Norwegianness as lived citizenship: religious women doing identity work at the intersections of nationality, gender and religion

Abstract

This article is focusing on identity work among Muslim and Christian women in Norway. Based on qualitative interviews with twenty Christian and Muslim women from four different faith communities: a congregation within the Church of Norway, a congregation within the Pentecostal movement, a Sunni mosque and a Shia mosque, I ask: What does it entail to be a «Norwegian» and how do gender and religion play into that? How are inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics experienced by religious minority and majority women? I claim that identity work is useful for understanding lived citizenship because it sheds light on inclusionary and exclusionary processes in a multicultural society. By including minority and majority experiences, the differences of power in minoritizing and majoritizing processes become evident. This article shows that identities are processual and dynamic; however, stereotypical collective categories often seem fixed. Categories like «Muslim», «woman» and «Pakistani» intermingle in the way that they position someone as «not fully Norwegian». The category «Norwegian» is a rather narrow and exclusionary term mainly based on an ethnos-understanding of being a Norwegian citizen in a broad sense (medborger). This understanding of Norwegian citizenship is based on a common cultural heritage and descent. Christianity is a part of this common cultural heritage, however Islam is not.

Keywords: Norwegianness, gender, religion, identity work, lived citizenship, Christian and Muslim women.

Introduction

I am Norwegian, but in the kind of public debate recently you become… (…) you’re not fully Norwegian, you’re a ‘Muslim Norwegian’, and it’s kind of a third category (Zeynab).

Over the last forty years, Norway has become an increasingly diverse society due to immigration (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2008). Today, questions about national iden-
tity and religion have become central – and contested – in public debate. The initial quote from a Muslim woman illustrates a tension related to being Norwegian and Muslim. The Norwegian social democratic citizenship model has been criticized because it is grounded on a national homogenous ethnic community (Holst 2002), and a relevant question is whether this citizenship model is able to accommodate ethnic and religious diversity (Lister et al. 2007). Earlier, the definition of a «Norwegian» implied a membership in the Church of Norway, and it was a marker of national identity against «the foreigners» (Breistein 2003). In this article I ask: What does it entail to be a «Norwegian», and how do gender and religion play into that? How are inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics experienced by religious minority and majority women? The aim is to explore identity work as lived experiences of citizenship among Muslim and Christian women in Norway. I will analyse how women from different religious communities negotiate their personal identities in relation to collective categories ascribed to them from others, such as «ethnic minorities», «immigrants», «Norwegians», «Muslims» and «Pentecostals».

One intention of this article is to contribute with new knowledge to the field of citizenship and religion. Feminist studies of citizenship have broadened the term from a narrow legal-political definition to a more inclusive cultural-social definition; however, religion is still an under-research area in citizenship studies (Halsaa, Thun and Nyhagen Predelli 2010). A second intention is to present new empirical knowledge about religious women in contemporary Norway. My attempt is to bridge the gap between a theoretical notion of citizenship and an empirical study of identity work in everyday life. I will argue that this approach is useful in order to understand citizenship in a multicultural society. A third intention is to discuss the notion of «Norwegianness» based on an analysis of lived citizenship. The perspective in the debate about integration is usually from the state or from the majority point of view, and ethnic and religious minorities are seen as a threat to social cohesion in society. Here, however, I apply a bottom-up, rather than a top-down approach in exploring how women from both «ethnic» and religious minority and majority groups negotiate their personal identities in relation to collective categories ascribed to them from others. A central point is the inclusion of majority experiences in order to study differences of power in minoritizing and majoritizing processes (Staunæs 2003; Berg, Flemmen and Gullikstad 2010).

In this article, I firstly introduce citizenship theory, lived citizenship and identity work. Secondly, I give a short account of the contemporary Norwegian citizenship model, the religious context and the empirical material. Thirdly, I analyse identity work and experiences of recognition and misrecognition in the interviewees’ meetings with ascribed collective categories. Finally, I discuss the notion of «Norwegianness», and experiences of exclusion and inclusion.
Citizenship, lived citizenship and identity work

At its most basic, citizenship provides individuals with a legal status (statsborgerskap) deriving from membership of a citizenship community, typically the nation state (Lister et al. 2007:8). Citizenship was defined by T. H. Marshall (1965) as «full membership of community» (Marshall 1965:76). He divided citizenship into three elements; civil (the rights necessary for individual freedom), political (the right to participate in the exercise of political power) and social (the right to economic welfare and security) (Marshall 1965:78). Feminist and other strands of critical citizenship theory have highlighted exclusionary tendencies for marginalized groups, and they have focused on gendered and racialised patterns of inclusion and exclusion (see Siim 2000; Lister 2003, 2007; Lister et al. 2007). Exclusion and inclusion operate both at a legal level through a «formal» mode of citizenship (statsborgerskap) and at a sociological level through a «substantive» mode of citizenship (medborgerskap) (Lister 2003:44). In citizenship studies, there has been an increased emphasis on the potential of inclusive and full citizenship, not only focusing on access to formal rights, but also on identity and recognition of differences (Lister 2007:51). The main focus in this article is the sociological aspect of citizenship (medborgerskap); identities, belonging and lived practices.

Lived citizenship can be defined as «the meaning that citizenship actually has in people's lives and the ways in which people's social and cultural background and material circumstances affect their lives as citizens» (Hall and Williamson 1999:2). Experiences of lived citizenship are not necessarily confined to the nation state, but can be experienced at a number of levels – locally, transnationally and globally. Studies of citizenship often focus on different citizenship regimes at a macro level and on crossnational comparisons (see for example Lister et al. 2007). The focus here is on the Norwegian context, including local, national and also transnational levels; however, it is not the Norwegian citizenship regime on the macro level I am attempting to describe. The scope in this article is narrower in the sense that the main focus is on the micro level; women’s experiences of lived citizenship in one particular national setting.

In order to operationalise the concept of lived citizenship in this empirical study, I have found the concept identity work helpful. I have chosen to focus on identity and belonging and experiences of recognition and misrecognition in order to explore inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics. Mette Andersson’s (2000) concept of identity work, which I draw on in the analysis, is defined as the negotiations taking place «between collective identities ascribed to us from others and our own identifications with various manifest and imagined communities of belonging» (Andersson 2000:291). Identity work addresses the dialectics between «outer» («categorical» and «social» identity) and «inner» («personal») aspects of identity. In other words, I seek to explore how women from different religious communities negotiate their personal identities in relation to collective categories like for instance «ethnic minorities», «immigrants», «Norwegians», «Muslims», and «Pentecostals». Processes of recognition and misrecognition are fundamental aspects of identity work. Misrecognition
refers to a mismatch between the ascribed collective identities and our own identifications (Andersson 2000:53).

I will also explore the notion of Norwegianness empirically by analysing identity work being done by the research participants. In negotiating Norwegianness, the categorical identities related to religion and gender, intersect. Intersectionality refers to «the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power» (Davis 2008:68). An intersectionality approach explores how «categories of race, class and gender are intertwined and mutually constitutive» (Davis 2008:71). Religion has yet not been at the centre of intersectional analysis; however, some argue that an intersectional analysis would benefit from including a religious dimension (Appelros 2005). I am inspired by intersectionality as a sensitising concept in order to analyse the complexity in lived experience (Berg et al. 2010:19). In this view, categories are not predetermined, stable and fixed, and the focus is on processes and differences of power in minoritizing and majoritizing processes (Staunæs 2003; Berg et al. 2010). I attempt to empirically explore which categories are important in various social settings, whether they intersect, and the ways in which these categories are negotiated.

Norwegian citizenship and religious context

The Norwegian citizenship model is described as social democratic (Lister et al. 2007:8). The Marshallian approach to social citizenship can be traced far back and the Norwegian welfare state works on the basis of universal citizenship (Lister et al. 2007:24). The Norwegian notion of nationality and citizenship combines elements of the prototypical ethnic model (ethnos) and political model (demos); nationality can be claimed both through birth and through residence (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli 2008:17). However, with regards to more informal demands of social inclusion in society (medborgerskap) – feelings of acceptance and belonging – Norway is more within the ethnos-tradition (Brochmann and Hagelund 2010:300). The ethnos or «ethnocultural» conception of nationhood «relies on notions of common genealogy and descent ties, a common history, shared cultural traditions and customs as constitutive elements of the nation or of national identity» (Peters 2002:4). In the demos or «civic» conception, «the nation is understood as a political community, or more specifically as a self-governing, democratic polity with legal and political equality among its citizens» (Peters 2002:4).

The Norwegian religious regime is characterized by Church of Norway (formally entitled the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Norway) as the state religion and this is established in the constitution. However, the constitution also guarantees religious freedom and the state provides financial support to both Church of Norway and other registered faith and worldview communities. From 2013, the constitution will most likely be amended and the ties between Church of Norway and the state will be «loosened», however, Church of Norway will remain part of the state administration
In 2010, 79.2 per cent (approx. 3.8 million) of the population were members of Church of Norway and about 9.3 per cent of the population belongs to other faith and worldview communities (Statistics Norway 2011). The Pentecostal movement is the third largest Christian community outside the Church of Norway. Islam is a relatively new religion in the Norwegian society, introduced with the migration from Pakistan that started in the late 1960s. Among the Muslim population in Norway, Sunnis are the majority, whereas Shia Muslims constitute about twenty per cent (Jacobsen 2009:21).

Empirical material

This article is based on empirical data from qualitative interviews with twenty Christian and Muslim women from four different faith communities in Norway: a congregation within Church of Norway, a Pentecostal congregation, a Sunni mosque and a Shia mosque. The respondents were recruited from women’s groups within these faith communities. The ages of the interviewees ranged from 20 to 73 years. Most of the women were either working or in higher education. Some of the older interviewees had retired. About half of the research participants were or had been married and had children. Some had been stay-at-home mothers when the children were younger, but others had worked full-time, also with small children. The interviews were conducted between March and August 2009.

The reason for selecting women from four different faith communities is because a comparative investigation can highlight differences and similarities across faith traditions and communities (Bartkowski and Read 2003:72). My aim is to shed light on identity work at the intersection of religion, gender and nationality. A central point is the inclusion of both minority and majority experiences and differences of power in minoritizing and majoritizing processes (Staunæs 2003; Berg, Flemmen and Gullikstad 2010). Minoritizing and majoritizing refer to processes of «doing» «Firstness» and «Otherness». Majority experiences are included because they highlight «differences in power and of being marked and unmarked, privileged and non-privileged, powerful and non-powerful» (Staunæs 2003:105). The women from the Church of Norway are «ethnic majority Norwegians» and also «majority Christians» in a Norwegian context. The Pentecostal women are «ethnic majority Norwegians» and «minority Christians». The Sunni Muslim women are «ethnic minority Norwegians» and «minority Muslims», whereas the Shia women are «ethnic minority Norwegians» and «minority Muslims» in a Norwegian context. By including women from these four different faith communities, the aim is to analyse the complexities involved in negotiating identities as religious, as women and as «ethnic» and religious minorities or majorities in Norway. Moreover, by comparing the experiences of women from different faith communities, the analysis might shed light on inclusionary and exclusionary processes related to «Norwegianness».

In this article I do not use «ethnic majority» and «ethnic minority» simply in a descriptive sense, but mainly as relational processes which I seek to study empirically.
The terms «minority» and «majority» are in quotation marks to indicate active processes of labelling groups and «active processes of racialization» that are at work in designating certain attributes of groups in particular contexts as being in a ‘minority’ (Gunaratnam 2003:17).

In the presentation of the data and the analysis, I use the stories of some of the interviewees from each of the religious communities. These interviewees and their quotes are selected in order to exemplify typical tendencies in the data material (Thagaard 1998:195). The interviewees’ stories and the quotes illustrate patterns in the data material as a whole related to experiences of recognition and misrecognition that are linked to processes of inclusion and exclusion. Thematically, the quotes from the interviews are selected in order to exemplify identity work at the intersection of religion, gender and nationality. I have also aimed at showing the complexity and the dynamics involved in negotiation identity. The interviewees are given fictive names and I have changed or left out some information in order to protect their anonymity.

The interviewees from the different faith communities in this study are not representative for all Christian or Muslim women in Norway. The women are selected because they are active in their respective religious communities, and one can assume that religion perhaps is a more important aspect in their identity work than religious women that are less active in religious communities. Data arising from qualitative interviews are not generalizable in the sense that findings can be generalized from the study sample to an entire population in a statistical sense. However, qualitative interviews can provide new empirical data that can shed light on social processes and also contribute to theoretical developments that have relevance beyond a particular and local study (Coffey and Atkinson 1996:162–163).

Identity work at the intersection of nationality, gender and religion

In the following, I will present the analysis of the empirical data and, to reiterate, I ask: What does it entail to be a «Norwegian» today, and how do gender and religion play into that? How are inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics experienced by religious minority and majority women?

Sunni Muslim Women: «Fatima» and «Hannah»

Fatima is part of the women’s group in a Sunni mosque in Norway. She is a woman in her fifties who came to Norway from Pakistan nearly thirty years ago. Fatima has higher education and has worked her whole adult life. Initially in the interview she was asked to describe herself:

Fatima: I am a young woman! (laughter) I work as a nurse. I’m from Pakistan. And I’m a Muslim woman. I like it very much here in this country. I’m not only integrated, but I also like to practice my religion and that means very much.
Interviewer: How important is religion for your identity?

Fatima: Religion is very important for me. I feel safe and the mosque is a big part of that (…).

In this short interview extract, Fatima touches upon issues of nationality, gender and religion. She describes herself as Pakistani and as a Muslim woman. She also mentions age (by humorously calling herself young) and social class (her occupation) and that she is a mother. Religion is very important for Fatima and makes her feel safe. She underlines that she is «not only integrated, but [I] also like to practice [my] religion». In this short sentence, Fatima emphasises that being «integrated» is compatible with being a Muslim. This illustrates how identity work – negotiations between ascribed collective categories and her own identifications – takes place in concrete interactions, here in the context of an interview situation where Fatima is interviewed by two majority Norwegian female Non-Muslim researchers. She emphasises the importance of religion in her life and that she is a Muslim, but at the same time she addresses the assumed difference from «native Norwegians» by resisting the categorical identity of an «unintegrated Muslim».

Hannah is another woman in the Sunni mosque. She is the same age as Fatima and has lived many years in Norway, where her children are born and raised.

When I look at my children, they, their hearts only beat for Norway. My heart beats for both Norway and Pakistan (Hannah).

Hannah describes her personal identity and sense of belonging («My heart beats for both Norway and Pakistan»). She is formally a Norwegian citizen (statsborger); however these quotes indicate that her sense of belonging is much broader. She uses the word «heart» to describe her feelings of belonging to two different places, and that illustrates how citizenship (medborgerskap) in a broad sense is connected to emotions and how she can be a citizen (medborger) of two different countries.

Later in the interview, Hannah talks about «integration» and she says that it means to give back to society by pursuing an education and to do paid work and also to participate in voluntary work. However, she also questions the meaning of the term «integration»:

It depends on how you understand the term ‘integration’ in Norwegian society. For me it has not been a problem. I feel that I’m well integrated, even if I don’t go to discos, I don’t go to places where they serve alcohol (Hannah).

Hannah addresses the term «integration» which is frequently used in Norwegian public debate about ethnic and religious minorities. She attends social events at her work place, but does not drink alcohol. However, she feels a bit uncomfortable and she argues that one cannot be integrated if «integration» means to be in places where peo-
ple drink alcohol. According to Hannah, her religion does not forbid her to be there, but she feels uncomfortable. Some majority Norwegians think that her husband has forbidden her to attend social events, but that is not the case, she insists. Hannah explains that her religion provides her with certain norms that guide her behaviour. However, these norms are not the problem; she does not describe these norms as barriers to participation. In her understanding, the barrier is rather the responses from majority Norwegians who automatically assume that she is forced to behave in a certain way because she is a Muslim woman. Hannah problematises the meaning of the concept «integration» and indirectly suggests that the majority Norwegian society expects Muslims to assimilate; to act exactly as majority Norwegians, which in this case means drunken people at parties. In her opinion, «integration» should also mean accepting differences.

In the interview with Fatima, she talks about inclusion as a Norwegian citizen:

Interviewer: Do you feel included as a citizen [medborger] in Norway?

Fatima: Well, not exactly. If I look around me at my work place or in the mosque or at home where I live, it’s okay. But if I consider the society at large – let’s say that I were to go to the Storting [the Norwegian Parliament] and state that ‘I’m Norwegian and I want to do this and this’. Then – then I’m Pakistani. Then I’m a Pakistani woman. And they say: ‘You are a Pakistani woman’. They don’t say: ‘Here comes a Norwegian-Pakistani woman’. The word – they don’t want to stop using the word ‘minorities’. (...) The meaning of ‘minor’ in English – minority means that there is a difference. I have stopped using that word in the lectures I’ve given. Instead I say ‘multicultural nationality’. We have multinational children. (...) They often say ‘utlendinger’ [foreigners]. We’re not ‘utlendinger’[foreigners], we’re ‘innlendinger’ [status as Norwegians] (laughter). (...) It still hurts [when people say foreigner].

In this interview extract, Fatima differentiates between her neighbourhood community, her work place and her religious community, where she feels included, and the Norwegian society at large, which sees her as a «foreigner». Her workplace has accepted her as a regular employee and they have facilitated her prayer in the work place and she can take time off from work twice a year at Muslim holidays. So in other words, she is recognized as an equal employee and her personal identity as a Muslim is acknowledged. However, in Norwegian society at large, she is not recognized as a Norwegian citizen (medborger) equal to majority Norwegians. The Norwegian word «utlending» means to be a person from another country, a foreigner. The word «innlending» is the opposite of «utlending» and means that you have a status as a Norwegian (Ordnett 2011). The word «foreigner» means to be a visitor, a stranger, and it has associations with being an outsider. To be viewed as a «foreigner» is the opposite of being included as a citizen (medborger) and to belong to Norwegian society. Fatima’s identity as a Norwegian-Pakistani woman and the description of her children as multicultural is not acknowledged by Norwegian society. In her opinion, she is still viewed as just Paki-
stani, as a «foreigner». She describes how it still hurts when people say «foreigners». By using the word «innlending», which is seldom used in the Norwegian language, Fatima emphasises that she wants to be acknowledged as an insider in Norwegian society; as an equal citizen.

Fatima also addresses the use of the term «minority», a term that is increasingly used both in Norwegian media and academia. In her opinion, the word «minority» in English is associated with «difference». This can be interpreted as a way of saying that people who are labelled «minorities» are also seen as «minor» in the meaning that they are worth less than the «majority», or that they are like children – not fully adults.

It is evident that Fatima experiences citizenship on different levels; from the local neighbourhood to «society at large», and also in a more global context when she talks about belonging to different countries. Her sense of belonging and recognition differs in these various contexts. Fatima mentions the mosque as a place where she belongs and where she feels recognized as whom she is as a person. The neighbourhood community and the workplace are also described as «pockets» in society where she feels included, whereas Norwegian society at large is experienced as more exclusionary. Fatima refers to a general feeling of being excluded from a notion of equal Norwegian citizenship (medborger) when she talks about «society at large».

Experiences and thoughts concerning the stereotypical image of the oppressed Muslim woman – often symbolized by the hijab9– also came up in the interview with Fatima, and she commented on the hijab debate in the Norwegian media.10

It has been a big debate about the hijab. Hijab is not, it should not have been such a problematic issue. (…) Women wear hijab to show their obedience to God, that’s all, it is instructed by God in the Quran and elaborated in several Hadiths. (…) I don’t use hijab myself, but I don’t think it should be a hindrance. I used to wear a hijab. It seems like they want some distance, it hasn’t been a hindrance, but it wasn’t very successful. So I thought: Should I wear a hijab or should I show the society that I am a very brave and very strong woman and that I am very resourceful? (Fatima)

Fatima places the hijab as a contrast to the image of resourceful Muslim women. For Non-Muslims the hijab has connotations of the opposite; namely a cowardly, weak and subjugated woman. These statements suggest that the hijab has become a symbol of the oppressed Muslim woman. Fatima is struggling with the ascribed collective identity «Muslim woman», which is understood as oppressed and weak. Being a Muslim woman is important for her own personal identity and it is also important for her to be seen as both a Muslim woman and acknowledged as a strong woman. To Fatima, the hijab is first and foremost a religious garment, a symbol of obedience to God, but she chose to take it off because in the Norwegian context the hijab has become such a visible symbol of women’s oppression.11

The other Sunni Muslim women in this study have also experienced that other people only see the hijab, not the person inside it. One of the other interviewees says that it can be a hindrance when she meets new people, but she has chosen to wear a
hijab because she thinks that the only way other people can learn about Islam is through dialogue. «They have to get to know the hijab», as she humorously says it. Some of the other interviewees also think it is important to wear hijab and at the same time be active members of society. In that way they can show that the stereotypical image of passive and subjugated Muslim women – symbolised by the hijab – is a wrong generalisation of Muslim women in Norway today.

Shia Muslim Women: «Zeynab» and «Sofia»

Zeynab belongs to the women’s group in a Shia mosque in Norway. She is a woman in her twenties and she is a student. She is born and raised in Norway. Her parents immigrated to Norway from another country before she was born. In the following interview extract Zeynab describes the importance of religion in her life:

Interviewer: How important is religion to you?

Zeynab: It’s very important. (…) It has to do with faith. Everything in your life is seen through that, like a glass, you see everything through religion. So yes, I’d say it’s important.

Zeynab describes how religion is a deeply integrated part of her identity and her life that influences her general outlook on life. On a more practical level, religion also influences the way she dresses and what she eats, Zeynab says. Later in the interview, she explains how the five prayers each day work as daily reminders of religion. She also describes how religion gives her direction in life and has influenced her choice of education and occupation. Her religion also encourages her to have strong family ties and to stay in touch with family members.

Sofia, another young woman from the Shia mosque, says the following when she is asked to describe herself:

I describe myself as… as a Norwegian, [the nationality of her country of origin], Muslim girl (laughter). (…) That is my way of saying it. Because I am a girl from [my country of origin], and I live in Norway. I love [my country of origin] as much as I love Norway (Sofia).

Sofia is born in another country, but has lived in Norway for almost ten years. She feels both Norwegian and from her country of origin. Sofia uses the word «love» when she describes her sense of belonging to both countries, and this quote illustrates how citizenship [medborgerskap] is linked to emotions and to identity. Sofia does not refer to the legal side of national identity, rather to her feelings of being Norwegian and from her country of origin.

Zeynab says the following when she is asked if she feels Norwegian:

Yes. (sighs) I am Norwegian, but in the kind of public debate recently you become… (…) you’re not fully Norwegian, you’re a «Muslim Norwegian», and it’s
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kind of a third category. It’s a bit like that. I feel that we who are the younger generation of Norwegian Muslims have a responsibility, not just towards other Muslims, but towards the society at large. I feel that there is a wrong image of Islam and Muslims (Zeynab).

Zeynab has lived her whole life in Norway and she feels Norwegian, however, her personal identity as being both Norwegian and Muslim is not acknowledged in the public debate in Norway. The categorical identity «Muslim», which here refers to an «Other-identity» based on religion, does not correspond to an identity as a «Norwegian». Even if Zeynab describes herself as both Norwegian and Muslim, she is not considered to be «fully» Norwegian in the public debate. Zeynab underlines this point by using the term «Muslim Norwegian» when she refers to public debates where religious identity as a «Muslim» is seen as the main identity and placed before «Norwegian». When she refers to her own definition of herself and the younger generation, however, she uses the term «Norwegian Muslims», placing «Norwegian» first and «Muslim» last.

Zeynab has also faced other people’s stereotypical and categorical identities in specific social interactions:

Zeynab: You have all the stereotypes [about Muslim girls], you know, naïve, oppressed… yeah, things like that. It’s really not like that, but you are told that all the time. And – it’s a bit annoying.

Interviewer: How have you been told that? Have you experienced that?

Zeynab: Yes, for instance when you’re in school. I remember from elementary school when I started to wear a hijab. Then all the teachers asked me if I was forced by my parents and things like that. And I remember that I was very upset and I just ‘Oh, what is it’ and I was really angry… and I was actually pretty young.

Interviewer: How old were you?

Zeynab: I was nine, I guess, in the second grade. Then it was maybe, I guess, fair enough, it was quite new. But then, for instance when I was in high school and I didn’t want to go to the movies with my class mates simply because I don’t like certain kinds of movies, not because, well, not for any other reason. Then it was like «oh, your father won’t let you» and «can’t you just talk to your father and ask him to let you go», and I just «argh…» Right, do you see what I mean? (…) And then you have teachers who come up to you and say: «Oh no, you need to become big and strong like Norwegian girls» and like «start taking cod liver oil.»

According to Zeynab, her hijab was automatically interpreted as a sign of oppression. In these episodes from her school experiences, she was met with an ascribed identity based on her gender and religion. In this interview extract it is also evident that the category «Muslim girl» is seen as the opposite of the category «Norwegian girl». Zeynab refers to teachers who have encouraged her to become more like «Norwegian girls», meaning strong and independent, the opposite of the meaning ascribed to «Muslim
girl» who is viewed as weak and dependent on others. Zeynab makes this point by referring to cod liver oil, which in this context gives connotations to both being physically strong and «typical Norwegian». Zeynab describes herself as a quiet, calm and mature pupil. However, the teachers’ and the other pupils’ remarks to Zeynab indicate that they interpreted her behaviour according to assumptions based on the categorical identity «Muslim girl». Zeynab can become a «Norwegian girl» if she behaves in a certain way; which here means to be louder and to remove the hijab.

Zeynab still wears hijab, but she feels that she as a Muslim has to defend herself all the time. She gets verbally attacked and always has to answer back. Her experience is that people only ask questions in order for stereotypes to be confirmed. After several incidents like those mentioned above, she no longer bothers to answer back because it is not worth it. In her opinion, it takes a long time to change people’s image of Muslims. Zeynab has experienced that others have interpreted her actions only on the basis of the collective identity «Muslim girl» and they assume that they know who and how she is based on assumptions about that category. After repeatedly trying to resist these stereotypical assumptions, Zeynab has given up.

When you’re a Muslim, you need to put your religion before traditions and culture. When your religion says that it’s forbidden to force your daughter into marriage, then you’re not allowed to do that. The marriage is not valid if you force your children to get married. (…) Even if it is several Imams who say that it’s forbidden, it’s just bla, bla, bla. They [the older generation] don’t listen. I think that’s just the way it is in that generation. I think that things will be different with the next generation. Because they are, I think that they are more aware of the choices they make and what they choose to believe. And they try to filter out what’s good and what’s bad; what’s faith and what’s culture (Zeynab).

Zeynab is positive regarding Muslim women’s rights in the younger generation of Muslims in Norway and she finds support in the Quran. She refers to the Quran and «true» Islam when she talks about changed gender roles. Zeynab distinguishes between «culture» on the one hand and «religion» on the other hand. She also emphasises generational differences and she claims that the older generation is more concerned with maintaining the «old», «cultural» or «traditional» gender roles, in which the woman should get married at a young age, have children right away, obey her husband, always look nice for him, do all the cleaning and the cooking and take care of the children. According to Zeynab, the younger generation of Muslim women in Norway have more options and they can choose what they want to do in their lives. The separation of «culture» and «religion» and the emphasis on the younger generation of Muslims in Norway who follows «true» Islam is also evident in the interviews with the other Shia women and the Sunni Muslim women in this study, especially the youngest women who are in their twenties.

Sofia also highlights the positive view of women in the Quran and she stresses that the image of women has been wrongly interpreted by people and that culture/society/men/religious traditions have oppressed women:
On religious holidays they talk about ‘men and women and their roles in Islam’ [in the mosque]. They are equals [likesilt]. Okay, so men are stronger, but that doesn’t mean that they are not equals – or that they should be treated differently. (…) However, many Muslims do not understand that. They look down on women, not on men. Men are supposed to have the power, and that’s wrong. Mohammad himself didn’t do that. He had several wives, but he treated them the same. Right? He was not mean to them or anything like that. But today; some men say: ‘We have the power’, but most of these men do not have the knowledge. As long as you have the knowledge and the experience then you avoid problems in life and in the world (Sofia).

In Sofia’s opinion, Islam is originally a religion that favours gender equality, but historically and also today people (men) misunderstand due to a lack of knowledge. Sofia’s and Zeynab’s view of Islam as women-friendly is illustrative for the view of all the Muslim interviewees in this study. They emphasise Mohammad’s respect for women and that he greatly improved women’s position at the time when he lived. In their opinion, «true Islam» says that men and women have the same value and are equally respected. The people with knowledge of Islam know this, but many people do not know enough.

Zeynab’s story about being categorised as a «Muslim Norwegian», a third category, not fully Norwegian, is recognisable in the stories of several of the other Shia Muslim women in this study. They especially refer to the media debates about Muslims and the reactions they meet when they wear hijab. However, whereas Zeynab says that she has given up her efforts to explain and resist the stereotypical assumptions about Muslim women, some of the other interviewees are more positive. They emphasise openness and dialogue, and argue that majority Norwegians will change their views over time when they learn more about Islam.

Women from Church of Norway: «Teresa» and «Jenny»
Teresa is a woman in her forties. She is an «ethnic» majority Norwegian, but has a missionary background and has lived in another country for many years. Teresa participates in a women’s group in a Church of Norway congregation. She explains what religion means to her:

Interviewer: How important is religion for your identity?

Teresa: It is quite fundamental. I grew up in a Christian family, and it is not a given that you continue to be a Christian, but for me… through searching and by being a part of it, it has gradually become a bigger part, it has gradually gained importance. It is fundamental, it is essential to my whole existence.

Teresa emphasises how religion is deeply essential in her life. Later in the interview, she elaborates how religion gives meaning in her life; it gives her direction and a feeling of not being alone. In her everyday life, Teresa prays and meditates.
Jenny, another woman in the congregation in the Church of Norway, also stresses the importance of religion for her identity:

The faith is a beam [bærebjelke] in my life, a foothold, a foundation in life (...). It is the most basic actually, that I am created and willed by God (Jenny).

These quotes from Teresa and Jenny give a good illustration of how the interviewees from the Church of Norway, and indeed all the women in this study, talk about the meaning of religion for their identities. Belonging to a religious community is also something that they emphasise. Teresa describes her feeling of belonging:

Interviewer: Do you feel included as a citizen [medborger] in Norway?
Teresa: Yes, pretty much. Earlier I didn’t feel like that because I grew up in a different culture, so I have spent much of my adult life struggling with the feeling of some kind of belonging. To be a citizen has to do with belonging, (...) you are a citizen of a community. But gradually I feel more belonging; I’ve sort of worked my way into the community. And I think that belonging to a Church that is something bigger than me – also in a worldwide context – was very important for me earlier. But now, that I get to be part of this is a very important part of my belonging, my sense of belonging as a citizen [medborger] in the society where I am now.

As a missionary child, Teresa describes how she felt as an insider in the country where she grew up, but she looked different and everyone else defined her as different. When she came back to Norway she looked like everyone else, but she felt different. «I felt different inside in a way», Teresa explains. She did not have the same experiences and the same references as other teenagers. However, her Christian faith has been a constant part of her life and when she came back to Norway she felt that she belonged in a Norwegian Christian setting. She felt included in the congregation and it provided her with the sense of belonging that she needed, especially when she was in her adolescence. Teresa emphasizes her belonging to the local congregation, but also to a worldwide religious community.

Interviewer: Do you feel Norwegian although you grew up in another place?
Teresa: That is a difficult question. More and more. Earlier I didn’t. «What is it to be Norwegian?» I’ve thought. What is it? I’m not [the nationality of the country where she has lived] either. So I’ve used the term «third culture kids» which is used about those who have grown up abroad in different places. So who you are is a fusion of several things which results in something different – or if not something different… But perhaps you have a different belonging; it’s not necessarily connected to where you are geographically. As the years go by and I experience more and kind of settle in this country, in the «Norwegian» in a way, then I get less dependent on that belonging because I feel more secure. However, others think it’s important – so I guess it is important for me as well; to get a stronger sense of
belonging which is not necessarily about being Norwegian or not, but about being a human being. To be allowed to belong, as a basic need.

In this interview extract, Teresa articulates some of her experiences as what she calls a «third culture kid». She has struggled with the concept «Norwegian» and what it actually means to be just that. The feeling Teresa had of being different from other Norwegians at her age and the feeling of not really belonging in Norwegian society did not correspond with the expectations from people around her. Her experiences illustrate a sense of misrecognition in the sense that other people automatically expected her to «feel Norwegian», whereas Teresa did not. Her religious identity as a Christian has been more important than her national identity, and it has been a constant part of her identity and a source of belonging and security. Teresa emphasises belonging as a basic human need, but this belonging is not necessarily connected to a national identity.

Jenny, who is born and has lived most of her life in Norway, also emphasises belonging to a world-wide Christian community:

Wherever you travel in the world, you can go into a church and be a part of a community (Jenny).

Jenny’s and Teresa’s stories show how religious identity and religious community can be sources of belonging and security, both abroad and in Norway. Additionally, they describe how their Christian faith is a source of exclusion:

An experience when I was younger and in high school, was that… it was not said in that many words, but it was kind of unsaid that you shouldn’t flag your identity as a Christian. It was not a good idea. We understood that quite quickly (Teresa).

This quote illustrates an experience of being a minority as a Christian in the Norwegian society. Jenny has also experienced a feeling of loneliness as a «personal Christian» (believing Christian):

Many Christian children at school are very careful about saying that they are Christians. They keep their faith secret. I know that from my own experience. They feel very lonely (Jenny).

Jenny and Teresa are part of a congregation in the Church of Norway, which is the majority religion in Norway; however, the feeling of being a minority as a Christian is evident. Teresa’s and Jenny’s stories indicate that being an active member of a Christian congregation and having an «identity as a Christian», especially when growing up, is experienced as being very different from the majority of the Norwegian population who are passive members of Church of Norway.

Jenny’s and Teresa’s stories about being part of a religious community and the positive aspects related to feeling safe are also evident in the stories of the other women from Church of Norway in this study. Some of the single women have, however, felt
excluded from certain social events in some, but not all, Church of Norway congregations because the emphasis is on families; couples and children. Also the experience of being different as a «personal Christian» (believing Christian) is present in the stories of several of the other interviewees from Church of Norway. Yet, several have experienced that their identity as a believing Christian has led to other people’s trust and the assumption that they have high ethical awareness.

**Pentecostal Women: «Alma» and «Astrid»**

Alma is an «ethnic» majority Norwegian woman in her seventies. She is part of a women’s group in the Pentecostal movement in Norway, and she describes what religion means in her life:

(…) one has a standpoint where one feels safe. And that makes, yes, one stands more firmly. It gives some directions for your life. In that way it has had an enormous importance (Alma).

To be included in a religious community provides a sense of belonging and security. Alma describes this belonging as a solid base in life that gives her direction. She also stresses the importance of feeling at home and having a network:

To belong and to feel at home – that is essential. When you feel at home and you have a network around you, that is very important, I think. We see that when we are going through hard times, we have an enormous network, and often we say that we don’t even know how lucky we are (Alma).

Belonging to a religious community is experienced as positive in a time of crisis. In the interview, Alma underlines the support from others both locally and internationally during illness in the family. She emphasises the world-wide Pentecostal community and explains how her family was the object of prayer and received text messages from all parts of Norway and from all over the world. Belonging to a religious community has provided Alma with a feeling of safety and self-confidence. Moreover, she explains how her participation at Sunday school, at various meetings from an early age has encouraged her to speak in front of a group of people and also to work together in groups. Alma also mentions the leader training that she has been given within her religious community.

Astrid, another «ethnic» majority Pentecostal woman, also emphasises the feeling of safety and belonging – to feel at home – in the Pentecostal community. However, she also addresses internal restrictions and barriers in her congregation:

(…) It has been safe, obviously, you knew where you belonged. You, you were within a system – that’s maybe a slightly wrong word, but you are within a relation where you could feel at home. As long as you followed the prevailing rules (Astrid).
This quote emphasises the positive aspects of belonging to a religious community, but it also points to aspects of social control. Astrid describes the congregation as a restricted and close-knit community which sometimes can feel «narrow». She recalls when she was young and had the feeling that everybody watched what she was doing; she had to be loyal to the congregation, and never disagree with the preacher. Astrid thought it was difficult to be a part of the Pentecostal movement when she was younger. She claims that the difference between Pentecostal youth and other youth was greater when she was young. As a teenager she was not allowed to dance or drink alcohol and she never attended parties, which made her different from other teenagers. Astrid contrasts her childhood and youth with the upbringing of her own children and grandchildren, and she emphasizes that today Pentecostals are not very different from other people in Norway today.

Interviewer: Do you feel included as a citizen [medborger] in Norway?

Alma: Yes. Absolutely! Yes, I am.

National identity is not a big issue in Alma’s story. She does not elaborate on that in the interview and her identity as a Norwegian is taken for granted. Alma has, however, experienced that people outside the Pentecostal movement have met her with scepticism and prejudice because of her religious identity as a Pentecostal:

You can experience that people think you are strange because you’re a Pentecostalist [pinsevann] because – I think it’s because people don’t know what it is. Ignorance. And it’s the same with immigrants; we think that they are strange and we distance ourselves, but maybe it is ignorance that is the main reason (Alma).

Alma compares this prejudice to how majority Norwegians look at immigrants. She has experienced to be seen as «strange», and she thinks it is due to lack of actual knowledge about Pentecostalism.

To be a Pentecostal, it was to be something very strange. Earlier it was viewed as very strange. People thought that we climbed in our curtains (laughter) and did all kinds of weird things (Astrid).

Astrid has also experienced prejudice and scepticism from people outside the Pentecostal movement. She also remembers the restrictions in the Dissenter law (Dissenterloven)\textsuperscript{13} when she started working and she felt put on the sideline as a Pentecostal. According to Astrid, it was an important shift when that law was abolished (1969).

Alma and Astrid, who belong to a religious minority in Norway, have experienced both legal barriers and more informal scepticism from people outside the Pentecostal movement. Their experiences show that they have been excluded due to their religious identity and belonging. However, Alma and Astrid feel included in the Norwegian
Similar experiences of being met with scepticism as Pentecostals, but yet feeling included as Norwegians are evident in the stories of the other Pentecostal women in this study. Also the emphasis on the religious community as a safe and essential place of belonging is common in all the interviews. One of the interviewees, however, says that it can be difficult to live up to the standard of being «perfect» and that the Pentecostal congregation mainly is for so-called «successful» people. Being divorced or having divorced parents can be quite challenging, she claims. Being a family; a heterosexual couple with children is the norm, and those who deviate from that norm experience that it can be difficult to be fully included in all the activities in the religious communities.

Being recognized as equal Norwegian citizens?

Citizenship in a broad sense (medborgerskap) is connected to identities, belonging and lived practices. Initially in this article I asked: What does it entail to be a «Norwegian» today, and how do gender and religion play into that? How are inclusionary and exclusionary dynamics experienced by religious minority and majority women? The stories above illustrate some of the complexities and the struggles involved in negotiating identities as religious, as women and as «ethnic» and religious minorities or majorities in Norway. The findings in this study show that the interviewed women constantly do identity work in their daily lives – and in the interview situation – and that they negotiate and sometimes resist ascribed categorical identities. In this last part of the article, I will sum up and discuss some of these issues connected to «lived citizenship»; belonging and identity, inclusion and exclusion, and what it means to be «Norwegian».

Astrid’s and Alma’s experiences show that they have been excluded earlier due to their religious identity and belonging. Their experiences illustrate both legal barriers (the Dissenter law) and more informal scepticism from people outside the Pentecostal movement. They have experienced to be seen as «strange», and they think it is due to lack of actual knowledge about Pentecostals. Ingunn Folkestad Breistein (2003) has studied the struggle of the Norwegian so-called «dissidents» for religious freedom from 1891–1969, and she claims that people in the churches outside Church of Norway (Pentecostals and others) were not seen as «good Norwegians» during this period. Today, it is legitimate to be part of a church outside the majority church, Breistein claims. Astrid’s and Alma’s stories presented in this article support this claim. They now feel included in the Norwegian «we». They do not have any stories about being «Norwegian» – that is taken for granted. Their stories about «Norwegianness» illustrate a more general finding in the interviews with the «ethnic» majority Norwegians, namely that national identity as an «ethnic» majority Norwegian is the norm and therefore not articulated or questioned. They do not experience a discrepancy between their personal identities as «Norwegians» and the collective identity as «Norwegians» that is ascribed to them.

Teresa’s story is interesting because she is seen by others as an «ethnic» majority Norwegian and therefore expected to «feel Norwegian». Her experience of being part
of the majority, but not herself feeling totally comfortable with it, also says something about «Norwegianness» which is often not articulated. The majority position is often difficult to name because it is the norm, and «those who are securely housed within its borders usually do not examine it» (Frankenberg 1993:228–229). However, Teresa’s experiences as a missionary child, what she calls a «third culture kid», have made her question the assumed «Norwegianness» that she is expected to inhabit. «What is it to be Norwegian?» Teresa asks. She describes a feeling of belonging to different places. Her story also problematises the notion of national identity. Even if you are a Norwegian citizen by law, your sense of belonging and personal identity is not necessarily restricted to Norway or to being Norwegian. Teresa’s experiences illustrate a sense of misrecognition because other people automatically expected her to «feel Norwegian», whereas Teresa did not.

The Christian women in this study – both from the Church of Norway and from the Pentecostal movement – talk about a feeling of being alone or seen as strange because of their identity as Christians when they grew up and they have experienced to be part of a minority as «personal Christians» (believing Christians) in a largely secularized Norwegian society. However, their identities as «Norwegians» are recognized – or even demanded in Teresa’s case. Her belonging to a world-wide Christian religion has not been questioned with regards to her «Norwegianness», neither has her upbringing in a different country.

The Muslim women in this study on the other hand, have experienced ascribed Otherness, misrecognition and exclusion from Norwegian society at large. Sayings like «My heart beats for both Norway and Pakistan» (Hannah) and «I love [my country of origin] as much as I love Norway» (Sofia) illustrate how the term medborgerskap [citizenship] is connected to emotions. Especially the Muslim respondents who have an immigrant background or have parents with an immigrant background refer to their feelings for Norway and/or their country of origin. They describe feelings of belonging to two different places, and in that respect they can be citizens [medborgere] of two different countries.

However, the Muslim interviewees, who have lived most of their lives in Norway, are not recognized as fully Norwegian. Their legal statuses as Norwegian citizens do not seem to be the most important aspect of citizenship in the broad sense of the term. The stories of Fatima, Hannah, Zeynab and Sofia illustrate a pattern in stories of the Muslim interviewees of being excluded from a notion of «Norwegianness». Their experiences indicate that they are categorized as «not Norwegians». The ascribed identities as «Muslim woman», «immigrant», «foreigner» and «Muslim Norwegians» – in the meaning of not being acknowledged as fully Norwegian – indicate that they are not considered to be equal members of the imagined Norwegian nation (Anderson 1991). They are positioned as both «ethnic» minorities and as being part of a stigmatised religious minority group. Their gendered experiences are also evident. The Muslim women in this study – both Shia and Sunni Muslims - are experiencing misrecognition where the categorical identity based on gender and religion is used to interpret their actions and subjectivities. The ways in which they experience the majority Norwegians’ views of Muslims, indicate that the category «Muslim woman» as an ascribed
identity—symbolized by the hijab—is rather narrow. The category «Muslim woman» is a category associated with many meanings, usually linked to images of oppression. Miriam Cooke (2008) claims that «Muslim women are no longer thought of as individuals: collectively they have become the Muslimwoman» (Cooke 2008:91). Cooke combines the words «Muslim» and «woman» into one word, Muslimwoman, which evoke a singular identity (Cooke 2008:91).

In Fatima’s story the concept of «integration» also illustrates a central issue in several of the interviews with Muslim women, and the term «integration» brought up the intersections of nationality, gender and religion. In Fatima’s own eyes, she is well integrated into Norwegian society because she participates both in paid working life and in voluntary work. However, her experience is that the society at large (mainly here referring to the majority view in the public debate) do not see her as «integrated» because she is categorised as «a Muslim woman of Pakistani origin». In Fatima’s story the categories «Muslim», «woman» and «Pakistani» intermingle in the sense that they position her as «not Norwegian».

The stories about hijab also indicate that Muslim women in Norway can be viewed as «Norwegians» in specific social interactions—but that is only if they behave and dress accordingly to the stereotypical image of the «Norwegian woman». Then they would have to remove the hijab, and be «loud», «brave», «strong» and «resourceful», in other words they would have to constantly prove that they are not like the stereotypical «Muslim woman». Implicitly these adjectives are associated with «Norwegianness» and they describe qualities that Muslim women allegedly have to learn specifically in Norway.

Categories are not set in stone, and the ways in which the interviewed women negotiate their identities and resist ascribed categories also show that. Zeynab and Sofia illustrate a common view amongst the Muslim interviewees when they argue in favor of women’s rights from a religious point of view and interpret the Quran in line with a gender equality agenda. The way in which they separate «culture» from «religion», and find support for gender equality and women’s rights in «true» Islam is also found in other studies of Muslims in Norway (see Jacobsen 2002, 2006; Østberg 2003; Andersson 2000; Thun 2004; Aarset 2006). In that way the Muslim women in this study challenge both the Norwegian majority society’s stereotypical view of Muslim women, secular feminists view of religious women, and also cultural traditions that have used religion as a source in order to legitimize women’s oppression. However, the question in the years to come is whether the room for creating and articulating for instance Muslim-Norwegian identities or claims for gender equality based on the Quran will increase or decrease.

Conclusion

This article has focused on lived experiences of citizenship among Muslim and Christian women in Norway. Religious identity and belonging to a religious community are central aspects in the identity work of all the interviewees in this study. As indicated
earlier, this might not be surprising, since the interviewees are all active members of their respective religious communities. Thus, this finding is not generalisable to all Muslim and Christian women in Norway. However, this study illustrates the complexity and the dynamics involved in negotiating identity at the intersection of religion, gender and nationality, and also processes of inclusion and exclusion related to «Norwegianness», which can have relevance beyond this particular and local study (Coffey and Atkinson 1996:162–163). I claim that identity work is a useful intake to understanding lived citizenship because it sheds light on inclusionary and exclusionary processes in a multicultural society. This article has showed that identities are processual and dynamic; however, the stereotypical collective categories often seem fixed. By including minority and majority experiences, the differences of power in minoritizing and majoritizing processes have become evident (Staunæs 2003; Berg et al. 2010). The image of «the Muslimwoman» (Cooke 2008) and the difficulty of resisting this ascribed collective category show the active process of reducing a heterogeneous group of women to a stereotypical collective identity – which is seen as «not fully Norwegian». In the debate about integration the perspective is usually from the state or from the majority point of view, and «ethnic» and religious minorities are seen as a threat to social cohesion in society. However, by studying lived citizenship at the micro level, other perspectives are evident. The stories in this article indicate that the category «Norwegian» is a rather narrow and exclusionary term mainly based on an ethnos-understanding of being a Norwegian citizen in a broad sense (medborger). My findings support the claim that Norway is more within the ethnos-tradition with regards to feelings of acceptance and belonging in society (Brochmann and Hagelund 2010:300). This ethnos-based understanding of Norwegian citizenship is based on a common cultural heritage and descent. Christianity seems to be a part of the common cultural heritage on which this understanding is based. Islam on the other hand, is mainly seen as an obstacle to integration (Døving 2009). Categories like «Muslim», «woman» and «Pakistani» intermingle in the sense that they position someone as «not fully Norwegian». I would argue that the ethnos-based understanding of Norwegianness and the current debate about integration is experienced as exclusionary by those who – from a majority point of view – are not considered to be «ethnic» Norwegians, and that these perspectives often are forgotten in the larger integration debates. A timely question would be: How can the majority society expect «ethnic» and religious minorities to «integrate» into the Norwegian society if they are not recognized as equal and fully Norwegians?

Acknowledgements

I owe thanks to Beatrice Halsaa and the research group; Citizenship, Gender and Minorities at the Centre for Gender Research, University of Oslo. Thanks to Sasha Roseneil for useful comments on an early draft. Also thanks to an anonymous referee and the editors for constructive comments and suggestions.
Notes

1 This research is conducted as a part of FEMCIT: «Gendered Citizenship in Multicultural Europe: The Impact of Contemporary Women’s Movements» and PLUREQ: «Gender Equality, Cultural Diversity, Religious Pluralism: State policies and feminist interventions». This article is based on Chapter 5 and 6 in Halsaa, Beatrice, Cecilie Thun and Line Nyhagen Peddelli (2010) Religion, Gender and Citizenship: A Case Study of Christian and Muslim Women in Norway (unpublished research report), however here the analysis is developed further.

2 The concept multicultural is used descriptively – to describe ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in a society. Bhikhu Parekh writes that «the term ‘multicultural’ refers to the fact of cultural diversity, the term ‘multiculturalism’ to a normative response to that fact» (Parekh 2006:6).

3 The word «citizenship» in Norwegian usually refers to the legal aspect of citizenship (statsborgerskap). Citizenship in a more broad term, the way it is used here (in Norwegian translated to medborgerskap or samfunnsborgerskap) is not a common word in Norwegian, except in academic language (see also Brochmann 2002:56–60).

4 «Ethnic group» is in this perspective defined as a «categorical identity» and refers to assumed difference from the «nation» which designates an «Other-identity» (Andersson 2006:33–34). «Social identity» is produced in contexts of direct interaction, for example being a «pupil» in a school context. «Personal identity» is understood as the identity that a person attributes to herself as a result of reflection upon, resistance against and/or habituation of the sameness-identities ascribed to her» (Andersson 2006:34).

5 The concepts of recognition and misrecognition are inspired by Charles Taylor (1994), however, Andersson also criticises Taylor’s use of these concepts because he sees no difference between misrecognition of ethnic minority group cultures and misrecognition of personal identities (see Andersson 2000:53–55).

6 January 1, 2010, The Norwegian Humanist-Ethical Association had 81 800 members, Islam had 90 000 members, the Roman Catholic Church had 67 000, the Pentecostal Movement had 40 000 members. Other small faith communities include Methodists, Jews, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Ba’Hai communities (http://www.ssb.no/trosamf/). 9 % of the population does not belong to any religious community (Daugstad and Østby 2009).

7 The interviews have been conducted by Beatrice Halsaa and Hannah Helseth. The interviews were conducted in Norwegian and the quotes have been translated to English by Cecilie Thun.

8 Racialization can be defined as «the categorization of people on the basis of characteristics that are assumed to be innate» (Gullestad 2006:25).

9 Hijab can be defined as «practice of dressing modestly» or «Islamic headgear» (Jacobsen 2006:373).

10 The hijab debate that is refered to here started after February 4th 2009 when the Minister of Justice, Knut Storberget, announced on his web-page that hijab should be allowed as part of the police uniform in Norway. This decision was followed by a debate and much resistance, and the decision was withdrawn on February 20th 2009. The interviews for this study were conducted during this hijab debate.

11 Jacobsen (2006:273) writes about the verses in the Quran which mentions the hijab and also more about different ways Muslim women in Norway interpret these verses. See also Førde (2006) and Aarset (2006) about the use of hijab among young Muslim women in a Norwegian context.
The interviewed Shia women have backgrounds from different countries, and I am not mentioning any specific countries due to anonymity reasons.

The first Dissenter law came in 1845 and it affected persons who were Christians but not members of the Church of Norway (see more in Breistein 2003). The law provided Christians outside the Church of Norway religious freedom and the right to organize. However, they were not allowed to teach Christianity in schools.

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