducing myself to the participants and explaining how the focus group interview would take place, I produced my position as a master's degree student conducting these interviews as part of my research project for my master dissertation. As the interviewer it was up to me when we would take a break during the interview, further producing my position as an academic and a researcher.

The questions in the interview guide as well as follow-up questions were articulated in a way that highlighted my partial status as an outsider. Though they were articulated in a simple way that still had to do with the topics of citizenship, faith and upbringing, questions asked like "what do you think about this image which gained a lot of attention in the media?" still very much came across as interview questions. If my intention was to "go native" in my articulation of these questions, then I would have asked the questions with a phrasing that is more in line with oral, informal speech patterns. In light of these points, it is evident that various aspects of my status as both a partial insider and as a partial outsider, came into play during the conducting of these focus group interviews.

Another important endeavor to consider in my research as I have interviewed members of a religious minority, is to not ostracize them or as certain academics would refer to it – to not participate in their *othering*. What this entails is to let interviewees explain their own perception of reality (Khawaja & Mørck, 2009, p. 30 – 31). Additionally, as a researcher, I must put enough emphasis on the participants' experiences, which is accomplished by giving attention to what is being said during the focus group interviews, as well as *how* it is being articulated by the interviewees. Another aspect of allowing the interviewees to explain their perceptions of their own reality, is for me to take these very understandings seriously and not undermine them, when analyzing the findings of my research project. This is something I pay attention to, when presenting the interview excerpts in the analysis and discussion-chapter.

In light of the research question of my thesis, emphasizing on the interviewees' experiences is something that I consider my research question and choice of research method to open up for by default. Seeing as I am researching *how* young adults of a traditional Muslim background living in Norway respond to three specific media debates on Islam and Muslims, there is no getting around delving into my participants' own understanding and construction of reality.

Sharing the same religious background as the interviewees, there was always a chance that this fact is something that would be highlighted, directly or indirectly, during the focus group interviews by the interviewees or by myself. Khawaja and Mørck mention that when informants are talking about their experiences (2009, p. 33 – 34), there is a possibility that a general experience or line of thought that is perceived to apply to an entire religious or ethnic minority in question, will be brought up during the interview.

There were questions asked during the focus group interviews that opened up for such remarks. An example of one of these questions is: "How do you think the parents of the children who went to these programs felt about this media debate?" This question was asked in the context of the ASP-media debate, after having read aloud an excerpt from Spencer 2019.The interviewees choosing to talk about personal experiences (2009, p. 33 – 34) and make claims about the experiences of most Norwegian Muslims, whether it be in those in their 20's or the community as a whole, could very much have happened in any focus group interview of a similar nature. Having reflected upon my positionality as a researcher in this sub-chapter, I will now talk about the recruitment process and sampling for my research.

3.3: Recruitment Process and Sampling

Recruitment Process

The recruitment process for the focus group interviews began with promoting the research project through social media. I had chosen two closed Facebook-groups I would attempt to recruit interviewees from, but I only managed to recruit one participant through this recruitment strategy. Because I did not recruit enough interviewees, I decided to take use of what is referred to as *snowball sampling.* Snowball sampling (Noy, 2008, p. 330) is to utilize one's own social networks in order to gather candidates for a specific endeavor.

The requirements potential interviewees had to fulfill were: (1) being of Muslim background, (2) in their 20's, (3) and not being my personal acquaintances. Luckily, my use of snowballing was successful, and I ended up with 5 participants for both focus groups.

This resulted in most of my interviewees being rather traditional Muslims, as this trait was a commonality in the social networks in which the word of my research project circulated in.

The initial plan was to have each focus group interview consist of 5-7 participants in each focus group. However, not long before each of the interviews, four out of the initially 10 interviewees could not attend the interviews for various reasons, resulting in both focus groups consisting of only 3 participants each. The reason why I initially decided on having 5-7 interviewees in each focus group, had to do with practicality. With a focus group interview of 5-7 participants, there would be no worries in regard to collecting enough data. In addition, some informants might have found it easier to speak if there are other interviewees present as well, as the effectiveness of focus group interviews relies on their conversations.

Sample of Interviewees

As Wade Clark Roof writes, representation is an important aspect of these kinds of research projects (2013, p. 75), meaning it is crucial to reflect upon what informants one would like to recruit. The only distinction made in the research question, is for the informants to be young adults of Muslim background in their 20's. This had me not see any grounds for including or excluding anyone based on factors such as how practicing the informants consider themselves, as I do not consider these matters to be relevant to the research question of this dissertation. The participants' age for the pilot interview ranges from 20 – 26 years old. As previously mentioned, all three of the interviewees for the pilot interview were acquaintances of mine, and they all lived in the city of Oslo. I have decided to anonymize the participants by referring to them as: Adam, Enoch and Nuh.

For the focus group interview with male participants, the ages of 20 to 22 were represented, with two of the male informants living in Oslo at the time. These interviewees have been anonymized with the names: Hud, Saleh and Lut. Saleh and Lut were already acquainted with each other prior to the focus group interview. In the case of the focus group interview consisting of female interviewees, their ages ranged from 21 to 29. Once again, only two of the interviewees in this focus group interview lived in Oslo. For this dissertation I have given them the aliases: Hawa, Khadija and Fatima. None of the interviewees in the female focus group knew each other beforehand.

3.4: Structuring of the Interviews

As previously mentioned, I have conducted focus group interviews as my research method for this thesis. The focus group interviewees were young adults of Muslim background in their 20's. My reasoning for choosing to interview Muslims in their 20's specifically, has to do

with this age demographic often being perceived to spend a lot of time on the internet. On the basis of thinking that there is an element of truth to this perception, I believe this gives room to assume that they have had some exposure over the years, to a decent amount of Norwegian media debates regarding Islam and Muslims. In light of this, I find it to be an interesting endeavor to look into how this age demographic of Norwegian of traditional Muslim background respond to these media debates.

I decided to conduct a pilot-interview in addition to the two focus group interviews. The reason I conducted a pilot interview was my lack of experience as an interviewer and wanting to both test out my interview guide, and gain experience in conducting interviews. My reasoning for conducting these interviews with non-mixed focus groups, has to do with the landscape one needs to navigate through with traditional Muslims. The initial platforms and social networks I decided to recruit participants from, were colored by an adherence to traditional yet distinct understandings of Islam.

This also ties in with the earlier mentioned mahram-system, and the frameworks for interactions with non-mahrams. What this meant for the recruitment process; is that partaking in a focus group interview consisting solely of participants of the same gender, could seem more religiously justifiable to a lot of traditional Muslims in their 20's. This was a choice made for the sake of having my interviewees and me feel more religiously comfortable in partaking in the focus group interviews.

This aspect of traditional understandings of Islam provided a challenge in recruiting female interviewees, as me being a man highly stands as an obstacle that would make some traditional Muslim women hesitant to be a part of a focus group interview of such nature. As there was no getting around the free mixing of men and women, with me as a male interviewer and the second focus group consisting only of women, this was the only way to tackle this dilemma. And so, the reasoning for this setup has to do with accommodating the traditional Muslim participants' lifestyle and religious practice, as well as attempting to make the project more appealing to these religious demographics.

Another important aspect of why I decided to go with this setup, is that I wanted to be able to compare my findings in the two focus group interviews respectively. By utilizing a comparative design such as this one, it allows for an analysis of what may come across as a gendered dynamic within the focus groups. As I focus on the reflections of my young adult participants of traditional Muslim background in their 20's who predominately live in Oslo; to be able to highlight both similarities and differences between the two focus groups,

it becomes more plausible for me to authentically represent them by being able to make note of tendencies and patterns within and across both focus groups.

Location and surroundings during an interview can have a considerable effect on the data. It can affect anything from the actual contents of the data, to the participants' willingness to even answer the facilitator's questions (Bremborg, 2013, p. 313). I ended up conducting the focus group interviews in one of the classrooms at the Faculty of Theology, at the Blindern-campus of the University of Oslo, as I considered it to be an appropriate location in light of these practical concerns and considerations. One advantage to this is that the idea of the interview taking place at the University of Oslo, gives the interview a professional feel to it. By conducting the focus group interviews at a university; it becomes more evident to the interviewees that they are partaking in a research project at an academic institution, rather than the whole ordeal coming across as an informal social gathering.

One could argue that for example using a mosque as the location for the interviews, could leave an impression on the interviewees that could impact the participants' answers and the overall conversation (Brekke et al., 2019, p. 220). If the interviews had taken place in a mosque, it could have potentially invoked a perceived responsibility in the participants to answer a certain way, in a manner that could be in contrast to how they would answer the question, if the interview were to take place at another location. It is worth reflecting over whether a location can ever truly be "neutral" of leaving any sort of impression on the interviewees; though utilizing UiO's facilities is something I nonetheless consider to have been a reasonable decision.

Before the interviews began, I made sure to prepare some refreshments for the interviewees in the form of some snacks, and a water bottle for each of the participants. I also set up the audio recorder at the table where we would all be sitting. The purpose for using this audio recorder is because these interviews are my data material for this research project. Hence it is only natural that I had the opportunity to revisit my data material through transcripts of the audio recordings. The initial pilot interview took place on the 29th of September, but because of some technical difficulties with the audio recording equipment I was not able to record the focus group interview, leading me to reconduct the interview on the 6th of October with the same participants. The focus group interviews took place on the 13th and the 27th of October 2020, from 4PM – 6PM in a classroom at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Oslo.

I decided to start off the focus group interviews with a short greeting, an introduction of myself and my research project, followed by an explanation of the structure of the interviews.

I also mentioned in this introductory statement that it would be ideal for the participants to hold a conversation amongst themselves, when they would answer my questions. Starting off the interviews in this manner with information about what was about to come, felt like a practical way to begin the interviews. Not only did it make it even clearer for the interviewees about the nature of this academic setting, it also let my participants know what to expect and give them some time to mentally prepare themselves for the upcoming conversation.

A goal I had during the construction of my interview guide, was to give the participants leeway to talk freely. Asking open questions that would allow my interviewees to accurately depict their own experiences and opinions, came across as the most reasonable course of action when constructing the interview guide. To give an example, the first thing I asked my interviewees about after reading out loud each of the excerpts from the three chosen media debates during the focus group interviews, was what they thought about the contents of the excerpt I had just presented them with. These simple yet open questions allow for a multitude of thoughts and perspectives, making it an effective question to include in an interview guide of this nature and a nice way to initiate a conversation.

In addition to that, having the questions be relevant to the sub-questions of this dissertation also played a big role while working with this interview guide. An example of this is one of the first questions in the interview guide being: "what are your thoughts on handshaking?" Regardless of what stance that was being expressed in response to this question, their replies would reflect their understanding of their own faith and social norms in the society they live in. This question therefore allowed for data on their reflections on the topics of citizenship and faith, making it an effective question that fulfilled its purpose during the focus group interviews.

Another important principle I took into consideration was to articulate questions that would provide me with the necessary data without being too complicated. This is something Kvale mentions in one of his works (2008, p. 76 – 77), in which he makes a distinction between how one should articulate a research question, and how one ought to articulate the same sentiment in the form of one or multiple research questions. Kvale also points out that in some cases, a single research question can be answered by asking the interviewees a handful of questions of a simpler nature.

In addition to a selection of questions, I included excerpts from contributions to the three Norwegian media debates, in which I would read the excerpts out loud and then have the informants give their thoughts on these quotes. This is something I decided to incorporate as

another important tool, to gauge the interviewees' responses to quotes that would function as a form of "representative excerpts" of sentiments expressed in the specific media debates. The excerpt, the picture and the interview guide act as a collective unit, giving the interviewees an opportunity to talk about the topic at hand from various perspectives. Discussing a media debate as an isolated topic presents a risk of short-lived conversations, especially if one or multiple participants have little to no knowledge of the discussed media debate. Including an excerpt in such a manner, provided the participants with something substantial to which they could articulate a response of their own.

The topic of the interview questions following each excerpt would vary depending on the quote's relevance to the topics of faith, citizenship and social conditions for raising Muslim children in the future. The selected excerpt from the ASP-media debate, includes statements about incorrect ways to raise a child, as well as what is considered unwanted behavior in Norwegian society. In light of this, the excerpts from the chosen media debates provide an opportunity to have the interviewees reflect on citizenship, faith, and upbringing.

This is particularly relevant to consider in the case of my thesis, as the three media debates I have chosen are not equal in terms of public recognition. Another reason is because the interviewees could potentially have felt more comfortable sharing their thoughts on media debates, they knew of and were witness to as it was ongoing, compared to a media debate they would be hearing about for the first time during the focus group interviews, in which they would have little information available to them.

For practical reasons, I made sure to include a break in the program for the focus group interviews. The timing of these breaks was influenced by the prayer times on these specific days, as well as by the overall energy level in the room. Being flexible with the breaks only felt natural, as I was interviewing traditional Muslims who all observed the 5 daily prayers. We ended up taking a break during the pilot interview and the focus group interview with male participants, as those interviews were particularly lengthy. However, the focus group interview with female participants was a bit shorter and I did not perceive there to be a need for a break during that interview, therefore we conducted the second focus group interview without taking any breaks.

3.5: Challenges & Ethical Considerations

As much as I was aware that focus group interviews are fairly dynamic in how the conversations could play out, it is not to be underestimated how the dynamic of every focus group interview can vary massively in each interview. A challenge I came across however,

during the focus group interview with the female interviewees, was a notable difference in atmosphere and willingness to give as elaborate responses compared to during the focus group interview with the male participants.

I found that the female informants' replies and conversations were sometimes only related to the question asked and the contents of the presented media debate excerpts. This was a contrast to the replies and conversations amongst the male interviewees, as they would at times go into discussions that were not directly related to the question or excerpt at hand, but they would nonetheless still be relevant to the topic(s) at hand. In addition, these interactions between the male participants did not fail to include a number of reflections on the topics of citizenship, faith, and upbringing.

The primary explanation for the difference in atmosphere and the direction in which the conversations would go in, I argue having to do with gender dynamics. To shortly summarize the explanation of the mahram-concept from earlier, it will suffice to saying that free-mixing between men and women is not considered ideal. Being a non-mahram man to the female interviewees, my presence categorizes the second focus group interview as a case of free mixing. When finding oneself in a setting which is not religiously ideal, it is logical for it to not to be natural to speak as freely, as one would be doing in a setting where one feels religiously comfortable finding themselves in.

Having such contrasting atmospheres in both focus group interviews calls into question whether I effectively conducted a proper focus group interview with the female informants. I am convinced that the female participants did give their honest opinions and reflections on the conversation topics, yet the fact of the matter is the flow of their conversations were not as natural and elaborate as with the male informants' conversations. Despite the limitation explained earlier due to the religious frameworks of social interactions; though there was not a lack of conversations that emulated the characteristics of a focus group interview, at times the interview was not as dynamic as focus group interviews tend to be. This speaks to the challenges that may arise when working with informants of traditional religious backgrounds. It also serves as a lesson for me to make more of an effort to have female interviewees, feel more comfortable in speaking their mind in a similar interview setting.

The matter of my contribution in the form of this dissertation stands as a potential ethical issue on its own. Once the pilot interview and the two focus group interviews had been transcripted (Kvale, 2008, p. 30), and as soon as I was about to read through and analyze my findings, I was at risk of strengthening or reproducing certain stereotypes or prejudices

towards Islam and its followers. Anyone who is interviewing or doing research on Muslims could potentially give grounds for anti-immigration or anti-Islam voices, to argue against or even partake in hate speech towards Muslims and the religion of Islam, their supposed lifestyle or the very existence of a Muslim community in a non-Muslim society.

One thing to consider is not only what these prejudices are but also on what grounds some of these claims are being made. It is important to acknowledge that some of the arguments made against Islam and Muslims by anti-immigration or anti-Islam voices, are arguments made on a secular, liberal basis. This becomes evident when anti-Islam sentiments are being expressed in light of traditional Islam's views on matters such as same-sex marriage, abortion, gender interactions and the understanding of gender equality. Without delving too much into the traditional Islamic stance on each of these topics, in a nutshell their stances on these topics differ greatly from a Western left-wing political party's stances.

This complicates matters to an extent in terms of avoiding feeding into prejudiced narratives. What I want to get across is that having my participants seem like they do not conform to a politically liberal set of values in certain instances, is unavoidable. In an ideological sense, by actively adhering to a *traditional* understanding of Islam, there is an element of illiberal values at play by default. It is not up to a researcher to convince their interviewees into conforming to any specific set of values, whether it be a liberal or a conservative set of values. And as previously mentioned in the sub-chapter about my research interest and contribution, I find the study and nuancing of the image of traditional Muslims to be an important endeavor.

What complicates things further is that a part of anti-Muslim rhetoric uses these conservative values as an argument in their favor. This means that some of the views expressed by my informants during the focus group interviews I conducted, are part of what certain anti-Muslim voices use to justify any prejudice, stereotypes or negative portrayal of Muslims in Norway, from a liberal perspective. We even find examples of this in the media debate excerpts utilized during the focus group interviews. There is a chance that interview-excerpts where less liberal views are being expressed by my informants, could be used as fuel for their rhetoric. This would apply only to the interview excerpts, and not my own analysis of them. Overall, this poses an ethical challenge for this research project as the plight of proper intellectual representation of one's informants, and the responsibility of avoiding reproducing stereotypes and prejudices towards said interviewees, are principles that do not fully coincide with each other in this case.

As I attempted to recruit informants from social media, the anonymizing of the participants stood as an important endeavor for my research. The probability of someone recognizing one of my interviewees who were recruited through social media, is not to be underestimated. This matter of anonymizing is just as important when it comes to my interviewees recruited through snowballing, though the one interviewee recruited from the Facebook-groups is in a somewhat unique situation in this regard. It is important to stay within the ethical guidelines, as well as to fulfill my informants' rights regarding privacy and avoiding potential harm. I therefore decided to anonymize the participants in the transcripts of the focus group interviews, in addition to in the dissertation paper.

Confidentiality and sensitive topics are also complicated matters (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 94), in the context of recruiting informants from social media groups. In the case of interviewees who hypothetically could have been active in these groups; the boundaries for what thoughts, feelings and personal stories they are willing to talk about in the focus group interviews, could very much coincide with the boundaries they operate with, while engaging in conversations in the public forums on social media. Anonymized statements in a thesis paper can be considered to be "out in the open", but the availability of the data in the final product is not necessarily on the same level as statements that are made in social media groups with hundreds or thousands of members.

All in all, this highlights the responsibility I had as a researcher, to ensure my informants that they were free to share whatever felt natural (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, p. 20) during these focus group interviews. And even if it were to involve information that is already out on the internet, or information that they are sharing for the first time, I am obligated to assure them that regardless, the data will be handled with utmost respect for their privacy and general well-being.

3.6. Reliability and Validity

Reliability

The concept of reliability is given utmost importance when looking at research findings, but the circumstances are often different when it comes to qualitative research. The term reliability in the context of a study is understood as having one's observations be capable of being replicated at another point in time with similar methodology. Some scholars have argued that when assessing qualitative research, the concept of reliability is completely irrelevant (Golafshani, 2003, p. 598 - 601). Placing too much emphasis on reliability as a measurement of quality when evaluating qualitative research is mostly going to have the

qualitative research in question be assessed as lacking in quality. Other scholars have argued that the matter of reliability is actually relevant for qualitative research, when evaluating the quality of the frameworks for the study in question.

Although not completely irrelevant to my research project, there is truth in this idea of reliability not being the most central criteria to apply to my research. My research project is all about finding out how do young adults of a traditional Muslim background in their 20's living in Norway respond to three specific media debates on Islam and Muslims and looking into this by having them reflect upon citizenship, faith and upbringing through the focus group interviews I conducted. With the element of subjectivity being so prominent, what is there really to replicate in terms of observations?

My dissertation does not make any statements as to my interviewees' views representing any number or percentage of Muslims in Norway, nor that these views have been held by the interviewees and other Muslims for any period of time. The only general statements I make in this dissertation are the frequency of certain sentiments specifically amongst my own informants. A selection of six young adult-interviewees in their 20's of a traditional Muslim background living in Norway (or nine if you include the interviewees from the pilot interview) are not guaranteed in any way to have the same views as my own interviewees, meaning there is nothing to replicate or repeat in order to measure this form of reliability in my research project.

When it comes to the understanding of reliability in terms of the paradigm of a research project, I am of the view that the research design I decided on allowed for authentic insight into my informants' perception of their realities. I make this argument based on the questions in the interview guide being articulated in an open-ended matter, allowing for all kinds of responses from my informants.

One example of such a question is one of the questions in regard to the excerpt from Manouchehri's op-ed article. The question asked was: "To what extent does the set of values in this excerpt reflect the values of the people around you in this society?" Besides simply affirming or denying the representativity of these values, the question gave room for the participants to give a nuanced description of how they perceive the values of the people around them. This is one of the strengths of focus group interview as a research method, something previous research literature also har bore witness to (Roest, 2015, p. 239 - 240). With such open questions in the interview guide combined with a research method that allows

for effectively learning about informants' perceptions, I make the case that the paradigm for this research project is coherent enough to give my findings a lot of reliability.

Validity

A prominent understanding of validity when it comes to research has to do with it being as complicated as the idea of reliability. When discussing this concept in light of qualitative research it has been argued by scholars that the term needs to be understood in the vein of trustworthiness (Golafshani, 2003, p. 602 – 604). The goal for a qualitative research project is therefore to have the findings come across as trustworthy, which is accomplished by collecting and analyzing data through multiple research methods and analytical strategies. Ultimately, it is argued that the idea of validity and how it is measured should be redefined on the terms of the qualitative research in question.

The notion of collecting data through other methods than the research method utilized during this research project is not a simple task. This has to do with one of Roest's observations (2015, p. 236 - 239) on focus group interviews as a research method, being that there is a certain synergy present during the interviews that serves as a unique characteristic to it. The data collected from my focus group interviews would be different from when collected during individual interviews or regular group interviews, because the responses are articulated in a unique setting.

The other two research methods do not have the conversational element to them in the same manner, which has the responses be articulated differently during individual interviews and group interviews. This means that one will not be left with the same data or findings if researching how young adults of a traditional Muslim background living in Norway respond to three specific media debates on Islam and Muslims, through individual interviews or regular group interviews. There are bound to be similarities between their findings, but in light of the synergy exclusive to focus group interviews as a research method, the data from the respective research methods will not be identical to one another. And having only interviewed six young adults of traditional Muslim background (nine if you include the pilot interview participants), there is not much room for using my research findings to make generalizations about all Muslims, or all Muslims in their 20's living in Norway.

This is not equivalent to qualitative research with focus group interviews as research method having findings with low validity. It means that this way of measuring validity or trustworthiness does not always translate well when focus group interviews are thrown into the mix. In the context of my own research project, validity is heavily tied to transparency.

Transparency would in this case be equivalent to sharing parts of the source material that I utilize as a basis for my arguments. In my dissertation, I make an effort to showcase transparency by presenting the interview-excerpts as objects of analysis. Based on this, I argue that an element of transparency is highly present in my presentation of my research findings. In addition, there is also the matter of authenticity – whether or not I received my participants' honest and genuine reflections during the focus group interviews.

Therefore, I hold the position of measurement of validity or trustworthiness being something that should be conducted on the premises of the qualitative research project in question. And in the context of my own findings and overall research project, I consider the concepts of reliability and validity to be interwoven with terms such as transparency and authenticity, and that the presented frameworks of my research project stand as a testament to the validity and reliability of my findings.

3.7: Analytical strategy and coding

Analytical Strategy

For one of my analytical strategies in this thesis I will be inspired by conversational analysis. This analytical strategy as the name implies, has a lot to do with the conversation that stands as the object of analysis, in the form of for example what words are being used. Also, there is also the matter of how these words are being said, and how the conversation is going forward. This transcends the audial aspects such as tone, volume, and intonation (Toerien, 2013, p. 2 – 5). Aspects such as body language, head movements made, hand motions that they might be making during the conversation or generally physical interactions with their surroundings, are all worth placing under the shade of this analytical strategy.

By identifying what some would call the *ethnomethods* of a conversation, it brings us a step closer to grasping an important part of this research project. These are defined as the methods the parties use, to engage in conversation and make sense of what they each are saying (Toerien, 2013, p. 4). Toerien goes on to write that ethnomethods are crucial in order to have mutual understanding amongst the parties represented in the particular conversation. And so, these ethnomethods stand as a golden ticket to examine how interviewees construct their own realities.

With conversational analysis as an analytical strategy providing a space for looking into how interview participants construct their own realities, it stands as an ideal analytical strategy to utilize combined with focus group interviews as a research method. It is especially useful while working with a dissertation such as this one, as this research project places such

importance on the interviewees' realities. Conversational analysis will be utilized during my analysis, when examining ethnomethods in the excerpts from the focus group interviews such as choice of words, tone, body language and other types of noticeable ethnomethods.

Thematic analysis has to do with finding the overarching themes of one's qualitative data. The research question, and in this case also the sub-questions, are what one through thematic analysis is to use as a sort of compass when trying to identify and analyze, the most important parts of the data (Clarke & Braun, 2017, p. 297). In light of the focus group interviews that have been conducted for this research project, this is particularly important as certain parts of the data material from the interviews are not as relevant to the overall research question and sub-questions as other parts of the data material.

Researchers have also pointed out a certain flexibility to this analytical strategy, one that is most welcome for this dissertation. This flexibility has to do with how thematic analysis can be applied on a multitude of different scales; be it a scale of 2-3 focus group interviews with 5-6 participants in each of them, or as many as 100 individual interviews (2017, p. 297 – 298). Clarke and Braun also point out that data regarding interviewees' lived experiences, is a good fit for this analytical strategy. This provides a solid incentive for utilizing this analytical strategy when working with this dissertation about how Norwegian young adults of traditional Muslim background respond to media debates surrounding Islam and Muslims. This analytical strategy was applied when attempting to analyze the interviewees' statements on their understandings of citizenship, faith, and upbringing.

Coding

For this dissertation I will be using inductive coding. Inductive coding is about making patterns, systems, models and so on from the raw data that originated from the research project in question, through both examining and comparing different pieces of data.
In the case of this research project, the primary source of raw data would be the transcripts from the focus group interviews. The process of inductive coding starts with what is referred to as *open coding*, which is the term used for the organizing and systematization of the raw data at hand (Chandra & Shang, 2019, p. 91 – 92). There is a certain perceived independence that comes with this way of coding, amongst researchers. When utilizing inductive coding, the researcher can code their data any label in the form of a textual unit, without having to rely on pre-existing frameworks related to the research topic. This theoretic independence makes this an effective way of coding the data for this research project. This coding method was used

when creating an overview of statements from the focus group interviews, in which the participants were discussing topics related to citizenship, faith, and upbringing.

Deductive coding is another form of coding I have used for this research project. Deductive coding is somewhat contrasting to inductive coding, as it relies a lot more on pre-existing theoretical frameworks. It is also worth mentioning that the prior mentioned coding method is often preferred in qualitative research compared to deductive coding. In deductive coding, the researcher often has a proposition or a hypothesis which they are attempting to confirm while working with the raw data (2019, p. 92 – 93). The coding manual one would use during the deductive coding process, would therefore be built on the chosen pre-existing models, theories and such. I used deductive coding when comparing the findings from my theoretical and empirical frameworks to the findings from my focus group interviews.

As it might come across through this dissertation's theory-chapter, this research project does rely on and benefit from the theories and other frameworks of pre-existing research related to the research question, and the topics of the sub-questions. With that in mind, both inductive and deductive coding stand as coding methods that are beneficial to use when examining the raw data of this research project.

Analysis & Discussion

In this chapter I will analyze and discuss my findings from the focus group interviews. There will be sub-chapters dedicated to the topics of the dissertation's sub-questions, with the topics being: citizenship, faith, and upbringing. These data from both focus group interviews with some supplements from the pilot interview will be analyzed in their respective sub-chapters. In each of the sub-chapters, I will be presenting and analyzing responses that relate to the sub-question topic at hand. After that, I will compare the respective findings from both focus groups with each other, before moving on to comparing my findings to both my theoretical frameworks and my empirical frameworks.

4.1: Citizenship

Focus Group #1 (Men)

The male interviewees were very adamant about their understanding of citizenship, in the context of who is and is not Norwegian. In this case, the title of the op-ed was something the participants decided to respond to prior to addressing the contents of the excerpt.

In regard to the title of the op-ed "*Should we Respect our Guests, or Should our Guests Respect us*?" from the handshake-media debate, two of the male participants stated the following in the literal translated transcription:

> **Lut:** She (points to the Muslim woman in the photograph) is Norwegian. You can't say that… you can't call her a guest.
>
> **Saleh:** Yeah.
>
> **Lut:** You two (signals toward the author's name and the Muslim woman in the photograph) are just as much… Norwegian so [laughs].
>
> **Saleh:** (Looks and points at everyone in the room) We all are. She (the Muslim woman) is just as much Norwegian as all of us, you know? It's like, who do you think you are? It's like "*Should we Respect our Guests, or Should our Guests Respect us*?", why use the word guests?
>
> **Lut:** If I, if she (the Muslim woman) is a guest then I am a guest as well.

How Lut and Saleh interacted with the title "*Should we Respect our Guests, or Should our Guests Respect us*?" speaks to how foreign this notion was to their understanding of citizenship. Thematic analysis is an analytical strategy which can be applied to this excerpt. As earlier mentioned, the "we" in the op-ed title is implied to be the Norwegian public, and the "guests" are implied to be the Muslim women in the photograph (cross ref., p. 10) or Muslims in general. The two informants did not entertain nor attempt to answer the question, which indicates there being an understanding of citizenship at play where one's religious affiliation or holding a certain set of values, are not grounds for considering someone not to be a citizen of Norwegian society. A practical indication of this is how Saleh pointed to Lut, Hud and myself when talking about all of us being Norwegians, while not knowing much about me and Hud's backgrounds aside from our names and religious background.

By using conversational analysis and thereby examining the ethnomethods used in the conversation from the focus group interview, it becomes even clearer how much the interviewees disagreed with the viewpoints expressed in the title. In Saleh's remark "who do you think you are?" and how he went on to question the use of the word "guest" in this context, he essentially questioned who the author is to decide who and who is not a Norwegian or as indicated - who is and who is not a guest. The harsh tone in which Saleh articulated his response to the subject of defining citizenship, the male informant displayed an understanding that differs from the author's approach; He identified the woman in the photograph, as well as the rest of us present during the focus group interview, as Norwegians.

Nuh, one of the informants from the pilot interview, expressed a similar sentiment in response to the title of the op-ed article:

> **Nuh**: Look, she… because they are Muslims, she concluded immediately that they are guests in Norway, and that they have to respect…. and another thing I want to bring to attention "By showing this kind of "respect" one is silently consenting to letting violations of principles of equality take root in this society." First of all, her principles of equality are not part of Norwegian law. These are her subjective ideas, it's what she personally finds to be a violation of uh… principles of equality. It's not formal, it's not objective, so how can she attack two Norwegian girls, uh for uh… not handshaking with the crown prince who said that he did not want to be a puppet in this scheme?

The understanding of citizenship displayed in this excerpt is multifaceted. One apparent characteristic is how it contrasts the implications of Manouchehri's title and overall op-ed, which according to Nuh is because of the women in the photograph's background as Muslim women. Nuh himself considered them to be Norwegians by default, underlining the contrast in his understanding of citizenship to that of the op-ed author's understanding.

In addition, the interviewee makes judicial references in order to debunk one of Manouchehri's claims. By arguing that there is no judicial basis for the argument, and describe it as merely the author's subjective ideas, this undermining of the op-ed speaks to the informant understanding citizenship in a more inclusive way that does not discriminate based on religious affiliation. A lot of these sentiments were also noticeable in Saleh's earlier presented response. The similarities in these two responses allow for a degree of generalization, especially amongst the responses from the pilot interview and the first focus group, seeing as they both consisted of male interviewees.

Other parts of the focus group interview give us more insight into a shared understanding of citizenship between two of the interviewees. When talking about the leisure activities being organized at their local mosque during their childhood, two of the participants said the following:

> **Saleh**: It was like a leisure club for us. It kinda feels like you're back in your home country?
>
> **Lut**: Yeah, it does, it gives you a good feeling.

This interaction must be seen in combination with the previously presented quotes about cultural Norwegian citizenship. Saleh's use of the phrase "home country" points to him having roots from another country, meaning he is of minority background. This tells us something

about Saleh's understanding of citizenship which Lut expressed his agreement with. What we see here is a perception of citizenship in which one is allowed to be Norwegian and consider it to be one's home, and at the same time be in touch with one's roots from another country to the extent that the other country in question, can also regarded as a person's home. Allowing for this association with two countries as a person's home countries, indicates an inclusive approach to the idea of citizenship from the two male informants. This corresponds to an understanding of citizenship in which having an ethnic minority background, and as previously demonstrated a religious minority background, is fully reconcilable with cultural Norwegian citizenship.

As the young Muslim male interviewees addressed parts of the media debate-excerpt, they focused on Manouchehri talking about what kind of values she does not want to see represented in Norwegian society. This sparked a conversation about what constitutes Norwegian views and values. This made Lut say the following:

> **Lut**: "It's not Norwegian values, it's not Norwegian views" but excuse me, what are Norwegian values and what are Norwegian views? It's…. you have to remember that uh… Norwegian values, Norwegian views… it's not, these are not values and views that are set in stone. They change over time.

At a later point in the interview when the participants returned to this subject topic, Lut reflected upon this notion once more:

> **Lut**: "These are values which are not compatible with Norwegian practice." What are Norwegian values? Are Norwegian values to greet someone with a handshake?
> **Hud**: Being born with skis on your feet. (chuckling)
> **Lut**: Isn't it about other things, isn't it for example to…. Be a nice person? Take care of the ones closest to you? Uh… take care of those who are less fortunate than you, that kind of stuff. Compassion…. It's not, it's not about greeting someone with a handshake, it's…. what has that got to do with Norwegian values? It's, again for me it's just… it's just insane. How… a girl doing this (putting his hand on the right side of his chest) while smiling, smiling at the crown prince. Does it, uh…. Does it look like she is being hostile towards the crown prince? Not at all!

These reflections from Lut point to a number of ways to interact with Manouchehri's understanding of Norwegian values. The first one is Lut's cementing of the concept of Norwegian values, as something vague and abstract. This is demonstrated in his repeated questioning of what these values are about. This acknowledgement of Norwegian values as a

vague concept in the face of Manouchehri's statements about what does not constitute Norwegian values, points to the interviewee giving no credibility to the author's claims. Aside from the vagueness he also acknowledged an element of flexibility within this concept, as he pointed out that these values "change over time".

Secondly, we find that Lut took the liberty of defining Norwegian values on his own terms. He rejected seeing the act of handshaking as an example of Norwegian values, and instead listed a number of ideals that he considers to be Norwegian values. What this illustrates is an understanding of his cultural citizenship in which Lut is free to define the idea of national values for themselves, while also interacting with pre-established understandings of national values as he pleases. This includes him taking an ideal such as compassion and taking a stance as to whether Norwegian values include the kind of compassion that opens up for alternative ways of greeting that do not require physical contact with one another. We will now look at how the female informants reflected upon the topic of citizenship.

Focus Group #2 (Women)

Before presenting the actual media debate excerpt from Manouchehri's op-ed, I asked the female interviewees about their thoughts on the handshake-media debate that took place in late 2019. The informants Hawa and Khadija discussed the debate amongst each other in the following way:

> **Hawa**: But I don't think like… uh, it's a bad thing not to do handshakes. Or for it to be such a… big problem in our society, at all.
>
> **Khadija:** Agreed.
>
> **Hawa:** I think it is a bit weird, because uh… it started such a big debate, but at the same time we are like… in 2020 where it's all about being free, doing whatever you want, not care about breaking the norms, and in such a… "cancel everything-culture" ... and then it's like, it turns into such a big debate over something so minor. I don't understand why it's like not very accepted.
>
> **Khadija:** Mmmhmm, I too am very puzzled by the reactions it has garnered.
>
> **Hawa:** Mmmhmm.

By again utilizing thematic analysis, we see in this interaction a tendency to "bend the playing rules" to the favor of their argument. While voicing her discontent with the reactions garnered by the handshake-media debate, Hawa pointed out other perceived contemporary societal norms and tendencies that can be utilized to justify, not wanting to handshake with a non-mahram. These are reflections on citizenship that interact with norms on a meta level. Hawa

points to societal norms that open up for not using this greeting manner, while also pointing out that we are living in a time of "not caring about breaking the norms", which also makes this somewhat of a norm itself.

Hawa and Khadija's ways of articulating themselves in this excerpt highlights a sense of frustration regarding the attention which the handshake-media debate has garnered. This is another example of ethnomethods that we can examine through conversational analysis. It was mentioned multiple times by Hawa that she thought of not wanting to handshake as a non-issue, and that she does not understand the spectacle around it. The repeated sentiment of feeling confused over the situation, illustrates a sense of frustration on Hawa's part over the fact that this topic according to her was blown out of proportion.

Repetition is often used to place emphasis on a specific sentiment, and in this case the informant feeling confused had been articulated very clearly. What this repetition reveals, is that the confusion surrounding the media debate makes the media debate an object of frustration. This is also reflected in how towards the end of the excerpt, Hawa said that there was a "*big* debate" over "something *so minor*". In this quote, the used descriptions of the two nouns are antonymous with each other to highlight the imbalance between the significance of the subject matter, and the amount of attention it was bestowed.

We find that in response to the same question, Fatima voiced her thoughts on the handshake-media debate and how she reflected on the debate from a different angle. The participant said:

> **Fatima**: I do understand where it is coming from, um… I am pragmatic enough to understand that um… when you live in a society where the majority culture considers giving a handshake as a totally normal thing, then it's very weird for someone to all of a sudden not just abstain from it, but also point out that they abstain from it. Cause I believe that is where the provocation happens. So, it is… I think there is a lot of hysteria over a provocation…. which is actually totally unnecessary.

Ultimately, what is stated in this quote is indicative of Fatima agreeing with Hawa and Khadija on the debate/hysteria being exaggerated. What is interesting to take note of is how the two female interviewees made references to perceived contemporary norms in their reflections. While Hawa talked about 2020 being considered a time all about being free and doing whatever one wants, as a counterargument against the handshake-media debate taking place and generating such a fuss - Fatima makes mention of handshakes as an established, contemporary way of greeting one another in Norwegian society, to explain the reasoning behind the hysteria. She considered the hysteria to be unnecessary, while also seeing where

the naysayers are coming from in light of other contemporary societal norms. This allows us to observe something about the topic of citizenship, and also how the female participants interact with this concept.

One of these observations is the depth of cultural citizenship, in terms of making reference to contemporary norms when making a statement about cultural citizenship. As Hawa and Fatima's respective quotes illustrate, there are a variety of different contemporary norms and values to call upon to use in favor of one's argument. Contemporary societal norms in a given society can even be utilized in arguments that are polar opposites of each other.

This speaks to there being many points of reference to make use for the sake of one's argument when discussing topics such as national values, or cultural citizenship.
The main takeaway from these reflections is how the two female interviewees, although they had the same stance on one aspect of the subject matter, displayed understandings of citizenship that are diverse enough to make reference to two different sets of perceived contemporary societal norms, in their respective reflections.

The interviewees later moved on to discussing the contents of the excerpt from Manouchehri's op-ed. In response to the excerpt, the interviewee Khadija said the following:

> **Khadija**: And then… the, the name of... the article "*Should we Respect our Guests, or Should our Guests Respect us*?", like... is a person not part of the Norwegian culture, like if they are born here, who is it that person… uh, becomes associated with, or uh… what group does one sort of belong to, like…. There is so much here that is so wrong. There is… a lot that doesn't make sense.

Just like with the male interviewees, Khadija decided to tackle the title of Manouchehri's article in her response. Interestingly enough, she touched upon both the cultural dimension of citizenship and the judicial dimension of citizenship, and she ended up *combining* these elements in her statement. The reference to those who are born in Norway is a remark of judicial character, as those who are born in Norway are naturalized Norwegian citizens. The remarks relating to being part of the Norwegian culture and what group one belongs to however, touch upon the cultural aspect of citizenship.

Khadija combined both aspects of citizenship to rebuke the implications that are present in the title "*Should we Respect our Guests, or Should our Guests Respect us*?". The implications are as earlier mentioned, the Muslim women in the photograph accompanying the excerpt being guests, and there even being a distinction between people who are guests and people who are

natives/non-guests. The rhetorical questions Khadija asked in response to the title of the excerpt, were used to highlight what she considered to be "so wrong" with its contents, serving as a way to undermine the actual statements/implications.

In essence, this is an example of Khadija's understanding of citizenship in which these implications are incorrect and illogical. This is reminiscent of the understandings of citizenship that came to light during the male focus group, in which we saw an inclusive understanding of what it means and or is required to be a Norwegian.

4.2: Comparison, Theoretical Tool & Previous Research

Comparison Between the Focus Groups

I find that my male and female interviewees have similar views on the topic of citizenship, and their own positioning as Norwegians. The first point of comparison that illustrates this, is their responses to the title of the op-ed "*Should we Respect our Guests, or Should our Guests Respect us*?". Both the male and the female participants expressed through their responses that they felt a bit taken aback by the title. Lut and Saleh talked about the photographed Muslim women being just as much Norwegian citizens as they themselves are and were very puzzled about the usage of the word "guests" in the title. Meanwhile, Khadija found the title and the overall excerpt to be loaded with statements that were illogical and incorrect.

An interesting parallel between the two examples is their position towards the author in this case. Based on both Lut and Saleh's as well as Khadija's responses, not only is it clear that they disagreed with the title – they do not find it legitimate for the author or anyone else, to question or undermine someone else's claim to cultural Norwegian citizenship. This is especially evident in the quote of Lut saying "you can't call her a guest", and in the multiple rhetoric questions Khadija asked during her response. In the same vein that they did not believe values and religious affiliation to stand in the way for one to claim a cultural Norwegian citizenship, they believe it is not anyone's place to undermine someone else's cultural citizenship. In its entirety, both the male and the female interviewees reflected upon citizenship by giving us insight into an open and inclusive understanding of the concept.

When looking at the discussions of national values, the nuances and differences of opinion are significantly more apparent. When it comes to the male informants, there were two primary sentiments expressed in regard to national values. One aspect of it had to do with the vagueness of the term "Norwegian values", with it not always being crystal clear what it constitutes. The other aspect was how the Norwegian values they did acknowledge were grand and generally positive ideals and values, and how handshaking is too insignificant to be part of "real

Norwegian values" – with abstaining from handshaking with a non-mahram not being considered contradictory to Norwegian values.

Then we have the female interviewees who interacted with norms and values in a different manner. In Hawa and Khadija's case, they pointed out what they perceived to be contemporary societal values which are lofty enough to open up for alternative ways of greeting someone, besides handshaking. They argued that in light of those norms, the manner of not handshaking with a non-mahram should have been considered a non-issue. They also talked about feeling perplexed at the reactions and amount of attention that was given to the event that sparked the handshake-media debate. Fatima however, though she did agree that it should be a non-issue, referenced norms she perceived to be contemporary societal norms to explain why such a massive debate was sparked by the incident between the Crown Prince and the Muslim women.

It was pointed out earlier how this essentially underlines the depth of citizenship and the multiple ways of interacting with norms, but there is more to take notice of in these interview excerpts. Already this early on in the analysis, we find a diversity within the main topic of what this dissertation's research question is all about – finding out how young adults of a traditional Muslim background living in Norway, respond to three specific media debates on Islam and Muslims. The interviewees in the excerpts presented thus far have evoked different ideas of the concept of citizenship, using their reflections related to societal norms and national values to express varying opinions on both the handshake-media debate itself, and the amount of attention it has been given. The view of someone's cultural citizenship as something one cannot call into question, was a common trait amongst their responses. And the topic where some of the participants differed, had to do with their responses to the media debate in general in light of other perceived norms and values. More than anything, we are becoming familiar with a diversity of ways to respond to media debates about Islam and Muslims with these findings.

Citizenship as a Theoretical Tool

Tonkens and Duyvendak's definition of citizenship is, interestingly enough, present in fragments within my own informants' understandings of the concept (cross ref., p. 14 – 15). When it comes to my male interviewees, they made no apparent distinction between the cultural aspect and the judicial aspect of citizenship and did not consider any of them to take away from their claim to being Norwegian citizens. They acknowledged the existence of the notion of Norwegian values, though it was acknowledged as something vague and not as a force to be utilized to exclude anyone from considering themselves as Norwegian citizens. When faced with the title of and excerpt from Manouchehri's op-ed, they immediately shut down any

attempts at diminishing the Muslim women in the photograph's claim to cultural Norwegian citizenship, something Tonkens and Duyvendak mentions that those of immigrant and/or minority background sometimes have to deal with.

Khadija's understanding of citizenship however, acknowledged the multiple layers of the concept. There is a mention of Norwegian culture in Khadija, but it was mentioned as synonymous to cultural citizenship and not as an informal requirement to be granted cultural citizenship. What this effectively means, is that the previously mentioned factors of values, culture, ethnic background and religion are not used to gatekeep cultural citizenship. Rather what is being expressed, is that these factors are informal enough not to have any effect on one's claim to cultural citizenship, according to Khadija's understanding of citizenship. Any implications in the presented media debate excerpt of calling into question the photographed Muslim women's cultural Norwegian citizenship, were described by the female informant as illogical and wrong. By comparing Tonkens and Duyvendak's definition of citizenship to my male and female interviewees' respective understandings of citizenship, it is clear that there are commonalities in that there is some interaction with the ideas of Norwegian values and Norwegian culture. However, these do not function as actual conditions that need to be fulfilled in order to be considered Norwegian citizens by my interviewees.

Previous Research on Citizenship

Through comparing my findings to Herbert and Hansen's findings, there are a few parallels between the two that become evident. My male participants did not find being Muslims and being Norwegians, as two irreconcilable identity markers. This stands in direct contrast to the reverts interviewed in Herbert and Hansen's research project (cross ref., p. 18), as they had internalized the idea that they could not identify as Danes and as Muslims at the same time.

We also find contrasts to Herbert and Hansen's findings from my interview with the female interviewees. With Khadija having articulated her disagreement with the implications found in Manouchehri's op-ed title, it is natural to conclude that her understanding of citizenship does not include any concepts of "guests" or "natives" or the like. Rather, this understanding differs from that of Herbert and Hansen's informants' reflections as she neither identified herself or the Muslim women in the photograph accompanying the op-ed excerpt, as guests or non-natives. Rather, she was very skeptical of this distinction being made by Manouchehri in the title of the op-ed.

In addition to this contrast, there are other circumstances worth taking notice of. In the context of Norwegian media debates and Manouchehri's op-ed, her understanding of citizenship and

national values is one of many understandings present in this specific media debate. However, there is nothing that indicates that these understandings of the subject matter are the views of the overwhelming majority of the actors in this specific media debate, nor the views of the majority of the Norwegian general public.

Whereas in the case of the Muslim reverts of Danish background, it is quite the opposite. The sentiment that being a Dane and being a Muslim being two identity markers that are incompatible, is described as the main view being expressed during Danish media debates surrounding Islam, Muslims and citizenship (2018, p. 16 – 18). This means that my interviewees, like Herbert and Hansen's interviewees, have also witnessed hostile and prejudiced media debates about Islam and Muslims take place. Yet, what separates the two groups of informants' experiences from each other in this instance also have to do with differing framing of media coverage and media debates in the two Scandinavian countries.

Besides the contents of the addressed media debates and the framing, there is also the matter of what role these media debates play in shaping the interviewees from their respective research project's responses. As previously mentioned, the nature of the Danish media debates had some of the reverts (2018, p. 16 – 18) stop associating with the Danish aspect of their identity, and only associate with their religious affiliation as Muslims. Whereas my own informants did not allow Manouchehri's understanding of citizenship to inform their own understanding of the topic, as they expressed their own thoughts and views about the subject matter. These differences are indicative of how media debates have the potential to shape consumers' thoughts on a specific topic to varying degrees, though the depth of this potential has been shown to depend on external factors as well.

I find that my male interviewees interacted with their cultural Norwegian citizenship and ethnic background in a different way from Tharaldsen's informants. Though my male informants did not use the word "immigrant" to describe themselves like Tharaldsen's interviewees (cross ref., p. 18), the acknowledgement of their roots were still present just like in the aforementioned research project, in the form of remarks such as referring to the country they have roots from as another "home country". My male interviewees considered both Norway, and the countries their parents originate from as their home countries. This bears resemblance to Tharaldsen's informants' acknowledgement of their minority background, but where they differ is the extent to which they claim any ownership of Norwegian cultural citizenship.

The interaction from the focus group interview does not make any mentions of this distinction between Norwegian and being a full-fledged Norwegian citizen. However, if one takes the

previously presented excerpt into consideration as well, the sentiment articulated by Saleh and Lut is crystal clear. Based on these excerpts, it is evident that my interviewees consider themselves equally as Norwegian as anyone else living in Norway. With there being such significant differences between the reflections on citizenship amongst Tharaldsen's interviewees and my own interviewees respectively, this illustrates the variety of ways to reflect upon citizenship and opinions on one's own cultural Norwegian citizenship amongst Muslims living in Norway.

Having the right to define national values and deem what is acceptable and what is unacceptable in Norwegian society, is also present in Tharaldsen's findings. Her own informants made direct statements as to what religious acts and practices are to be allowed in the public sphere of Norwegian society (Tharaldsen, 2017, p. 30). In my interviewees' case, they had no issue stating that greeting methods that do not involve physical contact with a non-mahram, do not go against Norwegian values. It is worth noting that while my interviewees are in their 20's, Tharaldsen's interviewees were between 14 – 16 years old.

As mentioned before, both Hawa and Fatima drew upon norms in Norwegian society to support their arguments. And the findings from Tharaldsen's research that relate to this, have to do with her informants voicing opinions on what religious acts and symbols are acceptable in the public sphere. What these findings from my research project and from Herbert and Hansen's research project have in common, is that they are both examples of norm-centered social commentary. They discuss and interpret societal norms on their own terms, by arguing in favor of what practices they believe the established norms open up for.

The willingness to give this social commentary provides insight into the interviewees' understandings of their own cultural citizenship. Their own understanding of their positioning in Norwegian society is that of having the privilege of discussing and voicing their thoughts on topics that are the talk of the town within the Norwegian public sphere, and also within Norwegian media debates. A commonality of this nature indicates that this is a right that the interviewees in mine and Tharaldsen's respective research projects, perceive themselves to have by default. Even with aspects of their identity construction such as being an ethnic and/or religious background, the right to make statements about societal norms and values is not something interviewees from either research project feel that they have to work for – rather, they perceive themselves to naturally already have this privilege.

Seeing as these two research projects have interviewees from different age demographics, it could be theorized that in Norway this aspect of cultural citizenship is something that is

internalized at either age 14 – 16, or at an even younger age. In short, the reflections from my interviewees in the presented excerpts display an understanding of citizenship where factors such as religious affiliation and set of values do not determine nor undermine one's right to cultural citizenship. Rather, the national values that are associated with this cultural citizenship are characterized by notions of inclusivity and kindness. The understandings of cultural citizenship being displayed by my own participants and Tharaldsen's participants, are understandings in which they are fully capable of conducting social commentary on norm-related issues. I will now present my interviewees' reflections on the topic of faith, by starting off with responses from my male informants.

4.3: Faith

Focus Group #1 (Men)

As the male participants talked about the ASP-debate and their experiences from similar activities at the mosque, their responses were telling of how they view their own faith:

> **Lut**: And, and…. I have learned more about my own religion. And second of all, I'm a much… a much better person. I always think about what I'm doing, whether it's right or wrong ethically, because that is what Islam also teaches us. And so, these… what he describes as "hurtful and unwanted in Norway" … it has had the opposite effect on me, and for most people… I'm speaking on behalf of those I've seen, and we have…
>
> **Saleh**: benefited from it.
>
> **Lut**: Yeah, benefited from it.

In this interaction we find out that Islam represents the religious morality that the two young Muslims actively adhere to. Their faith does not only represent a certain set of beliefs, but it is also about making sure that their lifestyle is in accordance with the religious morality of Islam. A description of this nature proves that the religious faith holds an important position in the lives of these two Muslim informants. When talking about the activities they attended at their local mosque as children; by describing it as a source of benefit where they learned more about their faith and Islamic morals as one of the positive aspects of these programs, the male interviewees display a positive relationship to their own faith. The point about feeling that he is a much better person now, also speaks to the moralistic aspect of the experience of attending these activities. These reflections point towards their faith playing a significant role in shaping their moral compasses.

One should also consider the conversational way of analysis and look to who Lut said he is speaking on behalf of. The idea of the activities for children at the mosque as a positive force,

was something he expressed being the case for those he has met who have attended such happenings as well. As getting closer to one's faith was highlighted by Lut and Saleh as one of the main strengths of such activities, it is clear that to learn about and become more in touch with one's faith is something Lut considers to be of benefit to everyone. More specifically, he considers it to be objectively *good* to become stronger in one's faith as it would lead them to adhere even more to what he sees as the objectively correct morality.

What this tells us about their view of their faith is that it transcends the idea of faith as something personal and subjective. Rather, they think of their faith, being the Islamic faith, as the objectively correct morality to follow. It is not uncommon to have believers view their faith in such a manner. This is the explanation as to why to become closer to the Islamic faith and the activities at the mosque as a whole, are described by Lut and Saleh as positive things not only for themselves, but for other Muslims they know of who have attended activities of this nature. To conclude, these reflections from the two informants indicate a view of their faith as a force of goodness and positive growth, and as the objectively correct morality which to the two young Muslims, it is a good thing for themselves and their fellow Muslims to grow closer to.

There are other statements from the interview that expand on their view of their faith. There is one quote each from Hud and Lut, which need to be seen and analyzed as one unit. Hud's statement was the following:

> **Hud:** And that is what religion is. It's a way of living, you know. It's not just something you keep up here (points to his head) and you just walk around… and don't practice it.

The second statement I would like to present is this one:

> **Lut:** I especially like what you said just then. Like, many people here… as I consider it here in Norway, when they ask me… "oh, you're Muslim? Yeah but… that doesn't mean that you have to do this or that, or this or that." I say to them… but like I said I'm a Muslim, they have to understand that Islam to me is the way I intend to live… it's my lifestyle. You get me? That's the thing, that's what I actually wanted to talk about, so it's good that you said that just now. It's like, it's like…. Islam is a way of living. It's not (makes quotation mark-gestures with his fingers) "just my religion, that's it", you get me?

Hud and Lut's statements help further solidify the sentiments that were expressed in the earlier presented interaction between Lut and Saleh. What we can analyze in Hud's reflection

on religion to be something one has to put into practice and not simply keep within one's mind, is that he considers faith to be more than just beliefs and doctrine. To be a follower of a religious faith, is something that should be reflected in one's set of values and their lifestyle. This is an understanding that further moves away from the idea of faith as something specifically personal and private.

And this holds true for the excerpt from Lut's response as well. The emphasis Lut placed on the phrase "just my religion, that's it" as he said it during the interview, showed him distancing himself from the notion of religion being a minor and superficial identity marker in his life. The usage of quotation mark-gestures and his change in tone from when he was saying "not" to when he was saying "just my religion, that's it", points to it being a sentiment he was trying to address, and that it is not representative of his view of his own faith. Lut emphasizing on this sentiment, indicates that it is something he has heard or had said to him in the past. He makes use of a declarative phrasing, to articulate that the understanding he was quoting, is unrepresentative of his own understanding of faith.

On the contrary, the role of religion in the informant's life as described by himself, is a fundamental element that dictates how he lives his life. With faith playing such an important role in both of these interviewees' lives, it is easy to conclude that they are both practicing, young Muslims who take their faith seriously.

However, we also find acknowledgement of such an approach to faith being foreign to a lot of people in Norwegian society. Lut talked about his own experiences with other Norwegians, in which their understanding of what role religion plays in the life of a believer, is oversimplified compared to how important Lut's faith actually is to him according to himself. What this acknowledgement indicates is that he is aware that the rest of Norwegian society, both those who do and do not adhere to a religious faith, interact with the idea of faith in a different way. The understandings Lut referenced that view faith as "just someone's religion" are understandings which are much more secularized compared to Lut's idea of faith.

An understanding of faith as playing a significant role in one's life, was also expressed during the pilot interview. Adam, one of the interviewees from the pilot interview, had this to say about his own faith:

> **Adam**: I'm gonna be honest, the person I am today, I am because of my religion, uh… I'm pursuing higher education, because of… uh, my faith… meaning that my faith tells me that… you have to… be resourceful in society. I am kind towards others

because of my religion, you know. Uh… because my religion tells me to. Uh…. And I think that if I hadn't had Islam, then I wouldn't have been who I am today.

Once again, we see an example of faith playing an important role in one of the interviewees' lives. Religion is the incentive Adam listed for being kind and being concerned with upholding good character, pointing to a clear connection between his faith as a Muslim and his moral compass. Secondly, the decision to pursue higher education was also revealed by him to be influenced by his religion. His relationship with his faith is described by the interviewee as a positive one, and that faith stands as a necessity for him. This is also reflected in this statement: "if I hadn't had Islam, then I wouldn't have been who I am today." For religion to be important to him is a natural conclusion, when he himself saw it to be such a fundamental part of his lifestyle and personality.

The main tendencies we have come across in these responses are reflections on their faith being the objectively correct morality, in which growing closer to it is an ideal. Faith is also viewed as something that transcends the level of personal belief and doctrine, as one's religion is meant to be the blueprint for how a believer lives their life. The thesis will now move on to explore how the focus group consisting of female interviewees reflected upon the topic of faith.

Focus Group #2 (Women)

We find statements relating to faith already when looking back to the handshake-media debate. When discussing the topic of handshaking and the practice of refraining from handshaking with a non-mahram, the female informant replied:

> **Khadija**: I think it's really, really brave by those who choose not to do it. I wish I was brave enough to do that myself. Um… I have tried to do it in a couple of situations myself, but I am way too socially… um, awkward, to stand strong in those situations, kind of. But like, I think it is a good thing of those who have chosen not to do it, I support them fully.

This statement gives us insight into various aspects of how the female interviewee interacts with her own faith. Firstly, we see a positive association with the faith itself and the religious practices it entails. By voicing her support for the Muslims who refrain from handshaking with non-mahrams, it is clear that she views this religious practice in a positive light. To view a practice that has been shown to be quite controversial through this media debate as something of positive character, only points to a positive relationship to their view as a whole. The argument of Khadija seeing the faith and those who actively practice this aspect of its

religious practice in a positive light, is only enhanced by her description of individuals who refrain from handshaking with non-mahrams as very brave people.

Secondly, we also learn about the depth of faith in Khadija's understanding of the concept. What we see in the excerpt, is an understanding of faith not being a cherry-picked selection of beliefs and practices that one implements of their own choosing into their life. Instead, faith is shown to be something *beyond* the believer. Regardless of whether someone chooses not to or is incapable of practicing a certain part of the faith in question, the specific act, doctrine or rule is still a part of the faith.

Lastly, we also learn from this excerpt about how external circumstances can play into how religious practice takes place. Khadija mentioned having tried to refrain from handshaking with non-mahrams, and that she wished she was capable of upholding this practice in her daily life. This touches upon the human aspect of adhering to a religious faith. In some cases, there are believers who will not be able to practice a specific ideal at one point in time. And as in Khadija's case, it is not because they disagree with or reject the practice in question. They very much accept the practice as a genuine part of their religion, it is simply that they are prevented from practicing it because of personal reasons or external circumstances. As a whole, these reflections on faith point to an understanding of it as a positive force with being religious being an ideal as well, and that the beliefs and rules are still in place even if they are not being practiced.

There are two statements made in response to the handshake-media debate which need to be seen in relation to each other in the analysis. The first statement was about the defensive tone in some of the contributions from the media debate written by Muslims, and it goes as following:

> **Fatima**: And what I do not understand is, why would you have to defend that which is a part of yourself? I don't see any need to defend why… I for example run from the bus stop in order to have time to pray, cause that is a part of myself. I can explain to you *why* I do it … yeah, if that made sense.

In the second statement she replied with:

> **Fatima**: I'm trying to challenge myself with, with like… but can I expect that she understands why… what handshaking, or not handshaking, really is all about? Cause she doesn't belong to the same faith as me. Um… cause I have a personal belief based

on narrations and reports, but… I don't really have any right to expect everyone else to share the same belief.

A vital observation to take notice of is the unapologetic affiliation this informant has to her faith. As Fatima herself stated, she does not deem it necessary to defend any aspects of how she lives her life as a Muslim. This reflection on faith tells us that her faith is something that she holds in high regard, hence why she is so unapologetic about it. This is also illustrated in how she articulated herself in the first excerpt. Referring to faith and religious practice as a part of herself, her faith is painted as an integral part of her identity and given a lot of emotional value in the process. Based on this, it is easy to conclude that this reflection illustrates the religious faith playing a big role in her life.

The second statement also relates to the concept of faith on a personal level. Fatima argued that she cannot expect others to share the same belief as herself. This does not trivialize the idea of faith as something subjective in her eyes or stand as an argument on her side in favor of moral relativism. What we are witnessing here is a form of humility over one's own views, in that a belief might be perceived by *others* as subjective even if oneself does not consider it so. There is a certain cultural and religious knowledge-based capital required, to hold certain religious beliefs – a capital that not everyone has acquired. Capital in this context is to be understood as the competence, resources and profit one acquires through interactions with a certain culture or social context (Bourdieu, 2003, p. 193 – 194). This humility is interesting as it does not compromise the religious faith's status as objectively correct morality or part of their identity in the eyes of the interviewee. It merely boils down to acknowledging how one's surroundings do not only consist of people who think or believe in the same things as oneself.

As previously stated, I make the case that these excerpts and the observations we have made about them thus far, must be seen within the context of each other. When examined as a combined unit, we learn something about how dynamic understandings of faith can be in practice through Fatima's statements. One can be unapologetic about one's faith and feel no need to defend why one practices one's faith, while also being aware that not everyone is going to share the same viewpoint or religious belief(s) as oneself. These nuances add to the multiple ways in which the female informants reflected upon the topic of faith.

4.4: Comparison, Theoretical Tool & Previous Research

Comparison

The light in which both my male interviewees and my female interviewees view their own faith, is fairly similar. Lut and Saleh talked about programs for children at the mosque being

beneficial for them, in light of the religious knowledge they learnt there and how they were able to become closer to their faith through these programs. This indicates a positive view of their faith amongst these two, and a consideration of their faith as the objectively correct morality. Meanwhile, Khadija spoke of not being able to fully abstain from handshaking with non-mahrams, and that those who did uphold this religious practice had her full support and were described by her as very brave people. This positive description of the Muslims who practice this religious principle, tells us that the female interviewee also had a positive view of her religion. Therefore, a clear parallel to draw in this scenario is that there is a positive outlook on their own faith amongst both my male and my female interviewees.

Another area in which the respective groups of interviewees show commonalities, is their attitude towards being Muslim. The view Lut expressed regarding Islam was that of it being very important to him, that it was the blueprint he sought to live his life in accordance with. Fatima talked about her faith being a part of her, with her description adding emotional value that underlines her religion being an important part of her life as well. These are examples of interviewees from both focus groups, fully embracing their faith in an unapologetic manner.

Where the two focus groups do differ in this regard, were how generalizable some of them were in their statements. When Fatima and Khadija talked about their views on their faith, they only talked about their own mentality and understandings related to faith as a whole and religious principles such as abstaining from handshaking with non-mahrams. Lut, Hud and Saleh made statements which were on a much grander scale.

When talking about the activities at the mosque for children, they expressed the activities being of benefit to them and their acquaintances who have also attended such happenings. And when Hud spoke of religion as encompassing both belief *and* practice – he explicitly said that "religion *is*" about both belief and practice rather than "religion is *to me*" about both belief and practice, which would have made it a statement on a personal level rather than on a general one. We therefore see more of a willingness amongst the male interviewees to make generalizations on behalf of bigger groups of people, compared to the female interviewees who only stuck to making statements based on their own experiences.

A potential explanation to part of this difference could be a matter of the social capital the male interviewees have acquired within their social circles. Lut and Saleh mentioned that those they had talked to who had also attended the programs at the mosque directed towards children, saw the programs as a source of benefit just as they themselves did. Possessing this knowledge of other people's experiences must therefore have given them an incentive to

make such general statements, hence leading to this difference in responses between the two focus groups.

With the case of Hud's statement, the choice of making a statement about religion as a whole could originate from a confidence on his part in what he is stating is factual. This will be particularly relevant when comparing their reflections to the theoretical tool established around the concept of faith. To summarize, the interviewees both have a very positive-oriented and proud view of their own faith, and some of them are adamant in their claims of it being the objectively correct morality. And when it came to making more generalizing statements on behalf of other Muslims and religion itself, there was a higher tendency of making such statements amongst the male interviewees compared to the female interviewees.

Faith as a Theoretical Tool

As previously presented, Dyess' attributes of faith are 1) a focus on beliefs and/or doctrine, 2) an answer to the existential question of the meaning of life, 3) attempting to live in accordance with one's beliefs and lastly, 4) to interrelate with oneself, with others and in some cases with the divine (cross ref., p. 16). Multiple of these attributes can be found in the male participants' reflections on faith. In Hud's response about religion being more than things to keep inside one's mind and that it has to be put into practice as well, we see commonalities between these points and Dyess' first and third attribute of religious faith which tackle doctrine and religious practice respectively. Lut's response falls in line with Dyess' fourth attribute of faith, with this attribute being how faith interrelates with the human ego/self, others and the divine – which is reflected in Lut's highlighting of Islam as what he attempts to mold his entire lifestyle after.

Though religion has been described by the male interviewees as incredibly significant to their lives, Dyess' second attribute about faith as an answer to the existential questions was not mentioned directly. The lack of direct mentioning of anything resemblant to this principle does not equate to faith not answering the existential questions in the eyes of my interviewees, it simply means that the subject matter was not discussed during the focus group interview.

Similarly, most of these attributes were present in the female interviewees' responses as well. The attributes regarding doctrine and religious practice are present in Fatima's excerpt where she talked about being unapologetic about her religious practice, and in her reflection on religious beliefs as something highly personal. In Khadija's reflections on handshaking, we find an example of faith interrelating with oneself and other people – this being Dyess' fourth

attribute of faith. Just like with the male interviewees, the presented excerpts do not tie in directly with the second attribute of faith which Dyess presents in her article.

Especially in light of Hud's statements, the male interviewees interact with the principles in Dyess' article in a rather unique way. With how adamant Hud was in his tone about faith needing to be reflected in both belief and practice, these principles are understood not merely as attributes, but perhaps even as *requirements* for having a faith. One thing that is worth taking notice of from Hud and Lut's reflections on faith, is that they responded with the articulation of what religion *is*, not what religion *could* be. Their determined manner of articulating themselves comes across as the two interviewees being confident in their words as they gave these responses, as if they were presenting something factual about religion. This speaks of the principles of combining both religious belief and religious practice, and having one's faith interrelate with one's surroundings, to be seen as fundamental parts of faith in the eyes of the male interviewees.

When it comes to the presented responses from my female interviewees; there are commonalities with their responses and Dyess' attributes. Where the male and female interviewees differ in regard to the attributes of faith, is the tendency to make statements on what religion truly encompasses. The earlier mentioned points of the male informants being more determined and general in their remarks, do not apply to the presented statements from the female interviewees.

As a slight contrast to their male counterparts, their reflections on faith had more to do with the personal aspect of religion, in that they often talked about personal views, experiences and beliefs. To conclude, we find that most of Dyess' attributes of religion are present in my interviewees' reflections on faith. While my male informants expressed considering these principles as fundamental aspects of faith, the female informants interacted with these principles differently in that they only related it to their own relationship with their faith.

Previous Research on Faith
The matter of accommodation and flexibility within faith was not something which was articulated by my interviewees during the focus group interviews. Though the centrality of faith in Elander et al.'s research is something which I observed in my own findings. When it comes to centrality of faith in this context, it is very similar to the concept of being "Muslim first" from Scourfield et al. write about in their research. "Muslim first" and the centrality of faith are essentially centered around the same phenomenon, but through different phrasings and in a sense to a different degree.

Centrality of faith on its own opens for varying degrees of faith playing a role in one's life, while perceiving oneself to being "Muslim first" indicates that faith is the thing that dictates the most of how a person is living their life. Nonetheless, this is a sentiment expressed by Lut in his responses that were presented earlier. Describing Islam as vital to his moral compass, and as the way in which he intends to live his life is indicative of his faith playing a central role in his life.

Faith being central to one's life was also something that came up in the female interviewees' presented responses. Fatima talked about in the previously presented quotes that her faith was like a part of herself, and that religious narrations and reports were part of what influenced some of her personal views. This points out to us that the matter of centrality and being "Muslim first" from Elander et al. and Scourfield et al.'s respective research projects, are also present within my own findings from the second focus group interview. When comparing my findings to Elander et al. and Scourfield et al.'s findings on the matter of centrality of faith, it is clear that this positioning of religion in the Muslim informants' lives is also reflected in my own findings.

Khadija's reflections on the matter of refraining from handshaking with non-mahrams can be compared to Yaqeen Institute's findings. The teenager informants from Yaqeen Institute's research project talked about perceiving their faith to be a burden, and that religious principles were an obstacle in the way of achieving financial success or to "make it in life", as one of the informants responded (Suleiman, 2017). Khadija's approach to this form of struggle is quite different. The matter of handshaking is perceived by Khadija as a religious obligation, and though she cannot fulfill it because of personal reasons she still wished that she was able to abstain from handshaking with non-mahrams. The interviewee acknowledged there being difficulties with practicing this particular religious obligation, though she did not express wanting to compromise this matter for the sake of her own gain or success.

There are other cases of my interviewees having a contrasting outlook on certain matters. In one of Lut's previously presented excerpts where he talked about faith, he said "they have to understand that Islam to me is the way I intend to live". The use of "they" in this sentence, is to be understood as those who do not share the same understanding of faith as Lut does. If we examine the entire sentence "they have to understand that Islam to me is the way I intend to live", he further expressed a sentiment of standing firm on his faith. The contrast between the informant from Yaqeen Institute's outlook and Lut's outlook, is how Lut is willing to be unapologetic in his faith and take up much more space.

Though Lut does not address facing complications in his daily life because of religious principles, his overall attitude and view of his faith is one that is firmer and more confident when compared to that of the referenced informant from Yaqeen Institute's research project. When comparing it to Khadija's outlook, she did not express the same willingness to compromise her religious principles even when the circumstances did not allow for her to practice certain aspects of her faith. The dissertation will now tackle the topic of upbringing, starting with my male interviewees' reflections on the topic.

4.5: Upbringing

Focus Group #1 (Men)

While discussing the ASP-media debate, the male informants started discussing the notion of a religious childhood which was brought up in the media debate excerpt. One of the interviewees then said the following:

> **Lut**: Islam has for me… I wish, I've had a religious childhood. But if I could uh… if I could have had more than what I already had, then I wouldn't have said no to that either. Because it hasn't affected me negatively. It has only given me positive… positive experiences and memories.

There is a clear continuation of the sentiment about faith representing a force of positivity and benefit in the interviewees' lives. Lut's response further enhances the tendencies we saw during his reflections related to faith and highlights the interconnection between the topics of the sub-questions. Because his faith represents objectively correct morality, Islam is something that he expressed thinking should be incorporated into a child's upbringing. Just as with his faith, his judgement of the moral character of a religious upbringing is an overwhelmingly positive one, something that is displayed with his description of the religious aspects of his own childhood as a source of benefit.

The clarification that he would have not minded having a more religious childhood also proves the positive attributes with which he describes his faith. This goes against the portrayal of a religious childhood as some dangerous phenomenon found in the excerpt from the ASP-media debate. On the contrary, Lut's response tells us that having a religious faith serves as a fundamental pillar of a child's upbringing and is a natural course of action. For Lut to have a stance on religion being incorporated into a child's upbringing, and on upbringing in general, is indicative of having reflected on the moral and spiritual aspect of when raising a child on the male interviewee's part. Based on this excerpt, it is therefore evident that the male

informant considered an upbringing of religious character to be of positive moral character and an ideal, in addition to it being a natural course of action for him as a practicing Muslim.

In the case of Saleh, he expressed a bit of skepticism about certain aspects of the activities the ASP-media debate was centered around. He went on to talk about his thoughts on children's daily schedule in relation to the ASP-media debate:

> **Saleh**: It's very important to me at least, that they also go to a Norwegian school, that they hang out with… doesn't matter who they socialize with, as…. long as they have good friends and like… with good values, but you always gotta remember where you came from, right? Let them go to school… after school program, let them play football… take them to the mosque, teach them good values…. Akhlaq, you know… yeah. Balance all the way. And you have to do good research before you send your kids, to a place like that. I would need to know if my children are really getting something out of it.

The word *akhlaq* means good character in Arabic. Saleh's notion of balance in the context of upbringing is an interesting object of analysis. What he essentially is referring to is the importance of cultural, religious and social capital, and the various arenas in which a child can receive these from. Saleh mentioned remembering one's roots, which in light of his previous statement where he mentioned a second "home country" must be considered to encompass both one's ethnic and religious roots. The religious capital is described as having to do with teaching children what good character constitutes from a religious perspective, and to internalize the good values that come with religious belief. In similarity with Lut, the religious capital is presented by Saleh as one of the pillars of an ideal upbringing.

Secondly, there is the cultural and social capital to be received in other parts of society outside the mosque and one's own home. This one is inherited according to Saleh through avenues such as school, the after-school program at school and while playing football. What all three of these arenas have in common on a surface level, is that these are places where a lot of socialization takes place. The role that this cultural and social capital plays is that it stands as a part of the idea of balance that Saleh considered to be essential during the upbringing of a child.

What is particularly interesting about the young, male Muslim's idea of balance, is how these different avenues meet at a crossing point which is Saleh's notion of "good values". In light of how he stated that it "doesn't matter who they socialize with", children of any ethnic and/or religious background are acceptable to Saleh as long as they inhabit what he referred to

as "good values". The male interviewee spoke of both good values learnt through going to the mosque and general religious education at home, and the good values that are present within the kind of children Saleh would want his own child's friends to have, and potentially pass onto his child. Even if the good values he referred to are not stated explicitly, the distinction made between the mosque and religious education at home as one unit and the other arenas for socializing as another unit, tells us that there are bound to be different good values to be learnt through different experiences, in the eyes of the young Muslim informant.

This emphasis on the element of balance in the upbringing of a child according to Saleh, lets us know that a child's character building is a priority for the male interviewee. This is also reflected in Saleh's singling out akhlaq as an important thing to teach one's child, as the term translates to good character. And for the sake of the child's character to be molded in an ideal way, it is necessary for the child to inherit the good values that are integrated into these cultural, religious and social capitals.

Another important point to note is Saleh's underlining the importance of quality checking of activities for children. It has already been pointed out the importance the interviewee has placed on the religious and social aspects of upbringing, but above all he is concerned with making sure these aspects of upbringing are being fulfilled in a high-quality manner. It is not merely about sending his child to any mosque that provide activities for children, it has to be a mosque with an organized activity that would greatly benefit his child. Even if it is not articulated in the quote, it is safe to assume that the same focus on quality would apply to other things such as the after-school program at school, or football practice.

This adds a necessary nuance to Saleh's overall reflection on upbringing. There are several factors that need to be in place for providing the ideal upbringing according to Saleh, and these factors all have to meet a certain standard. In short, religious education and socializing with other kids their age is both important parts of the balance Saleh wanted to maintain in the upbringing of his future children, and he is concerned with the opportunities for both religious education and social activities to be of high-quality.

During the pilot interview, one of the interviewees voiced views similar to those of Saleh's, in regard to organized activities having to reach a certain standard. During this interview, this was said by the interviewee Enoch:

> **Enoch**: If I had known that there are trustworthy people who are running it… if my child is getting something out of it, and they get better…. If they learn about how to behave, to have good behavior…. I would have had my child attend it even if it was

not in a Muslim institution. I would have sent my children to a school where they are well-behaved, rather than a school where they are not. Cause I want what is best for my child, you know.

Quality is at the center of the concerns being expressed in this excerpt. Enoch's willingness to hypothetically send his children to an organized activity for children at a non-Muslim institution, is a display of how his child's benefit and personal growth is his main priority in such a scenario. The same is to be said about his concern with the trustworthiness of the staff at such an institution. Once again, this shows the importance placed on both developing good character, and quality checking activities and programs that the interviewees' children hypothetically would attend.

In his reflection on the matter of upbringing, Hud brought up the aspect of the ideal location for where to raise his future children. The interviewee responded with:

Hud: I… I will not raise my kids in the city. That, I won't do that. Not in the city of Oslo, I am gonna go as far away from the city as possible, you know. I am going to live in a farmer town, bro. Uh… (laughs) I'm gonna take my wife, my father, his family, my wife's family. Live there with my kids and my family, you know. Live a simple life, produce our own food and, what do you call it… live like a farmer, basically. To live in a big city... personally, I think it is going to make life harder much harder for them. When you live in a big city, you see everything around you… it will make you want it, bro.

Hud's qualms with raising children in a big city are in need to be seen in a religious context, especially the remarks regarding the city life making life harder for his children and wanting everything around oneself. The meaning of "everything" in this case can be understood as materialistic temptations and/or religiously immoral temptations, though materialistic temptations can often be religiously immoral as well. The scale on which these temptations are rampant in the big city according to the interviewee, must be significantly big as it represents the main incentive for him not want to raise his children in a city like Oslo, based on this response. The idea of this making life harder for his children, are therefore connected with the idea of temptations – in that these temptations would make it more difficult for his children to live as practicing Muslims.

Another interesting circumstance is the other side to this understanding. The other side of the coin is for farmer towns or something equivalent to it, are void of the religiously immoral temptations to be found in the big cities according to Hud. In light of this lack of religiously

immoral temptations within small towns or farmer towns, the informant found them to be a more ideal location to raise his children in compared to one of the bigger cities in Norway like Oslo. It is worth making notice of that in the bigger picture of it all, Hud considered location and local environment to play a role when seeking to raise one's children to inherit a specific worldview, in his case being the religion of Islam.

Lastly, Hud's plans for the future as described by himself in this excerpt can interestingly enough be considered making hijrah. Hijrah is more commonly made from one country to another, but in this participant's case he has plans of making a domestic migration rather than a transnational one. As it has been highlighted so far, there is a clear religious undertone to his reasoning for wanting to move to a farmer town for when he is going to raise his own children. With Hud's plans of migration being for religious reasons and for the sake of his children, as well as these two motivations being highly interconnected in light of his background as a traditional, practicing Muslim – his reflections speak to the importance of the religious aspect of child upbringing for the Muslim interviewee.

So far in this sub-chapter, there are many views that have been expressed in relation to upbringing. The main tendencies we see is a willingness to provide a religious upbringing, to have children socialize in various arenas to build good character and an awareness of local conditions in which one is to raise a child to become a practicing Muslim. The dissertation will now move on to explore how the focus group consisting of female interviewees reflected upon the topic of upbringing.

Focus Group #2 (Women)

One of the questions I asked during the second focus group interview, was whether a religious childhood is an ideal or something undesirable to the informants. To this question, Khadija gave the following reply:

> **Khadija**: For me personally, it is an ideal because…. As a Muslim, I am supposed to… the religion is supposed to be something that permeates through your whole life, so that also…. Of course, that goes for the childhood as well, mhm.

This quote could have been included in the sub-chapter relating to faith, but in this case, we are to focus on what this reflection tells us about Khadija's thoughts on upbringing. The phrasing of faith being something that "permeates through your whole life" is particularly interesting in relation to upbringing as a topic. According to what Khadija stated, religion is meant to permeate through a believer's whole life, and it also extends to upbringing which includes fostering and taking care of *another* life, besides one's own. The ideal childhood in

light of these statements from the interviewee, is one where faith influences and shapes aspects of the childhood such as the general knowledge passed down from the parent to the child, and more practical aspects such as certain mannerisms or rules and boundaries.

On the basis of this response, Khadija considered a parent's faith to be something that must be transferred over to their child. There is no attempt at being "neutral" in terms of beliefs or morality when raising a child according to this understanding of upbringing. Rather, these things are in the form of a religious tradition, inherited by the child from their parent or primary caretaker. By going off of Khadija's response, one of the ways in which the female interviewees reflected upon upbringing, involved religion as a naturally incorporated element and something which the child is to inherit from their parent or primary caretaker.

Fatima raised the question of the effectiveness and benefit of organized activities at the mosque, also varied depending on the age of the child. Hawa also reflected upon this matter in response to Fatima's answer, and had previously expressed being optimistic about after school-programs at a mosque. The female interviewees responded:

> **Fatima**: Uh… I think it's great for the youngest children, uh… and then… I get a little bit unsure, I for example have a little sister who's 15, I'm a little unsure as to whether I would have sent her on a camp, with a lot of other teenagers her age. "Yes, you have to have a strong identity, but you are also part of a diversity. Øh… I don't want all of your friends to be just like you, that's one thing."
>
> **Hawa**: I actually very much agree. I was thinking of the youngest children earlier, but when they are in their teenage years, then… I don't know if I would have actually done it.

This interaction tells us of a pragmatic approach to the idea of upbringing, particularly in regard to what organized activities a child is to attend. It is worth specifying that these statements specifically have to do with sending one's child to an organized activity at the mosque, and not whether the informants hypothetically would send their children to the mosque in general. The matter of sending their children to a happening at the mosque would not be a matter of Fatima and Hawa attempting to fulfill a hollow principle. Instead, what we are witnessing in this interaction, is the interviewees' genuine concern for the intellectual, social and spiritual wellbeing of their potential children. And this concern involves knowing that certain activities that hypothetically would have a positive effect on their children at one stage in their childhood, might not have as much of a positive effect at a later stage in their childhood.

We also find that these reflections regard raising a child as a rather intricate endeavor to take upon oneself. To have views on the structuring of a child's daily life in such detail, indicates that the subject matter is something both of the interviewees have reflected upon earlier. To make plans about what activities one's child is to attend, and what their daily schedule will look like, is something that requires a great deal of reflection and thought put into it. Therefore, to go the extra mile by having thought of what activities are more appropriate for the child at certain stages in their childhood, requires another level of effort and reflection from someone. The reflections surrounding upbringing in this interaction, tell us that the interviewees go forward with a pragmatic approach, and that they go to great lengths in their reflections and planning, for the sake of the hypothetical child's intellectual, social and religious wellbeing.

At another point during the focus group interview, Hawa was asked by one of the other interviewees about how she would talk to her child about if an organized activity they attended regularly, had become an object of controversy in the same vein as the ASP-media debate. Hawa replied to the question with the following statement:

> **Hawa**: I imagine that you would talk to your child, you… ask them like if it is something they enjoy attending, if they want to attend it or what… they think about it. Or like, if my child had found themselves in an uncomfortable situation there, or some form of coerce or something like that, then I would not have sent my child there.

We again return to the matter of a concern for the child's safety and wellbeing, in combination with assessment of the activity in question's quality and consideration of the child's own opinion. Whereas the previous quote related more to a child's intellectual, religious and social wellbeing, Hawa addressed in this quote the matter of a child's physical wellbeing. Once again, the child benefitting from the activity in question and doing well, is prioritized over fulfilling a form of principle. If her child were to experience use of coerce or some kind of uncomfortable experience, these would have the interviewee not let her child attend an activity of this manner. This strengthens the idea that one of the most central principles present amongst the female interviewees' reflections on upbringing, is for the child to be healthy, happy and benefit from whatever endeavor they may partake in.

In addition, Hawa also touched upon wanting her own child's input on the activity they would be attending. This is displayed through her mentioning of hypothetically asking her child, if they are enjoying attending the activity, if they want to attend it and their overall thoughts on the program. Naturally, not all aspects of upbringing are matters in which a child gets to make

the final decision. However, attending an organized activity at the mosque is considered by the informant, to be one of those matters where the child should have a say as well. What this tells us, is that a child's input is something the female interviewee values enough to take into consideration, when making decisions such as whether or not the child is to attend a program at the mosque. In short, valuing a child's input as well as their overall wellbeing, and incorporating one's own faith when raising a child, are fundamental principles in the way the female interviewees reflected upon the topic of upbringing.

4.6: Comparison, Theoretical Tool & Previous Research

Comparison

One of the main recurring patterns in my informants' responses, is the presence of religion in the upbringing they would like to provide for their own children, and the positioning they assign it. Lut and Khadija mentioned the idea of a religious upbringing directly in their reflections, while it was discussed in the form of organized activities at the mosque for children by Saleh, Fatima and Hawa, and Hud whom spoke about it more indirectly in regard to his ideal choice of location to raise his children. The interviewees through their reflections, expressed a wish to have their faith cultivate how they would hypothetically raise their children, and that they intended to have their children inherit the Islamic faith and become practicing Muslims themselves.

In addition, we see a tendency to pay attention to both care and quality in different aspects of a child's upbringing amongst the male and the female interviewees. This was articulated by Saleh, in his explanation of what he considered to be a balanced childhood and daily life for a child, mentioning activities related to learning about their faith at home and in the mosque, as well as social interactions with children of other backgrounds. In the case of Fatima and Hawa, the two informants discussed these matters through their responses on sending their children to a program at the mosque, in light of its appropriateness and the child's overall wellbeing while attending these programs.

Besides these two commonalities, we also find that certain conversation topics were unique to both focus groups. When it came to the male focus group, this was the only focus group interview in which the matter of location for upbringing of children was brought up. Hud reflected upon the importance of surroundings, in context of raising one's children, and went on to express his view of farmer towns being a more ideal location than the big cities. His response sparked a conversation about location, and each of the ideal interviewees' place to

live with their families. This makes the matter of location for upbringing, a topic which was exclusively discussed by the male interviewees in this research project.

The female interviewees, however, focused particularly on considering the age of the child during their upbringing. Both focus groups discussed the matter of programs at the mosque in great detail, and shared various reflections that brought nuance to their views on the topic. The female participants reflected on whether the organized activities at the mosque are more beneficial and appropriate for children, during the earlier parts of their childhood compared to during their teenage years. This makes the matter of age a topic of conversation exclusive to the female focus group. To summarize, the main commonalities between the two focus groups had to do with a focus on providing a religious upbringing and paying great attention to the quality of any free-time activities and the child's wellbeing. In terms of differences, we have found that the male interviewees reflected on the aspect of location, while the female interviewees talked about different activities having varied appropriateness, depending on the age of the child.

Upbringing as a Theoretical Tool

As earlier mentioned, religious upbringing is defined by Kupari as faith playing an important role in an upbringing and having the parents or primary caretaker(s) instill the child with religious beliefs and knowledge (cross ref, p. 16 – 17). The presence of religion in an ideal upbringing as described in Kupari's research, was mentioned either directly or indirectly by all of my male interviewees. In the case of Lut, he mentioned it directly when speaking of appreciating the religious aspects of his own childhood, and that he would have liked for it to be even more religious. Saleh mentioned the idea directly, as he talked about taking his children to the mosque and teaching them about good moral character, as part of the balance needed in an ideal upbringing. It was mentioned more indirectly by Hud, as the interviewee spoke of raising his children in a farmer town, in order to protect his children from the religiously immoral temptations in the big city.

The female interviewees also shared this commonality with Kupari's findings. Khadija spoke of faith being something which is meant to permeate through every aspect of a believer's life, including upbringing – making it a direct mention of the term. Fatima and Hawa both spoke of potentially sending their child to an organized activity at the mosque with some variances in their statements, which means they both indirectly talked about religious upbringing as a concept.

What is particularly interesting about their statements in light of upbringing as a theoretical tool, is the lack of mentioning og consideration of their status as religious minorities. We do find mention of potential hardship related to providing a religious upbringing in Hud's reflections, but none of the interviewees speak of prejudice or resistance towards them as a factor that impacts their approach to raising children. Based on the presented interview excerpts, my interviewees did not adapt or interact with the facing resistance or being a religious minority, something that fundamentally shapes their understanding of upbringing.

Previous Research on Upbringing

Haga's findings are natural to compare with the observations to be made from Hud's reflection on upbringing. This has to do with the concern which Hud, and Haga's Somali Muslim informants shared, about the social conditions under which they are/were to be raising their children, stood as an obstacle in the way of having their children become practicing Muslims. It is worth noting the different methods Hud and Haga's Muslim informants, have/have planned on dealing with the issue. This has to do with the scale on which they viewed these religiously problematic social conditions.

In the Muslim mothers' case from Haga's study (cross ref., p.20 – 21), the hardships they were faced with when attempting to raise their children to be practicing Muslims, were conditions that must have been perceived to be present in the entirety of Swedish society. And as a result of this religious concern, many Somali families made hijrah by immigrating from North America and Europe to Muslim-majority countries such as Dubai. On the other hand, Hud's religious concerns were mostly directed towards the social conditions in the big cities. This led him to consider immigrating to a farmer town, which he saw as more religiously ideal surroundings, as sufficient.

The major contrast in this comparison, is therefore the Somali families making trans-national hijrah to Muslim-majority countries, contra Hud whom had plans on only making a domestic hijrah in the future. This speaks of a multitude of ways to perceive social conditions amongst traditional Muslims and religious minorities in general, while also spotlighting Norway and Sweden representing two different social contexts, even while being neighboring countries.

A focus on the children's age that we found in Scourfield et al.'s research, is also reflected in the responses from Fatima and Hawa. Interviewees from Scourfield et al.'s study expressed a concern, specifically for raising teenagers in a non-Muslim country, in light of the religiously immoral temptations they perceived to be in these countries. One of the families felt strongly enough about it, that the parents considered temporarily moving them and their children to the

parents' country of origin, until the end of their children's teenage years. The concern expressed here is identical to that of the concerns mentioned in Hud's reflection, only that they took/planned on taking two different courses of action.

Fatima and Hawa's sentiments are comparable to the ones expressed by Scourfield et al.'s informants. It is important to consider that these sentiments, however, were expressed on two different levels. While the parents from the aforementioned research project were worried about their children spending their teenage years in a non-Muslim country, the two female interviewees from my own research project were skeptical towards sending their own children to an organized activity at the mosque, while they were in their teenage years. There is also quite a difference between concern and skepticism, in this case. The parents did explicitly state their reasoning for their concern, whereas Fatima's concern had to do with her sister and/or a child in their teenage years, needing to have friends who are of different backgrounds than herself, with "different backgrounds" encompassing both ethnic and religious backgrounds.

The reasoning for Hawa's concern was not expressed in the interview excerpts in the same manner. The two examples share their commonalities but are still not identical to one another. In conclusion, a tendency to make notice of, is a perceived difficulty around or highlighting of the religious upbringing of a child during their teenage years, in comparison to the prior parts of their childhood.

Findings & Conclusion

This is the final chapter of this dissertation. Firstly, I will give some critical self-reflection surrounding this research project, before summarizing my main findings for the topics of citizenship, faith, and upbringing. Subsequently, I will use these findings to answer the research question of my thesis, before assessing this dissertation as a research contribution once more. And finally, I will then summarize the entirety of my research project in the form of this dissertation's conclusion.

5.1: Self-Reflection

When gauging things such as interviewees' opinions, responses and so on, a researcher has to be prepared to accept whatever answers they may get. Truth be told, I did have expectations to what kind of responses I would get. As the research question asks how the interviewees respond to specific media debates, and with the rather grim tone set for the conversations by

the media debate-excerpts in light of their contents – I was expecting predominantly negative responses during the focus groups.

The number of complexities and nuances that came up during these interviews, was something that positively took me by surprise. When I first began working with the research design for the interviews, I did not expect the answer to my research question to in essence be that my interviewees respond on their own terms, and that they would set their own playing rules for dealing with these topics. Even though it was explicitly stated in the research literature I read while preparing for the interviews (cross ref., p. 23), the dynamics of how humans respond to and interact with topics such as faith and citizenship, is never to be underestimated. Human beings are not always simple creatures, and this is reflected in my not so simple findings. The nuances in my findings, are ultimately a reflection of the nuances to the human mind and the human experience, and these nuances stood as a moment of surprise for me while working on this research project.

For this research project, I selected three media debates which I presented excerpts from during the focus group interviews. However, I only ended up presenting interview-excerpts from conversations surrounding two of the media debates, with the conversations about the mosque surveillance media debate not making it into this dissertation. This is regretful for me as a researcher. The conversations surrounding this media debate were as nuanced and fascinating as the ones surrounding the handshake-media debate and the Muslim ASP-media debate, but I found that the questions I asked did not lead to as topic-specific data as I had hoped.

I had intended on emphasizing on the mosque surveillance-media debate responses, during the analysis and discussion of findings related to upbringing, which I was not able to do in the end. Overall, this has been a learning experience which has shown me my inexperience and room for improvement when it comes to making research designs, constructing interview guides and conducting interviews as a whole.

5.2: Main Findings

Having presented my findings and answered the sub-questions, it is time to answer the research question of this thesis: How do young adults of a traditional Muslim background living in Norway respond to three specific media debates on Islam and Muslims?

How do the participants reflect upon citizenship?

Citizenship is understood by my informants as an object of great importance, with cultural Norwegian citizenship specifically being quite inclusive. They consider themselves to be full-

fledged Norwegians, and they actively engage with interpret societal norms on their own terms. They are in their own eyes able to provide such social commentary, because they consider themselves to be in the position to do so by default. This positioning is one of confidence, which is reflected in how they articulate themselves, and the norm-based arguments they use when reflecting upon topics related to cultural citizenship.

While interacting with statements based on perceived societal norms in media debate-excerpts, they have no issue expressing their own thoughts without feeling the need to conform to anyone else's understanding of citizenship in any way. They also place a great deal of importance on cultural citizenship, and one's claim to it – as the moment a group of Muslim women's cultural citizenship was called into question in one of the media debates excerpts, was met with condemnation from all of my informants.

My interviewees acknowledged there being a connection between cultural citizenship, and factors such as values, culture, religion and ethnic background. However, they do not view these aspects to gatekeep cultural citizenship in any way, nor that their religious or ethnic background had any effect on their claim to Norwegian cultural citizenship. When discussing the matter of abstaining from handshaking with a non-mahram, someone they religiously are allowed to marry and by extension have to avoid physical contact with, they are able to make use of contemporary norms in their arguments.

They use these perceived contemporary norms to make sense of why abstaining from this greeting method, is a controversial gesture, while simultaneously utilizing other perceived contemporary norms to argue for the social permissibility of abstaining from handshaking with a non-mahram. They are also able to combine judicial and cultural aspects of citizenship in their arguments, pointing yet again to their reflections coming from a position of confidence in regard to their own cultural citizenship.

How do the participants reflect upon faith?
Faith is a near and dear element in my informants' lives, and one that they allow to permeate through their beliefs and general lifestyle. Their faith and religious heritage are viewed by them in a positive light, and as a source of benefit in their lives. They are unapologetic in their faith and consider it to be a vital part of themselves, which they perceive as unnecessary for them to have to defend. My interviewees also expressed a firm belief in the faith of Islam as the objectively correct morality.

Simultaneously, the participants showed an interesting awareness of themselves as members of a religious minority. As previously stated, they are firm in their religion, but they also

acknowledge that not everyone in Norwegian society, share the same moral and spiritual understanding as them. There is a cultural and religious knowledge-based capital that my interviewees have acquired, which have led to them to hold the religious beliefs that their faith encompasses. Although this capital is not exclusive to my informants and those who are part of the same religious-age demographic, it is certainly not a capital that every Norwegian has had the opportunity to acquire.

In terms of differences between the male and the female interviewees, the two focus groups made generalizations on two very different levels. Amongst the male interviewees, there was a tendency to make generalizations and bigger statements. A few examples would be speaking on behalf of other Muslims who have for example also attended organized activities at the mosque for children, and about the fundamental framework of how religion works. As a contrast, the female interviewees only spoke on behalf of themselves for the most part, while discussing faith. Their reflections were mostly related to their own personal relationship to their faith.

How do the participants reflect upon upbringing?
The ideal upbringing as described by my interviewees, is one where the parent's or primary caretaker's faith is to permeate through it. A religious upbringing is considered to be an ideal for the informants, and to have their children's upbringing be of religious character, is only natural to them. They all have thoughts on what measures they plan on putting in place, to make sure their children grow up to become practicing Muslims – whether it be through having them attend an organized activity at the mosque, or through other means related to family life at home.

Another main tendency in their reflections on upbringing, is a focus on moderation, quality and their children's holistic wellbeing. Moderation is a central virtue in that the interviewees wish for their children to balance different aspects of daily life, like social activities and being at the mosque, as well as strengthening their identity while also being part of a diversity. All of these avenues will provide their children with social, cultural and religious knowledge-based capitals which my informants consider to be necessary for their children. They also expressed that activities such as football practice or organized activities at the mosque, have to be of a high quality and serve as beneficial to their children, while also maintaining their physical and mental wellbeing.

In addition, certain conversation topics were unique to both of the respective focus groups. The male interviewees discussed the importance of location for when raising Muslim

children, with one of the informants expressed wanting to not raise his children in a farmer town rather than in the big city, in light of all the religiously immoral temptations one can find in the city. The female interviewees talked about certain activities' appropriateness and benefit, might depend on the age of the child, using programs at the mosque as an example.

A reoccurring element is that the responses to these media debates, are articulated on the interviewees' own terms. They decide for themselves what does and does not constitute part of cultural Norwegian citizenship, they determine what faith is and what role it plays in their lives, and they make up their own minds about what kind of upbringing they want to provide for their children. The informants responded to multiple understandings of these three topics, where they gave various types of responses to the media debate-excerpts. While sometimes they found themselves somewhat agreeing with some aspects of the quotes, there were moments where the informants were in total disagreement with the presented media debate-excerpt. My informants were able to articulate themselves and respond in this manner, because these responses came from a position of confidence.

This confidence permeated through their mindset in regard to all three main topics – they were confident in their claim to citizenship, confident in their faith, and confident in their vision of how they were going to raise their children. This confidence and comfortability allowed them to discuss, and when required, argue against statements made in the media debate-excerpts. They did not allow themselves to be othered or ostracized by the media debate-excerpts in any way. Rather, they would reject these understandings in the media debate-excerpts completely because of the gap between their own views on the three sub-question topics and the presented understandings of them.

Now that we have established how the interviewees responded to these specific media debates, it is appropriate to ask the question of why the interviewees responded the way they did. Or in other words, what made them respond in the manner that they did. One of the explanations that I argue played a key factor in having the focus group interviews play out the way they did, is the research design combined with my own positionality as a researcher. Focus group interviews generally allow the informants to speak their mind freely, and to articulate themselves however they please. This was further enhanced by my interview guide focusing entirely on the interviewees' views and understandings of any subject matter. With the emotionally loaded and oral articulations in my informants' responses to the media debate-excerpts, as highlighted during the use of conversational analysis in the analysis-chapter, their statements come across as genuine and unfiltered.

This factor needs to be seen in the context of my positionality as well. Me and my interviewees were not only young adults in our 20's, but we also shared the same faith and had grown up in Muslim families. Being aware of these circumstances, was something which also provided leeway for the informants to speak freely. This was reflected in the references to theological concepts and Arabic phrases during the focus groups, and in moments where everyone present during the interview were described as Norwegians – with me as an interviewer, also being included in that statement.

Having all of these points of references as well as cultural, social and religious knowledge-based capitals in common, gave them the comfort of being understood clearly, regardless of how they would choose to articulate themselves. Seeing as the research design and my positionality, collectively gave rise to an academic setting in which my interviewees felt able to give their authentic responses to the specific media debates, I argue that this combined unit of research design and my positionality as a researcher is a key factor in explaining my findings.

Another key factor is the multifaceted capital my interviewees have acquired during their lives, as members of their religious communities. They have interacted with their fellow believers in their own homes, in their communities, while also having learnt about and practiced their faith for a number of years in the social context of Norway. The interviewees have grown up in different households, have parents from different parts of the world, are from different parts of Norway, and have interacted with and/or belong to different communities. In addition, they have also interacted with their religious communities to varying degrees.

Nonetheless, the informants were all left with a capital that allowed them to be as confident and nuanced in their approaches to citizenship, faith, and upbringing. There was particularly a confidence in their faith amongst the informants, which stood as the fundament not only for their lifestyles, but to other aspects of their mindsets – mainly, how they reflected upon citizenship and upbringing. The relationship they exhibited having with their faith, was a circumstance that became evident even when faith was not the specific topic of conversation at certain points during the focus group interviews.

This is telling of not only the interconnection between the topics of the three sub-questions, but the importance of their religion to their general outlook on things – and is therefore an explanation for the findings of this research project. The capital the interviewees have

acquired, which has accumulated to the relationships they have with their faith, is therefore to be seen as a key factor in explaining my findings. Now that the central explanations for my findings have been presented, it is appropriate that I also reflect on my research contribution and what it has materialized into.

5.3: Research Contribution

In its entirety, my research contribution to the study of Muslims, or more specifically – traditional, young Muslims is an analytical one. My interviewees' responses related to citizenship, faith, and upbringing do not erase or undermine research that indicate other sentiments or responses on the aforementioned topics. Rather, my research contribution joins this selection of previous research, in adding nuance to the plethora of ways that Muslims might reflect on such matters.

The similarities and differences between my own findings and the findings in previous research (cross ref., p. 50, 62 & 72), do not delegitimize any of these research contributions, instead they all highlight the spectrum of nuances present in this research field. In light of this, my research contribution is one that delivers on both reliability and validity with its findings and research design, which both point to this dissertation being an analytical research contribution to the research field of studies of Muslims and Islam.

There is also a methodological aspect to my research contribution. Presenting excerpts from each of the selected media debates during the focus groups, was in hindsight something I consider a fruitful decision. This allowed my informants to directly quote, and reference statements made in these excerpts, which provided them with room for articulating their responses and general thoughts on the three sub-question topics. This was further enhanced with the photographs that accompanied the media debate-excerpts, as the contents of these photographs also became topics of conversation during the focus group interviews. And so, my research contribution is also a methodological contribution as it highlights the effectiveness of incorporating a textual and/or visual element into a focus group interview, as an object of analysis for the interviewees.

5.4: Conclusion

It turned out that the people talked about in the negatively charged articles and media debates, respond to them in different ways. There were many different responses to the media portrayal, but what is evident is that the young adults who are part of the religious minority being discussed in these specific media debates, are establishing their own playing rules when interacting with these media debates. They allow themselves to set the perimeters for all of

these conversations, because they have the confidence to do so, and they believe themselves to naturally be in the position to engage in this social commentary on the topics of citizenship, faith, and upbringing. They were clear about their own claims to cultural Norwegian citizenship, and they had their own views on what norms and values are to constitute being Norwegian. This also carried over to the topic of faith, where they explained how fundamental it is to their lifestyle.

Being Norwegians and being Muslims are seen as two fully reconcilable identity markers, and religious acts such as abstaining from handshaking with non-mahrams is fully compatible with their understandings of Norwegian values. Furthermore, they planned on giving their children a religious upbringing and to balance out their children's daily lives through free time-activities such as football practice, while demanding all of these activities to be of high quality. The responses to the excerpts from the chosen media debates reflect a clear interconnection between the topics of citizenship, faith, and upbringing. My interviewees did not allow the othering in the media debate-excerpts, to influence their positions as Norwegian citizens.

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