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A Growing Consensus? *A History of Public Debates on Islamophobia in Norway*

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ABSTRACT The term *Islamophobia* is seldom used in Norwegian public debates, but people are increasingly recognising the phenomenon to which it refers. Regardless of the labelling – anti-Muslim sentiments, discrimination against Muslims, prejudice, harassment, or enmity against Muslims – there seems to be a new awareness of Islamophobia as a problem that needs to be addressed. Although only 56 per cent of the respondents to the population survey conducted by the Norwegian Center for Holocaust and Minority Studies (CHM) saw a need to combat harassment against Muslims, 81 per cent believed negative attitudes towards Muslims were widespread. The population's perception of prejudice as being prevalent in Norwegian society might be a reflection of a growing concern for Islamophobia expressed in public debates. This chapter gives an overview of the cases that put Islamophobia on the map in Norway: When are anti-Muslim discourses seen as problematic – and why? It identifies developments in the understanding of Islamophobia and asks whether the acknowledgement of the phenomenon has resulted from a growing consensus of Islamophobia as a social and political problem that cuts across various political standpoints.

KEYWORDS Islamophobia | public discourse | conspiracy theory | 22 July | anti-Muslim racism | Norway

1. INTRODUCTION

The term *Islamophobia* has never become properly established in Norwegian public debates. The phenomenon it refers to – widespread prejudice, acts and practices that exclude or discriminate against people on the grounds that they are or are assumed to be Muslim – however, is increasingly recognised.¹ The aim of this chapter is to locate when and in what ways Islamophobia (regardless of what it is called) has been debated in the Norwegian press: When was Islamophobia first recognised as a problem? What are the cases that triggered discussions of Islamophobia, and how have the boundaries of what can be said about Muslims been negotiated?

Not surprisingly, the history of an understanding of Islamophobia is linked to the history of Muslim migration to Norway.² Xenophobia, discrimination, and racism have been side effects of debates on migration, and an understanding of Islamophobia has developed hand-in-hand with these issues being publicly discussed.

The late 1980s marked the start of a long-lasting and often conflict-oriented public debate on migration and integration in Norway. An important – almost paradigmatic – shift in these debates was when “the migrants” became “the Muslims”. To begin, Norwegians of Muslim background were generally understood to be immigrants with highly varied national backgrounds, and described with reference to their country of origin rather than their religious affiliation. This changed during the 1990s. The understanding of Islamophobia as a specific phenomenon, different from general xenophobia, is linked to this change. A change from “ethnicity” to “religion” as an identifying marker was not necessarily a one-sided affair, as an increasing number of young Norwegians of Muslim background during the same decade started self-identifying publicly as “Muslim” rather than “Pakistani”, “Moroccan”, or “Turk”.³ Towards the end of the chapter, I will discuss whether the understanding of Islamophobia can also be seen as part of a discourse of “resistance” and identity politics among Muslims.

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1. For a definition of the term *Islamophobia*, see the introduction to this book; and for a discussion on how Islamophobia is related to racism, see chapter 8 in this book, Cora Alexa Døving, “Muslims are...: Contextualising survey answers”.
 2. See chapter 8, “Muslims are...: Contextualising Survey Answers”, for a brief introduction to the history of Muslims in Norway.
 3. Cora Alexa Døving and Siv Ellen Kraft, *Religion i pressen* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget 2013); Christian Stokke, *A multicultural society in the making. How Norwegian Muslims challenge a white nation* (PhD, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Department of Social Anthropology, 2012), 7.

One of the debates that has triggered discussions about Islamophobia is that on the term itself, and how it should be conceptualised.⁴ These conceptual discussions, however, did not enter the wider public sphere in Norway until 2001, which is late compared to discussions in Britain, Sweden, and France. In Norway, conceptual variations of the term were discussed seriously first around 2009 and then again after the terror attacks of 22 July 2011. In the search for data in the archives of national newspapers, the term Islamophobia was therefore not useful as a starting point for identifying the understanding of what it refers to. Since the aim of this text is to identify some sort of public understanding of the phenomenon rather than tracking the history of the term, the chapter will refer to debates that centred around *a concern* about prejudices, aversion, discrimination, anti-Muslim sentiments, or attacks on Muslims as a point of departure. To simplify reading, I will use the term *Islamophobia* when addressing these phenomena, regardless of the term used in the different debates.

The numbers of articles on Islam and Muslims that appeared in the Norwegian press between the end of the 1980s and 2012 is overwhelming; the press seemed to possess an unlimited interest in the presence of Muslims. This chapter has no intention of covering the breadth and depth of these debates and how they have been fed into Islamophobia.⁵ Rather, I have selected a few cases based on the criteria that they, in addition to starting with a negative angle on Muslims, also produced a meta-discussion (often marginal) on the consequences that such negative depictions could have for Muslims. I have chosen some of the cases that can be defined as milestones in the history of both Islamophobia and the attempts to counter it in Norway. I refer to them as milestones because the cases have become references in the national history of Muslim migration, as well as having promoted discussions on Islamophobia.

The rise of Islamophobia in Norway is intimately linked to the rise of populist right-wing formations that mobilise on an anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim platform.⁶

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4. The history of the term has been of little interest in these debates. It was first used in French in the book *La Politique musulmane dans l'Afrique Occidentale Française* from 2010, by Alain Quellien. The book criticised French colonial administrators' attitudes towards Muslims. The first usage of the word in the English language can be cited in the works of Edward Said, from 1985. He used the word when arguing for the close association between "Islamophobia and anti-semitism" throughout history.
 5. Arranged marriages, Koran schooling, Muslim values (whatever they may be), imams and the building of mosques are examples of typical themes in the general debates. Due to their ongoing nature, they are not discussed in this chapter other than as a general backdrop for more time-specific events.
 6. Sindre Bangstad, *Anders Breivik and the Rise of Islamophobia* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2014).

When Islamophobia is recognised and discussed, it is therefore often entangled with political arguments raised against the right-wing populist party, the Progress Party (*Fremskrittspartiet*). Consequently, the issue of Islamophobia has often been framed as part of a right/left polarisation established in Norwegian politics. In other words, Islamophobia is often seen as a politicised concept used rhetorically with references to different views on migration or multiculturalism. Inasmuch as the title of this chapter indicates that there is an increasing consensus concerning Islamophobia in Norway, it is because Islamophobia seems to be (slowly) becoming an issue for political parties and debaters independent of a right/left axis in politics (2019). I suggest that the increase in populist and more extreme right-wing milieus in recent years has led to a more hegemonic understanding among politicians of Islamophobia as a phenomenon that needs to be politically addressed, and that it is a phenomenon that combines conspiracy theories and racist elements.

2. MUSLIMS IN THE PRESS – A GENERAL BACKGROUND

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor has pointed out that debates on the understanding of a multicultural society in all Western European countries have become debates on Islam and Muslims.⁷ This is also the case in Norway.⁸ A media survey for 2009 showed that the terms “Islam” and “Muslims” were used more often than the term “swine flu”, which relates to the biggest news of 2009, and that the term “Muslims” was used almost as many times as the name of Norway’s prime minister.⁹ The finding illustrates a public sphere with a certain obsession with the issue of Muslim presence.

The press is the primary source of information about Islam and Muslims for most Norwegians.¹⁰ It is therefore reasonable to assume that the media image affects the population’s beliefs and attitudes towards Muslims. Due to the “logic of media”, Islam/Muslims are often visible through exceptional events.¹¹ Emphasis on sensational rather than everyday matters applies to news in general, but

7. Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (New York: Harvard University Press, 2007).

8. Fritt Ords medieanalyse 2016: http://www.frittord.no/images/uploads/files/Muslim_og_islam_i_mediene_2016.pdf.

9. Retriever medieanalyse 2009: <https://www.imdi.no/contentassets/e187852a18ca46afb6f2-bc7e4915d6ad/medieanalyse-innvandring-og-integrering-i-norske-medier>.

10. Elisabeth Eide and Anne Hege Simonsen, *Mistenkelige utlendinger. Minoriteter i norsk presse gjennom hundre år* (Oslo: Høyskoleforlaget, 2007).

11. Stefano Allievi, “The Media and debates on Islam”, in Brigitte Marechal, B., Allievi, S., Das-setto, F., Nielsen, J. eds., *Muslims in Enlarged Europe. Religion and Society* (Boston: Brill, 2003), p. 291.

because Islam is linked to a part of the population that is vulnerable on account of its migration background and minority status, the consequences of the media logic can be serious. Several studies of ways in which Islam is presented in mass media have documented how stereotypical notions are produced or reproduced.¹² A recent study of representations of Muslims in the British press (from 2000 to 2015), found that Muslims are generally negatively framed, whilst Islam is characterised as an intolerant and violent religion.¹³ The history of so-called migration debates in Norway is similarly marked by depictions of Muslims as “a political problem that must be solved”, even in cases where there is no breach of policy or social norms.¹⁴ But some changes have occurred in recent years: Norwegian newspapers today provide a more nuanced picture of Islam than they did just a few years ago, not least because of the increasing number of Muslims participating in public debates. Muslim voices are, as will be shown, central to the increased recognition of Islamophobia as a societal problem in the arena of public debates. National newspapers also have journalists who have covered Islam-related issues for several years and who have actively sought knowledge of Islam and Muslims. Several of these journalists have contributed to an increased focus on discrimination and prejudice against Muslims in the press.¹⁵

The real turning point in the history of the public awareness of Islamophobia in Norway is to be found in the aftermath of the terror attack on 22 July, 2011. Just before the right-wing extremist Anders Behring Breivik killed 77 people, he posted a manuscript on the internet titled *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*. The manuscript explained that Breivik defined the attack as a legitimate act of self-defence on behalf of the European people. His core message was that in the face of an ongoing Islamisation of Europe, the political and social “elite” have entered into a pact with the enemy. These ideas led to a public identification of right-wing extremism as a producer of Islamophobic ideology and of conspiracy theories as essential elements of Islamophobia. However, the first recognition of conspiracy theories as a specific element of xenophobia is to be found twenty years earlier, in the debates triggered by a fake letter from a Muslim to a politician.

12. Elisabeth Poole, “Reporting Islam: media representations of British Muslims” (New York: Tauris 2002); Peter Hervik, Elisabeth Eide, and Kunelius, R., “A Long and Messy Event”, in *Transnational Media Events. The Mohammed Cartoons and the Imagined Clash of Civilizations*, eds. Eide, E., Kunelius, R., and Phillips, A. (Gothenbeug: Nordicom, 2008); Cora Alexa Døving and Siv Ellen Kraft, *Religion i pressen* (Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, 2013).

13. Saifuddin Ahmed and Jörg Matthes, “Media representation of Muslims and Islam from 2000 to 2015: A meta-analysis”, *The International Communication Gazette* 79, no. 3 (2017).

14. Døving and Kraft, *Religion i pressen*.

15. *Ibid.*

3. A LETTER FROM MUSTAFA

The so-called Mustafa letter was a fabricated letter written to the chairman of The Progress Party, Carl I. Hagen. The Progress Party developed from being an anti-tax protest movement to becoming an anti-immigrant right-wing populist party, with a breakthrough in 1987 when anti-immigration politics really entered the stage in Norway.¹⁶ At an election rally in September the same year, Hagen read out the “Mustafa letter” for his audience, and the content was immediately circulated by the press:

Allah is Allah, and Muhammad is His Prophet! You are fighting in vain, Mr. Hagen! Islam, the only true faith, will conquer Norway too. One day, mosques will be as common in Norway as churches are today, and the children of my grandchildren will live to see this. I know, and all Muslims in Norway know, that one day, the Norwegian population will come to (our) faith, and that this country will be Muslim! We give birth to more children than you, and many right-believing Muslims come to Norway each year, men in fertile age. One day, the heathen cross in the flag will be gone too!¹⁷

Hagen used the letter as “evidence” for his argument that asylum seekers were about to take over the country. *VG*, one of the national newspapers, quickly revealed the letter as fake. Mustafa existed but had not written the letter.¹⁸

The letter’s content gave rise to a new concern over migration politics and the year 1987 represents a milestone in the history of the Progress Party’s growth as it tripled its election results that year. But the letter also led to public reflection on a new type of xenophobia: *fear of an intended Muslim takeover*.¹⁹ Journalists described the letter as “something that would spread racist attitudes” and reported that Mustafa himself and his children were subjected to several threatening phone calls with racist statements. In the newspaper *Aftenposten*, the President of Parliament Jo Benkow condemned reference to the letter as it would spread fear of immigrants.²⁰ Hagen was also sued for racism by an immigrant organisation.

16. The Progress Party has become the country’s third largest political party, and a part of the centre-right government coalition.

17. If not otherwise indicated, all translations are by Cora Alexa Døving.

18. Sindre Bangstad, “Re-coding nationalism: Islam, Muslims and Islamophobia in Norway before and after July 22 2011”, in *Islamophobia Studies Yearbook*, ed. Farid Hafez (Vienna: New Academic Press, 2016).

19. “Hagens falske brevhetts” *VG*, September 8, 1987, front page and 6–7.

20. Jo Benkow, “Hvirvler opp rasistiske holdninger”, *Aftenposten*, September 9, 1987, 4.

Even though the word “Muslim” occurred several times in the letter, the public responses referred to xenophobia (*innvanderhets/frykt*) and racism against Pakistanis rather than to fear or hatred of Muslims. This illustrates an interesting gap between the *content* of the letter, which consists of what would become classic Islamophobic claims, and the *reception* to it, which saw it as racist, xenophobic, and as targeting migrant workers from Pakistan. Still, the Mustafa letter has become an important reference in later years’ understanding of Islamophobia, as it was the first time the depiction of a Muslim takeover appeared in the public press and was acknowledged as being a substantial component of xenophobia and racism.

4. FROM LABOUR MIGRANTS TO POLITICAL MUSLIMS – FROM XENOPHOBIA TO ISLAMOPHOBIA

In the introduction, I referred to the transition when “the migrants” became “the Muslims” as a paradigmatic shift in public debates on Islamophobia. This shift is related to, or rather overlaps with, a shift from seeing immigrants as a category of “poor non-organised people” to a depiction of Muslims as a minority group with the potential to mobilise politically. It is when a minority is associated with some sort of political threat that stereotyping of them seems to increase.²¹ When the Runnymede Trust, in its now-classic report from 1997, *Islamophobia – A Challenge for Us All*, re-launched the term Islamophobia, it described the Rushdie affair as one of the “formative and defining events” of processes that would come to stereotype Muslims because the case made the Muslims visible as a political force.²²

THE RUSHDIE AFFAIR

In 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini’s religious ruling (fatwa) that Salman Rushdie, the author of *The Satanic Verses*, deserved the death penalty, led to a diplomatic crisis between Iran and several Western countries. It also led to Muslims all over Europe demonstrating against a book they saw as blasphemous, and “Muslims in Europe” becoming visible as a political force. Although the Rushdie case did not feed into general debates on multiculturalism and integration, which were few in Norway

21. Historian Frode Ulvund illustrates this connection in a book on different religious minorities in Norwegian history: *Nasjonens antiborgere. Forestillinger om religiøse minoriteter som samfunnsfiender i Norge, ca. 1814–1964* (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademiske, 2017).

22. The Runnymede Trust Report, *Islamophobia – A Challenge for us all* (1997) 27.

at that time, the press coverage of “angry Muslims burning books in England” led to the beginning of a long-lasting public discussion on freedom of speech versus “Muslim values”.

As a response to the fatwa, the Islamic Defence Council (IDC)²³ was established in Norway as an organ representing 20,000 Norwegian Muslims who proclaimed that they would use all legal means to stop the publication of a Norwegian edition of the book. Demonstrations were organised²⁴ and, according to the newspaper *VG*, this was the “biggest Muslim event ever held in Norway.”²⁵ The press referred to individual Muslims, stating that this was not a demonstration against freedom of speech, but more generally against abusive language targeting Muslims. Although most comments and letters to the editors of different newspapers adopted a negative approach in using adjectives such as “fanatics”, “mediaeval”, and “barbaric”, attention was also paid to the problem of negatively stereotyping Muslims.

When a Muslim who was a member of Oslo City Council and the Labour Party in Oslo stated that he would not hesitate to kill Rushdie, the press coverage of the affair became even more marked by anger and shock. At the same time, organisations working against discrimination and racism reported an increase in experiences of prejudice among Muslims in general. A few Muslim voices were also present in public debates, reporting how negative depictions of Muslims in general had led to negative experiences for them personally.²⁶

It was in the aftermath of the Rushdie affair that references to prejudice against Muslims rather than against immigrants (Pakistanis) emerged for the first time in the Norwegian press.²⁷ One example is the reaction to a population survey showing that attitudes towards Muslims’ right to practice their religion had changed dramatically after the Rushdie affair: several politicians and researchers commented on the finding with warnings against negative generalisations of Muslims.²⁸

In 1993, the Rushdie affair once again became a media event when an attempt was made to assassinate William Nygaard (who barely survived), the publisher of the Norwegian version of *The Satanic Verses*. Very quickly, Muslim organisations

23. Later to become the organisation *Islamsk Råd Norge*.

24. On February 25, 1989, 3,000 Muslims gathered in Oslo.

25. “Siste sjanse”, *VG*, February 27, 1989, 11.

26. *Norsk Telegram Bureau*, February 24, 1989.

27. In Britain, the affair led to debates about whether existing laws could be used to protect groups against blasphemy, and the question of whether religious groups should have the same legal protection for “the collective dignity” as the protection given to groups defined by “race” and “gender”. I found no record of this type of debate in Norwegian newspapers.

28. *Norsk Telegram Bureau*, April 18, 1989.

cooperated in making a public statement saying that the murder attempt was a “violent act from which they strongly distanced themselves.”²⁹ In addition to this, Oslo’s largest mosque made a public statement: “We condemn the book. But we kill no one.”³⁰ These reactions illustrate a climate in which Muslim organisations knew that solely by being Muslim, they could be held responsible, or at least be seen as representatives of extremism. Muslim debaters tried to explain how it felt to be asked constantly to take a stand against the banning of the book. Still, most of the national newspapers reported an increase in experiences of anti-Muslim attitudes and warned against it: “Rhetorical clichés such as ‘fanatical Muslims’ make us blind to the diversity within the Muslim world.”³¹ The editor of *Aftenposten* warned against “making Islam our new enemy.”³² Although the press, both in terms of op-ed articles, letter to the editor and pieces written by journalists, was dominated by expressions such as “Muslim values at war with European values”,³³ several commentators in different papers and media channels warned against seeing Muslims as a single mass.

According to the Runnymede Trust’s first definition of Islamophobia (1997), the understanding of Islam as a monolithic and static religion, as well as the collectivising of Muslims as aggressive by nature, is the core of the phenomenon.³⁴ The Rushdie affair was the starting point for recognising these two traits of Islamophobia and for combating them. However, there was no discussion of what to call this form of prejudice. This discussion started at the time of the terrorist acts on September 11, 2001 in the United States, hereafter referred to as 9/11.

9/11

It is widely documented in Western countries that the framing of Muslims in mass media changed dramatically in the aftermath of the terror attacks on 9/11 in 2001: Muslims were now described as a threat to civilisation.³⁵ The expression “fear of

29. “Muslimer i Norge: Tar avstand fra Nygaard attentatet”, NTB in *Dagbladet* and *VG*, October 11, 1993.

30. “Sunnimuslimer: Vi dreper ingen”, *Aftenposten*, October 12, 1993, 4.

31. Jo Bech-Karlsen, “Media skaper kulturkonflikter”, *Bergens Tidene*, October 13, 1993, 6.

32. Harald Stanghelle, “Blir islam vårt nye fiendebilde?” *Aftenposten*, October 13, 1993, 14.

33. For example, “Verdikamp på liv og død”, *Aftenposten*, October 16, 1993, 4.

34. The Runnymede Trust Report 1997, 4. These elements are still central in the latest report in which Islamophobia is defined as anti-Muslim racism.

35. The Runnymede Trust Report 2017; Mattias Gardell, *Islamofobi* (Oslo: Spartacus Forlag, 2011); Sindre Bangstad, *Anders Breivik and The Rise of Islamophobia*, (London and New York: Zed Books, 2014).

Muslims” (*muslimfrykt*) suddenly became one of the most common concepts in Norwegian newspapers. Media coverage of extremism was naturally overwhelming, but it also led to a discourse on how this might feed into Islamophobia. The press functioned as an arena for expressions of fear of Muslims *and* as an arena for warning against such fear. One month after 9/11, The Norwegian Centre against Racism organised a campaign to combat fear of Muslims. With funding from the state and from the private sector, the organisation hung up posters in buses and trams. These consisted of the text “Hate at first sight?” and a photo of a veiled woman. The press referred to the campaign, but only briefly.³⁶

Several politicians and academics reminded the public of how important it was not to fear or hate Norwegian Muslims because of the terror attacks in USA. Prime Minister Kjell Magne Bondevik, also the leader of the Christian Democrat party, warned against seeing the attacks as a “war between religions”,³⁷ and 11 bishops sent out a message warning against the “harassment of Muslims”.³⁸

“Anti-Muslim sentiments on the increase in Europe” was a title of an article referring to a report on incidents in the EU countries after 9/11.³⁹ The EU report was titled “Islamophobia in the EU” and several papers referred to the examples it gave of how Islamophobia might appear: spitting, vandalism of mosques, harassment of Muslim schoolchildren, and so forth. In an article titled “In the shadow of September 11”, *Klassekampen* used the EU report as a source to gain a better understanding of Islamophobia as more than an attitude; it was also actions.⁴⁰

After 9/11, Islamophobia continued to be understood as a way of negatively generalising Muslims, but greater attention was paid to harassment (actions). An example illustrating this is a demonstration organised by The Islamic Council against stereotypical depictions of Muslims in the press, with the two main slogans: “Against generalisation” and “Stop harassment of Muslims”.⁴¹

The first opinion text (op-ed) discussing the term Islamophobia was written by a student named Peder Jensen. Jensen was later known as the blogger Fjordman, who inspired the right-wing extremist and terrorist Anders Behring Breivik. Jensen argued that Islamophobia was a trend word, and that it was being used as a weapon against the critique of Islam. Islam, he argued, is a religion that people must be allowed to criticise since many Muslims were very open in saying that

36. For example “Kampanje mot muslimfrykt”, *VG* October 31, 2001.

37. Radio, *P4*, November 8, 2001.

38. “Biskoper advarer mot muslimhets”, *VG*, September 25, 2001.

39. “Antimuslinske holdninger på frammarsj i Europa”, *NTB*, May 23.

40. “I skyggen av 11. september”, *Klassekampen* May 27, 2002, 6–7.

41. “Demonstrerer for felles framtid”, *Aftenposten*, February 9, 2002, 4.

“one day Islam will cover the whole planet and replace all other religions and ideologies.”⁴²

Islamophobia after 9/11 was generally discussed in three different ways in Norway: 1) as a cognitive way to make generalisations about Muslims (with references to fear/terror); 2) as harassment (also physical) of Muslims; and 3) as a rhetorical means to hinder the legitimate critique of Islam. This last view escalated with our next example – the cartoon affairs – in which Islamophobia was often degraded to being a term that was useful for Muslims who saw the benefit of depicting themselves as victims.

THE CARTOON AFFAIRS

The response to cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad made the Muslim minority visible as a minority that could mobilise politically in a much broader way than the Rushdie affair did. In 2005, the Danish cartoons of Muhammad (12 in total) were published in the country’s largest newspaper, *Jylland Posten*. According to the editor of the paper, the intention was to stop what they called political correctness based on a misunderstood respect for not hurting the feelings of religious minorities.⁴³ One of the faces showed the prophet with a bomb in his turban and with the Islamic profession of faith written on it. The printings led to some debates on a new kind of hate speech, but the dominant messages in the press were that “Muslims are too sensitive” or “too demanding”. The understanding of the cartoon affairs as a “clash of civilisations” was more or less hegemonic when the cartoons were printed in Norway a year later.

The Norwegian context for reprinting the cartoons was different than the Danish, which may explain why the debates included more concern about Islamophobia than they had in Denmark. Norway had an established arena for inter-religious dialogue, and when a Christian journal, *Magazinet*, published one of the cartoons, the foreign minister of Norway, Jonas Gahr Støre, apologised for the offence felt by many Muslims.⁴⁴ The Norwegian Islamic Council accepted the apology that soon came from the editor of *Magazinet*, and called off planned protests.⁴⁵ An

42. Peder Jensen, “Islam og det åpne samfunn”, *VG*, August 21, 2003, 41.

43. For an analysis of the cartoon debates in Denmark and Norway, see Hervik, Eide and Kunelius, “A Long and Messy Event”, and Jytte Klausen, *The Cartoon that Shook the World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).

44. Jonas Gahr Støre, “Dialog som prosjekt”, *Dagsavisen*, March 10, 2006, 4.

45. Christian Stokke, *A multicultural society in the making. How Norwegian Muslims challenge a white nation* (PhD, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Department of Social Anthropology, 2012), 7.

independent group of Muslims, the Volunteers (*De frivillige*), however, proclaimed that they were not satisfied because the government had not addressed anti-Muslim sentiments in general. They organised their own demonstration on February 11, 2006 with slogans about how the press gave a false impression of Muslims, and that free speech had nothing to do with telling lies (about the prophet). The demonstration gathered 1,500 Muslims and was reported in all the main newspapers. Most of the reports had a negative angle with a focus on the threat of Muslim political violence. In fact the only violent act that took place in Norway with reference to the cartoons was when a Palestinian was stabbed with a knife while he being asked: “Why do you burn our flag in the Middle East?” This act of violence did not lead to debates on racism, since the police categorised it as an accident caused by alcohol.⁴⁶

The Volunteers managed to draw some attention to negative portrayals of Muslims in the press. For example, *Dagbladet* used the slogans from the demonstrations, such as “Shame on you, media”, as illustrations the day after the demonstration.⁴⁷ Several newspapers also recited slogans such as “Media, mouthpiece of lies”. It is therefore reasonable to describe this as a public recognition of the connection between Islamophobia and the media. The demonstration also made it clear that young Muslims did not necessarily listen to leaders in Muslim organisations (who had tried to stop the event).⁴⁸ Several newspapers highlighted fear of a new and more fundamentalist generation, though they also gave access to a variety of Muslim viewpoints.⁴⁹ Through the press, several young Muslims had expressed the idea that a peaceful demonstration was a means to counter a stereotype of Muslims as aggressive.⁵⁰ They proclaimed that protecting Muslims against hate speech was just as important for them as protesting against the cartoons.

Public support of the Volunteers came first and foremost from members of the International Socialists in Oslo, who addressed anti-Muslim racism as a problem.⁵¹

46. “Frykter hevnaksjoner”, *Dagsavisen*, February 6, 2006, 9.

47. “Muhammed tegningene”, *Dagbladet*, February 12, 2006, 12–13.

48. The debate that ensued after *Magazinet* published the Mohammed cartoons suddenly started conveying an impression of Norwegian imams in a positive way. This was a result of their warnings against angry uproar. The imams’ desire to engage in dialogue was reiterated in several press reports. However, the caricature also led to imams being characterised as “out of step with younger generations”. Cora Alexa Døving, “Position and Self-understanding of Sunni Muslim Imams in Norway”, *Journal of Muslims in Europe* 3 (2014): 209–233.

49. Stokke, *A multicultural society in the making. How Norwegian Muslims challenge a white nation*, 75.

50. *Dagsavisen*, February 7, 2006.

51. Alf Skjeseth, “Still opp for muslimene”, *Klassekampen*, February 10, 2006, 9.

Professor of Social Medicine Per Fugelli, a well-known voice in public debates, gave his vocal support to the demonstrators and referred to them as “our neighbours” rather than Muslims, thereby addressing the importance of respect.

Internationally, several academic works were written on the issue of Islamophobia related to the cartoon affair.⁵² In these texts, the authors discussed the severe lack of recognition of anti-Muslim racism. The main argument was that Western countries understand Islamophobia as hatred against a religion, and not as racism.⁵³ These academic responses are important contributors to a subsequent understanding of Islamophobia in Norway: the framing of the cartoon affair in terms of racism and the question of legislation (laws against hate speech) were brought into Norwegian public consciousness.⁵⁴ Even if their arguments were not prevalent in the debates, they offered an important alternative way of understanding the rise of Islamophobia. The concept of racism turned up in some of the debates on Islamophobia⁵⁵ and in relation to the UN’s international day to focus on the problem of racism, the national paper *VG* printed a long text discussing whether it was relevant to understand anti-Muslim attitudes as a form of neo-racism.⁵⁶ The article also refers to antisemitism and asks, rhetorically, whether members of the press would have covered cases relating to Muslims in the same way if they exchanged the word “Muslim” with “Jew”. This comparison did not – as it would later – result in harsh reactions. It was simply not commented upon.

A second cartoon affair occurred in Norway four years later. On February 3, 2010, *Dagbladet* used its front page to show a cartoon of the Prophet Mohammad as a pig. As a response six individual Muslims organised a demonstration that gathered 3,000 people carrying slogans such as “Islam condemns terror”, “*Dagbladet* divides the nation”, “Stop publishing the cartoons” and “Islam is part of Norway”. However, none of these slogans reached the headlines: one of the organisers made a speech containing a threat towards Norway by referring to what happened on 9/11. He said “When will Norwegian authorities understand that this is serious? Maybe not before it is too late? Maybe not until we get a 9/11 on Norwe-

52. Most cited is Tariq Modood’s work on the cartoons: “Muslims, Religious Equality and Secularism” in *Secularism, Religion and Multicultural Citizenship*, ed. Tarique Modood and Brahm Levey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); and Saba Mahmood and Judith Butler: *Is critique secular? Blasphemy, Injury and Free Speech* (UC Berkeley University Press, 2009).

53. Nasir Meer and Tarique Modood, “Refutations of Racism in the ‘Muslim Question’”, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 43, no. 3–4 (2009).

54. Anthropologists Sindre Bangstad and Thomas Hylland Eriksen and philosopher Arne Johan Vetlesen were among the contributors.

55. Cora Alexa Døving, “Islam er er også en norsk religion”, *Aftenposten*, February 7, 2006, 5.

56. Finn Erik Thoresen, “Den nye rasisme”, *VG* March 21, 2006, 31.

gian soil? This is not a threat but a warning.”⁵⁷ The result was that the cartoon affairs that had led to some interest in and focus on Islamophobia in 2006 now resulted in the strengthening of a one-sided debate on extremism. Even if the other organisers distanced themselves from the speech and tried to argue that the demonstration had been a peaceful gathering communicating views quite different from those of the speakers, anger from the public characterised the news for several weeks.

Leader of the Progress Party, Siv Jensen, who one year earlier had warned against “Islamisation by stealth”, demanded that “it is time that the silent majority among Muslims also speaks up clearly.”⁵⁸ She stated that Norwegian values were under pressure and that Islamisation was proceeding at full strength. With references to the demonstrations in 2010, *Aftenposten* printed a long text by a well-known debater, Hege Storhaug, in which the demonstrators were referred to as “Quislings”; a traitor and enemy within.⁵⁹ The seriousness of the threat made by the speaker at the demonstration is probably the reason for the lack of critical responses to generalisations such as those made by Jensen and Storhaug.

Generally speaking, the second cartoon affair led to a setback in public discussions on Islamophobia and warnings against it. Attempts to address the phenomenon were now quickly defined as “naivety against extremism”. Islamophobia, which had been recognised as a problem of generalising and harassing Muslims, was reduced to a marginal problem and a conceptual tool for people who were unwilling to talk about Muslim extremism or to criticise Islam.

ISLAMOPHOBIA UNDERSTOOD AS AN IDEOLOGY

Between the two cartoon debates, Islamophobia was discussed with the general backdrop of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, even more cartoons, the assassination of the Dutch film director Theo van Gogh, terrorist attacks, the increase in hate speech on the internet, and a more or less continuous debate on integration. However, probably of greatest significance for a deepening understanding of Islamophobia was the range of books published after 2001, the so-called warning literature, of which *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis* (2005) has been the most influential. This category of literature, with a myriad of titles in English, also includes

57. His message was printed in several papers; see, for example, “Tre tusen i tog” *Dagsavisen*, February 13, 2010, 6.

58. Siv Jensen was interviewed in several papers on this issue, for example, *Aftenposten*, February 14, 2010, 3.

59. Hege Storhaug, “En stigende uro”, *Aftenposten*, January 6 2011, 4.

books translated into Norwegian as well as books written by Norwegian authors.⁶⁰

The underlying premise of this literature is that Norway, as well as other states on the European continent, are becoming “Islamised” by Muslims wishing to introduce Shari’a into Europe and who are transforming Europe into an Islamic domain (“Eurabia”). The word “Islamophobia” is often addressed in these books, but then always as a term developed to cover up information about the alleged takeover and to stop sensible critique of Islam. The so-called Eurabia literature became a well-known phenomenon after 22 July, 2011, as the perpetrator’s worldview was greatly influenced by these books. However, the books also raised awareness of Islamophobia as being linked to conspiratorial thinking. In other words, the books contributed to Islamophobia becoming visible as part of an ideology in which Muslims were portrayed as an enemy of western civilisation.

The term “Islamophobia” is not often used even when the warning literature is being criticised, but when it is, it addresses a fear of an increase in the belief in conspiracy theories. Compared to earlier times when “racism” was used to describe anti-Muslim sentiments (1980s), the concepts of racism and Islamophobia, especially after 9/11, have been kept apart. The increase in conspiracy theories did, however, lead some debaters to question the connection between racism and fear of a takeover. Henrik Lunde, a sociologist and the then-leader of The Norwegian Centre against Racism, was one of the first to actively use the term Islamophobia with references to the warning literature. He saw Islamophobia as a phenomenon that would lead to an increase in racism.⁶¹ The Ministry of Children and Equality also used the word Islamophobia in an opening speech at a conference on racism and discrimination.⁶² An expert on Islamic terrorism, Thomas Hegghammer, also used the term when he warned the public of how Islamophobia is a phenomenon that could easily lead to discrimination against Muslims – which in turn could lead to an increase in radicalisation among Muslims.⁶³

60. Examples are Pim Fortuyn, *Against the Islamization of Our Culture* (2001); Oriani Fallachi, *Fornuftens styrke* (Gyldendal Forlag, 2004); Bat Ye’or, *Eurabia: The Euro-Arab Axis* (Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005); Bruce Bawer, *While Europe Slept: How Radical Islam Is Destroying the West from Within* (Random House/Broadway Books, 2006); Mark Steyn, *America Alone: The End of the World as We Know It* (Regnery, 2006); Melanie Phillips, *Londonistan*, Encounter (2006); Walter Laqueur, *The Last Days of Europe: Epitaph for an Old Continent* (Thomas Dunne/St. Martin Press, 2007); Bruce Thornton, *Decline and Fall – Europe’s Slow Motion Suicide*, Encounter (2007); Hallgrim Berg, *Amerikabrevet: Europa i Fare* (Koloritt Forlag, 2007).

61. Lunde interviewed in “Islamofobien øker rasismen”, *LO aktuelt*, December 9, 2005.

62. The ministry’s homepage, November 28, 2007, <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dep/bld/id298/>.

63. “Rasisme er et sikkerhetsproblem”, *ABC nyheter*, January 8, 2008.

Professor in Social Anthropology, Thomas Hylland Eriksen, a well-known contributor to debates about the multicultural society, suggested that Islamophobia should be discussed without linking it to general debates on integration, his main point being that integration processes in Norway are going rather well at the same time as Islamophobia is increasing.⁶⁴ He suggested that Islamophobia should be understood as a phenomenon with no direct relation to how well Muslims in Norway are integrating into society. His attempt, however, did not generate much support.

With references to the international Holocaust Remembrance Day in 2007, *Aftenposten* printed an opinion piece asking whether we could learn anything from history: Are there any common features between the antisemitism of the interwar period and the conceptions of Muslims today?⁶⁵ The text pointed to semantic similarities between antisemitism in the years before the Nazi period and Islamophobia today and listed several examples. The comparison generated a heated debate for a few weeks.⁶⁶

One of the first debates about Islamophobia as a *term* addressing an ideology was initiated by Marthe Michelet, an editor for the newspaper *Dagbladet*. Michelet wrote a review of one of the Norwegian books warning against a Muslim takeover.⁶⁷ Michelet described the book as elucidating because it gives insight into what Islamophobia consists of – namely, a worldview based on the generalisation of Muslims, the propaganda of fear, and representations of Islam as equivalent to radical Islamism.⁶⁸ Michelet also expressed how shocking it was that the book was given positive reviews in many newspapers, and she warned against how the press contributed to reproducing author Hege Storhaug's statements by giving her a platform. Michelet's review was responded to by Storhaug and others with the argument that Islamophobia did not exist in Norwegian society, but was used as a concept to stop "vital criticism of Islam".⁶⁹ Michelet continued to address the problem and argued, in line with Hylland-Eriksen, that Islamophobia should be seen as one of our time's most dangerous ideologies with a life of its own, separated from the minority it targeted.⁷⁰ Furthermore, she said, Islamophobia is not

64. Interview, NRK, January, 5, 2007. His point is similar to what I suggest is part of an increasing consensus among politicians: the understanding of Islamophobia as detached from a general debate on integration.

65. Cora Alexa Døving, "Muslimen og jøden", *Aftenposten* February 6, 2007, 4.

66. For example, Herman Willis, "Muslimer ikke som jøder" *Aftenposten*, February 9 2007, 5, or Sara Azmeh Rasmussen, "Fortjent islamkritikk" *Aftenposten*, February 13, 2007, 3.

67. *Tilslørt og avslørt* by Hege Storhaug (2007).

68. Marte Michelet, "Burkafobi", *Dagbladet*, October 5, 2007, 2.

69. For example, Jens Tomas Anfindsen, "Useriøst fra Michelet" *Dagbladet*, October 12, 2007, 42.

70. Marte Michelet, "Muslimhore", *Dagbladet*, March 17, 2008, 3, and "Løgn og bedrag", *Dagbladet*, March 28, 2008, 40.

only dangerous for Muslims but also for democracies in Europe, as it fertilises the soil of the extreme right. This she underlined by referring to specific organisations that distribute an Islamophobic ideology. Her texts provoked many reactions – especially in the online comments – some of which accused Michelet of not seeing that Islam is a form of Nazism or that the term Islamophobia was used to censor important critique.⁷¹ The debates on Islamophobia would continue, but the dominant argument – regardless of political differences – was that the term itself destroyed a healthy debate on “the boundaries of tolerance”.⁷²

After the Progress Party warned against “Islamisation by stealth” in 2009, the term Islamophobia gained more support among critical debaters, not least among Muslims who warned against the rhetoric of a creeping Muslim takeover.⁷³ The author Aslak Nore responded to this with the argument that Islamophobia was nothing but a myth created by Muslim leaders and European liberals. “The allegations of Islamophobia,” he claimed, “are promoted without exception by Western multiculturalists and Islamists.”⁷⁴ He suggested there was a conspiracy between super-conservative Islamists and liberal politicians, and that this could be an explanation for the rising prevalence of the term. Although negative to the term Islamophobia, Nore saw discrimination and poverty among immigrants as the real problem, claiming that “discrimination in Europe is due to racism.”⁷⁵ Nore’s standpoints were representative for the dominant view in the public at the time (2009): Islamophobia was understood as solely connected to Islam and therefore mostly used to hinder criticism of it; it was not seen as intending to discriminate against Muslims or as an expression of anti-Muslim racism.

Historian of religion Lars Gule responded to Aslak Nore with arguments defending the use of the term Islamophobia. Gule defined it as an important concept for addressing conspiracy theories against Muslims. The seriousness of Islamophobia, he argued, could be mirrored in history: “The central element of antisemitism is not in the devaluation of Jews as a race, but the notion that the Jews are dangerous because they conspire.”⁷⁶ Furthermore, he argued, since we all agree on the fittingness of the term “antisemitism” to describe cases in which Jews are accused of conspiracy, the same should be the case with Islamophobia. Gule received some negative reactions, mostly in short letters from readers.

71. Hege Storhaug, “Av en annen verden”, *Dagbladet*, March 27, 2008, 40.

72. For example, Ole-Fredrik Einarsjon ““Vi tolererer oss til døde”, *Aftenposten*, October 2, 2008, 4.

73. For example, “Siv Jensen og muslimene”, *VG*, February 23, 2009, 2.

74. Aslak Nore, “Islamofobi-myten”, *VG*, March 1, 2009, 2.

75. *Ibid.*

76. Lars Gule, “Islamofobi er ingen myte”, *VG*, March 5, 2009, 43.

In 2009, the broadest of the various debates on the use of the hijab turned the focus on Islamophobia away from conspiracy theories to the issue of discrimination and civil rights for Muslims.

5. ISLAMOPHOBIA AND A MUSLIM STRUGGLE FOR MINORITY RIGHTS

There is a relation between, on the one hand, increased integration and increased recognition of minority rights, and on the other hand, a certain understanding of Islamophobia as a violation of human rights.⁷⁷ In Norway the so-called hijab debate is an example of how an understanding of Islamophobia as a threat to civil and minority rights developed alongside a struggle for recognition as practising Muslims. More than any other Islam-related debates, the debates on whether the hijab should be allowed or not in public institutions introduced the public to a plurality of Muslim voices who argued their case with the vocabulary of a human rights discourse.⁷⁸

There have been several debates related to the use of hijabs,⁷⁹ but in Norway the biggest took place in 2009, starting with a letter from a Muslim woman to the Police Directorate. The woman was applying for the right to wear the hijab if she was admitted to the Police Academy. The applicant received a positive response from the Ministry of Justice, but the go-ahead was immediately criticised. Among other things, the critique referred to the processing of the case, as the political or bureaucratic management had not granted permission. The Standing Committee on Scrutiny and Constitutional Affairs⁸⁰ investigated what had now come to be known as the “hijab case”. The case became a part of numerous debate programs, news programs, newspaper articles, and a Facebook group was created to

77. David Feldman, “Islamophobia and antisemitism”, in *Islamophobia. Still a challenge for us all. A 20th-anniversary report*, Elahi Farah and Khan Omar, eds. (Runnymede Trust, London School of Economics, 2017), www.runnymedetrust.org.

78. For an analysis of the different hijab debates in Norway, see Cora Alexa Døving, “The Hijab Debate in the Norwegian Press: Secular or Religious Arguments?” in *Journal of Religion in Europe*, 5, no. 2 1–2 (2012).

79. The hijab and to what extent it should be used in different public sectors and professions constantly surfaces as a theme in debates, but there have been two main hijab debates in Norway: the first in 2004, which took the introduction of a ban on the hijab in schools in France as its starting point, and the second in 2009, which was about to what extent the hijab could be used as part of the Norwegian police uniform for those who wished to wear it.

80. Stortingets kontroll- og konstitusjonskomite.

campaign against the decision. On February 20, 2009, the Minister for Justice withdrew the permission.

In the debates that followed the withdrawal, Muslims, mainly women who wear the hijab, argued for their equal rights: to wear the hijab as part of a uniform would be in line with international human rights conventions on freedom of religion. Islamic Council Norway (IRN) claimed that being a minority means one sticks out in society, but that this should not lead to questioning the motives and integrity of the minority. The loyalty of the employee is not weakened by the hijab, they argued.⁸¹

Four young women wrote an op-ed titled “We are underestimated”, in which they argued that women who are practising Muslims are discriminated against if they are denied the possibility of fully participating in all parts of society: “Lots of ads encouraging multicultural Norwegians to apply for jobs don’t help when in reality there is no possibility of this in some professions.”⁸² Bushra Ishaq, a leader of a Muslim students’ organisation, drew a connection between the democratic state and the core of the case: “The democratic rights of minorities are weakened when women who would like to wear the hijab are not allowed to in the police force. ... we are talking about the integrity and freedom of action of Muslim women.”⁸³ Ilham Hassan, also one of the most profiled debaters that year, focussed on the state in large parts of her argumentation.⁸⁴ As a hijab-wearing law student, she saw herself as a future representative of the state, wanting a job as a legal practitioner in the police force. Her main argument was that it was important not to let fear of Islam or prejudices against Muslims influence the state’s efforts to maintain a modern, pluralistic, and democratic society.⁸⁵

Several debaters saw resistance to the hijab as a result of Islamophobia, and that this could come to challenge freedom of religion.⁸⁶ Pervez Ambreen and Khan Farah claimed that the government’s retreat in the hijab case was a sign of the xenophobia present in Norwegian society. Their contribution to the debate ended with a few declarations: “Muslim girls demand to be treated as equal citizens in our own society”; “We refuse to let ourselves be oppressed and underestimated.”⁸⁷ It is not just the relationship with the Norwegian state, but also the proximity to the

81. Shoaib Sultan and Asghar Ali, “Beskytt trosfriheten”, *Dagbladet*, February 12, 2009, 39.

82. Tajamal Hajra, Javed Mariam, |Hussain Sophia, Hussain Sahr M: “Vi blir undervurdert”, *Aftenposten*, February 13, 2009, 3.

83. Interview with Bushra Ishaq, “Et skritt tilbake for Norge”, *Klassekampen*, February 21, 2009, 13.

84. Hassan took the initiative, with Iffit Qureishi, to establish the “Hijab Brigade” and to set up a Facebook page for Muslim girls to support them in wearing the hijab.

85. Ilham Hassan, “Hijab for dommere”, *Dagbladet*, February 18, 2009, front page and 8–9.

86. Iffit Qureshi, “En kamp for likeverd”, *VG*, February 18, 2009, 39.

87. Pervez Ambreen and Khan Farah, “Hijab kommet for å bli”, *Aftenposten*, March 1, 2009, 5.

Norwegian identity that is emphasised by several debaters: “We are a part of the red, white and blue” is the title of Hajra Tajamal’s text.⁸⁸

Counting the concepts used by hijab wearers shows that “identity”, “integrity”, “freedom of religion” and “democracy” are most frequently used. Although many of the arguments *against* the use of hijab as part of the police uniform was based on arguments that had nothing to do with either Muslims or Islam; like the importance of neutrality of the state or similar rational arguments, the hijab debate pushed forward an understanding of Islamophobia as prejudices that could lead to discrimination. However, this understanding of the phenomenon was forgotten in the light of the extreme nature of Islamophobia that came to public consciousness in the aftermath of 22 July 2011.

6. IN THE AFTERMATH OF RIGHT-WING TERROR IN NORWAY

The terrorist attacks on 22 July, 2011 started with a bomb placed outside a government building and continued with a mass killing on the island of Utøya, where the Labour Party Youth League was holding its summer camp. The perpetrator himself defined the massacre as an act of terrorism, based on a specific ideology conveyed through a manifesto which he published online prior to the killings. In this document, entitled *2083: A European Declaration of Independence*, Breivik defined the attacks as legitimate acts of self-defence on behalf of the European people. The document consists of well-known arguments from several anti-jihadist writers and bloggers, the core message being that in the face of an ongoing Islamisation of Europe, the political and social elite had entered into a pact with the enemy. The underlying motive for Breivik’s actions was, he claimed, to be found in the dream of an ethnically and culturally homogenous (pure) society, and in hating those who allow ethnic “impurity” to develop (politicians, multiculturalists and what he called cultural Marxists). Discussing Islamophobia became a way of issuing a counter message.

WHAT IF ANDERS WAS NAMED AHMED?

The hegemonic discourse that arose already in the first week after the attacks can be characterised as a “progressive narrative”.⁸⁹ This term refers to the development of

88. Hajra Tajamal, “Vi er en del av det røde, hvite og blå”, *Dagbladet*, July 22, 2009, 50.

89. In his study of the responses to the bombing in Oklahoma City in 1997, in which 168 people were killed, Edward Linenthal calls the hegemonic response a development of a progressive narrative. Edward Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombing: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 41.

a story about how the horrible events rendered visible the true essence of the nation as warm and good. The idea of a new beginning – initiated by evil, yet which would enable people in Norway to create a new and warmer society – was declared by the then prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg and other politicians, the Crown, religious leaders, journalists, and newspaper editors alike. The parallel to the reconstruction of the country after 1945 was rhetorically activated “Never again April 9” – “Never again July 22”. However, another part of this progression consisted of recognising and countering the message of the terrorist – namely racism and Islamophobia.⁹⁰

After the first hours following the attack, during which some voices in the media claimed that the perpetrators of such terrorist attacks could only possibly be of Muslim background,⁹¹ the general message was that the only way to respond to the terror was to embrace the “multicultural Norway” that the Labour Party’s youth organisation represented.⁹² Journalists and editors selected headlines, pictures, and perspectives that conveyed an ideological response to the terrorist’s motives. Never before were churches, synagogues, temples, and mosques featured in such a positive light as during the weeks after the attacks. Minority religions were not measured *against* Norwegian values, but described as *part of* Norwegian public values: the multicultural aspect was simply not up for debate. The newspapers mediated the “multicultural society” as the image of the nation. Alongside this new embrace of the multicultural Norway, there ran a debate on what could explain the terrorist’s worldview.

Several reporters asked what Norwegian society would look like if a Muslim had been behind the terror, and several newspapers reported unpleasant incidents experienced by dark-skinned individuals in the city centre in the hours after the horrific events. The editor of the national newspaper *Aftenposten* wrote that Muslims had good reason to be relieved that the perpetrator was not a Muslim.⁹³ It is reasonable to say that the massacre made the general public in Norway aware of the extent of anti-Muslim sentiments both at street-level and in online discussions and blogs. The press wrote about Breivik’s ideas, thus bringing the so-called anti-jihadist blogosphere to the wider public’s attention.⁹⁴ Critical journalists wrote

90. For an analysis of the press’s counter messages after the terror, see Cora Alexa Døving (2018), “Homeland Ritualized: An Analysis of Written Messages Placed at Temporary Memorials after the Terrorist Attacks on 22 July 2011 in Norway”. *Mortality*, 23(3).

91. Sindre Bangstad, *Anders Breivik and The Rise of Islamophobia* (London and New York: Zed Books, 2014), 286.

92. As examples are several pieces in *VG* July 28, 2011 and *Dagens Næringsliv* July 28, 2011.

93. “Han er ingen fremmed”, Kommentar, *Aftenposten*, July 24, 2011.

94. The most central ideological inspiration for Behring Breivik’s ideas about Muslims was the Norwegian extreme right-winger Peder Jensen, who called himself “Fjordman”.

pieces on the prevalence of Islamophobia,⁹⁵ and several politicians expressed shock over their new insight into the hatred found in some online milieus.

ISLAMOPHOBIA COMPARED TO ANTISEMITISM

Two prominent political leaders expressed shock over online Islamophobia by comparing it to antisemitism. The leader of the Liberal Party (*Venstre*), Trine Skei Grande, suggested in a radio interview that from now on, claims made about Muslims should be tested by exchanging the word Muslim with the word Jew or Black. Negative reactions to the comparison with historic antisemitism exploded when the leader of the Conservative Party (*Høyre*), Erna Solberg, compared the antisemitism of the 1930s to expressions about Muslims in contemporary debates.⁹⁶ She was quickly accused of putting Muslims in a similar position to that of Jews during the 1930s and 1940s. Solberg refuted this accusation and defended herself by making it clear that she was not making any comparisons between the situations of Jews and Muslims. Rather, she had essentially wanted to highlight some of the similarities in the stereotypes and conspiracy theories:

I have not said Muslims today are treated as Jews were in the 1930s. On the contrary, I stated that they are NOT treated equally. What I said was that extreme anti-Islamic groups' mentions of Muslims is reminiscent of the way antisemites referred to Jews in the decades before World War II.⁹⁷

Solberg also referred to research done at the Norwegian Centre for Holocaust and Minority Studies that shows similarities between conspiracy theories and specific patterns in depicting the two minority groups as an enemy.⁹⁸ She defined the real danger to be in the mechanisms of Islamophobia that collectivised Muslims; for instance, the mechanism of making a whole minority group responsible for acts committed by individuals.

Solberg's attempts to nuance the issue apparently had little effect; *VG* had to shut down its online comments function following the case, as it filled up with racist comments against Muslims.⁹⁹ Several intellectuals soon entered the debate,

95. Examples are to be found in *Dagsavisen* July 25, 2011, *Vårt Land* July 26, 2011, *Aften Aften* July 28 2011, *Dagens Næringsliv* July 28, 2011, *Klassekampen* July 28, 2011, *Aftenposten* July 24, 2011.

96. Interview with Erna Solberg, *VG*, August 4, 2011, 4–5.

97. Erna Solberg “Lærdom fra historien”, *Dagbladet*, August 6, 2011, 65.

98. Cora Alexa Døving, *Anti-Semitism and Islamophobia: A Comparison of Imposed Group Identities*, *Dansk Tidsskrift for Islamforskning*, nr. 2, 2010.

99. Comments on *VG*, August 5, 2011.

referring to the long history of Jewish suffering (from medieval, religiously reasoned hatred to the Holocaust) as an argument for the unique character of antisemitism. In the following three weeks, Solberg's statement was the focus of several opinion pieces. Debaters, historians, and other academics from different disciplines called Solberg's comparison a result of lack of knowledge. Others pointed to her lacking acknowledgement of Islamophobia functioning as a concept to stop an open debate on Islam.

An argument frequently cited in the responses to Solberg was that Muslims are not a race; they are followers of a religion. Antisemitism, however, is racism because it attacks a race, a nation, namely "the Jews".¹⁰⁰ A well-known professor in the history of ideas, Trond Berg Eriksen, argued against Solberg by defining Islamophobia as something qualitatively different from antisemitism. Racism played a central part in the persecution of Jews and had no such part to play in Islamophobia, he argued. He referred to Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations*, and proclaimed that even among extremists, racism is not a part of the xenophobia against Muslims. He further described Islamophobia as a marginal phenomenon. Compared with antisemitism, he claimed, anti-Muslim harassment comes from anonymous persons who only represent a margin of the population.¹⁰¹ His text illustrates both how racism is understood in solely biological terms and also how Islamophobia is reduced to a phenomenon existing solely among extremists. The social anthropologist Sindre Bangstad wrote a follow-up in which he agreed upon historical differences between antisemitism and Islamophobia, but pointed out the structural similarities that Edward Said found as early as 1985. He also argued that Islamophobia had racist elements and should not be seen as something qualitatively different from racism.¹⁰² Bangstad's arguments were heavily criticised in the following issues of the same newspaper, and his arguments never reached a broader media coverage.

Another wave of reactions to Solberg's statements came from spokesmen on behalf of the Jewish community, who found the analogy inappropriate. The leader of the Mosaic Faith Congregation, Ervin Kohn, called it a comparison that revealed a lack of historical knowledge because antisemitism had been integrated into Norway's judicial system in the 1930s, while Islamophobia obviously was not.¹⁰³ *Aftenposten's* theatre reviewer, Mona Levin, also reacted strongly. With the title "Cannot be compared", she asked how an industrialised genocide could

100. Bjørn Nistad, "Vår tids jøder?", *VG* August 10, 2011, 47.

101. Trond Berg Eriksen, "Noe annet enn rasisme", *Morgenbladet* August 12, 2011, 9.

102. Sindre Bangstad, "I professorens verden", *Morgenbladet* August 19, 2011, 19.

103. Ervin Kohn, "Historieløs sammenligning", *Dagsavisen* August 5, 2011, 7.

be used as a comparison.¹⁰⁴ Harassment of Muslims is terrible, she wrote, but to compare it with antisemitism is a way of relativising the Holocaust as well as Jewish history. Other spokespersons from the Jewish community warned against putting antisemitism in “‘a sack’ of bullying, racism, and hate crimes”.¹⁰⁵

One of the reasons why the use of antisemitism as a basis for comparison was met with harsh reactions seems to be that the term antisemitism makes the mind leap directly to the Holocaust. In spite of the heatedness of the debates, they opened up for new recognition of the danger of depicting a minority group as the enemy of society. As I will argue at the end of the chapter, today’s debate climate is much more willing to make analogies between patterns of prejudice.

ISLAMOPHOBIA AND THE QUESTIONING OF POLITICAL RESPONSIBILITY

A year before the terror attacks on July 22, 2011, two members of the Progress Party, Christian Tybring-Gjedde and Kent Andersen published an opinion piece in *Aftenposten* in which they accused the governing Norwegian Labour Party of “wanting to tear the country apart” by allowing “thousands of immigrants” with their harmful culture into the country every year.¹⁰⁶ The two authors also referred to the Labour Party’s ideas as a multicultural Disneyland that would destroy Norwegian culture. This text became an important reference point in public debates after the terror attacks: Did Anders Behring Breivik’s ideas have some sort of resonance in the established discourses on migration and Islam, particularly those in which “our culture” was portrayed as falling apart because of the politics of the Labour Party?

The newspaper *Klassekampen* offered critical self-reflecting questions on behalf of the nation. It reminded readers about criticism from the European Council (ECRI) in 2009, which stated that the government of Norway did not recognise the growing Islamophobia in the country.¹⁰⁷ The politician from the radical-left party Rødt, Aslak Sira Myhre, stated that he hoped the discovery of “the heart of darkness” in the midst of our own society would lead to changes in our depictions of minorities as an enemy and that we would “go through a process of self-examination.”¹⁰⁸

104. Mona Levin, “Kan ikke sammenlignes”, *Aftenposten* August 9, 2011, 5.

105. *Vårt Land* August 6, 2011.

106. Christian Tybring-Gjedde and Kent Andersen, “Drøm fra Disneyland”, *Aftenposten* August 26, 2010, 4.

107. Eivind Trædal, “Vær varsom” *Klassekampen* August 8, 2011. The report from ECRI concluded on the basis of interviews with NGOs, politicians, researchers and representatives from Muslim organisations.

108. Aslak Sira Myhre, *Klassekampen* August 27, 2011.

Most debaters were careful not to give the Progress Party responsibility for the terror attacks, but the party's contribution towards mistrust in Muslims in general was highlighted by several politicians and debaters. Four well-known scholars discussed publically the distinction between words and actions with the goal of pointing to the moral responsibility that follows hate speech ("the rhetoric of war always precedes a war").¹⁰⁹ Dehumanising Muslims is a form of action, and so is depicting Muslims as enemies, they argued, pointing to the highly polarised and heated debates on migration in the years preceding July 22, 2011. They ended their text by stating that "after July 22nd, we are obliged to struggle against Islamophobia and racism."¹¹⁰

The *term* Islamophobia was also discussed after the terror attacks. Marthe Michelet, who was also one of the persons the terrorist referred to by name as an enemy in his document, introduced the debate by asking "What shall we call it?"¹¹¹ She argued that Norwegian society needed a term for anti-Muslim sentiments and hate. Politicians and editors of various newspapers who had condemned the word Islamophobia had to look at it again, she claimed: "After Utøya, the word has to be taken out of the taboo box."¹¹² Michelet was immediately confronted with how the word could be used to silence an important debate on Islam and how the term implied that a rational fear was a psychiatric diagnosis.¹¹³ The attempt to merge a certain understanding of Islamophobia as a phenomenon with the term Islamophobia was, in other words, heavily criticised.

"Make yourself familiar with what Islamophobia is" was the title of an op-ed trying to counter the accusations of the term being used to silence critiques by examining what sort of phenomenon it referred to.¹¹⁴ The message was that by being able to recognise Islamophobia, one would also be able to criticise Islam; some characteristics of Islamophobia were listed. The op-ed also warned about placing Islamophobia solely in the landscape of the extreme right and gave some examples of how it is part of mainstream society as well.

To sum up: Before 22 July, 2011, the term Islamophobia was almost non-existent in the Norwegian public discourse, but in at least the first six months after

109. Thomas Hylland Eriksen, Arne Johan Vetlesen, Sindre Bangstad, and Bushra Ishaq, "Uakseptable ytringer", *Aftenposten* August 22, 2011, 4 (part 2).

110. Ibid.

111. Marte Michelet, "Hva skal vi kalle det?", *Dagbladet*, August 14, 2011, 2.

112. Ibid.

113. For example *Morgenbladet* August 29, 2011, or *Aftenposten* August 15, 2011. Human Rights Service published on their homepage a much-quoted piece on Islamophobia being a useless concept and a tool of illegitimate power (*hersketeknikk*) to silence voices, <https://www.rights.no/>.

114. Cora Alexa Døving. "Gjør deg kjent med islamofobien", *Aftenposten* August 7, 2011, 4 (part 2).

the terror, it was used every day in several mass-media channels. Interestingly, and probably because of the seriousness of the terror attack, it did not end up in a debate on the term, but kept focus on the phenomenon. This, however, did not last: The meaning of, as well as the legitimacy of the term, did not become hegemonic. After being used more or less without reflection in the first shocking description of the ideology motivating the terrorist, the concept ended up figuring in warnings against using the very concept. Islamophobia became a term for describing the worldview of the extreme right and nothing else. So did the general debates on the phenomenon; it was something belonging to the margins. The rejection of the term Islamophobia, then, has made it difficult to refer to the seriousness of negative experiences of discrimination among Muslims, as well as to discuss more mainstream examples of anti-Muslim sentiments.¹¹⁵

The debates on the comparison of Islamophobia and antisemitism – in spite of not being very fruitful (since it ended up centring on differences in historical periods rather than on the understanding of the phenomenon) – did, however, engage voices across the political left/right axis in Norwegian politics. It was in the aftermath of the terror attack that Islamophobia as a phenomenon was thoroughly discussed for the first time without being connected to statements from the Progress Party. This was the beginning of an understanding in which the *danger* of collectivising Muslims through negative prejudices became a reference point for the understanding of Islamophobia. It also started the process of a broader acceptance of seeing a link between antisemitism and Islamophobia: not only because they are attitudes that society must combat, but also because they are two key aspects of right-wing radicalism and are related to racism as a phenomenon.

7. CONCLUDING REMARKS: ISLAMOPHOBIA – A GROWING CONSENSUS?

The review of when and how Islamophobia has been debated in Norway illustrates a development in the understanding of the phenomenon: from general xenophobia and discrimination of migrants, to *a way of thinking* that generalised Muslims in particular. This cognitive dimension of attitudes was again explained as a result of seeing Muslims as a homogenous group of fanatical religious people. Islamophobia was also understood as a phenomenon linked to positioning on the right/left

115. This has its parallel in what Christhard Hoffmann describes in his chapter in this book, “A Fading Consensus: Public Debates on Antisemitism in Norway, 1960 vs. 1983”: when antisemitism is only associated with Nazi ideology and genocide, more moderate forms slip under the radar.

axis of Norwegian politics, and Islamophobia was mainly addressed as part of criticism against the Progress Party. After the terror attacks of 9/11 in 2001, Islamophobia was commonly referred to as “fear of Muslims” (*muslimfrykt*). This fear was often described as understandable, but still something that could harm innocent Muslims and expose them to discrimination. Due to reports of the harassment of Muslims, the understanding of Islamophobia went from addressing a cognitive dimension of attitudes to also incorporating actions – practices – and the expression “harassments against Muslims” (*muslimhets*) became the dominant way of referring to Islamophobia. A few years after 9/11, Islamophobia was once again closely linked to debates on migration, with references to political statements usually from members of the Progress Party. Islamophobia was also largely understood as a phenomenon in the mass media; Muslim voices, in particular, referred to the press as a place where negative portrayals of Muslims were broadcast. Due to the growing number of Muslim voices, the issue of equal rights and minority rights became part of an understanding of Islamophobia as discriminating against the rights of a religious minority. However, parallel to the increase in literature that warned against a Muslim takeover, and the explosion of online hubs circulating negative images of Muslims, Islamophobia increasingly came to be understood as a worldview and an ideology belonging to the landscape of the far right. In the aftermath of 9/11, it became almost synonymous with a belief in, and fear of, a Muslim conspiracy to take over Western society. Such an understanding placed Islamophobia at the margins of the population, but it also led to an important understanding of Islamophobia as attitudes existing in a part of the majority population, *independent* of the how well the Muslims were integrated. Islamophobia, especially after July 22, 2011, became a phenomenon recognised as not only dangerous for Muslims, but also for democracies in Europe because of its link to the extreme right. Seeing Islamophobia as an ideology also opened up for an understanding of it in the light of other prejudices, such as antisemitism.

The years after 22 July 2011 have featured several debates on Islam, Muslims and Islamophobia in which the understandings of the concept have alternated between those presented above. However, some recent policy measures (2019) make it reasonable to suggest that increased consensus on how to address Islamophobia is in the making, and a new interest in the concept of racism seems to play a role in this.

When the Runnymede Trust put Islamophobia on the map in 1997, its writers stated that the term referred to three phenomena: “unfounded hostility towards Islam”; “practical consequences of such hostility in unfair discrimination against Muslim individuals and communities”; and “exclusion of Muslims from main-

stream political and social affairs.”¹¹⁶ In a follow-up report, they have kept this broad understanding, but shifted the weight from negative images of Islam to a more specific concentration on the exclusion of Muslims. They also offer a new definition: “Islamophobia is anti-Muslim racism.”¹¹⁷

Islamophobia, understood as anti-Muslim racism, is, as I have argued in chapter 8¹¹⁸, very far from being a common understanding of Islamophobia in the Norwegian population. In 2015 the Norwegian government was criticised by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) for not using the word “racism” in any political plans and programs. Warnings like this, in combination with the prevalent negative attitudes towards Muslims found in the CHM report (broadly referred to in the media), and the increase in hate-crime statistics for Muslims and darker skinned citizens, have led to new concerns about Islamophobia as a form of racism at the political level. An illustrative example of this is that various political parties have initiated the development of a national action plan to combat racism towards ethnic and religious minorities. In the notes written in preparation for the plan, “hostility towards Muslims” is specifically addressed. Islamophobia is on the verge of being understood as a variant of racism existing in the midst of our society and not solely in the worldview of right-wing extremism.

Political differences on the issue of Islamophobia have by no means disappeared from public debates, but it seems like the growing visibility of extreme milieus and arenas for expressing hate and anti-Muslim racism has created room for at least some cooperation across party boundaries in combating the phenomenon. An example of this is the consensus in parliament to implement a national action plan against racism in which Islamophobia is specifically addressed (2019).

According to historian of religion Mattias Gardell, Islamophobia is a “regime of knowledge” in the Foucaultian sense of the expression.¹¹⁹ It is in the framework of an Islamophobic regime of knowledge that “certain statements, beliefs, and claims about Islam and Muslims through the logic of repetition are perceived as adopted truths because it matches what we have always heard, and thus know.”¹²⁰ In many ways, combating Islamophobia has also been restricted by a “regime of knowledge”: that of discursive borders protecting a specific understanding of what racism is, namely something solely connected to ideas about race or skin colour. It is this

116. The Runnymede Trust Report, *Islamophobia – Still a challenge to us all* (2017) 1 (referring to the old report).

117. Ibid.

118. Cora Alexa Døving: “Muslims are...: Contextualising survey answers”, chapter 8 in this book.

119. Michelle Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1969).

120. Mattias Gardell, *Islamofobi* (Oslo: Spartacus, 2011).

regime of knowledge that is at the very beginning of opening up for new perspectives – perspectives that acknowledge Islamophobia to be a phenomenon with mechanisms and consequences that are similar to those of other types of racism.

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