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**RELIGION, GENDER AND CITIZENSHIP:  
A CASE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM WOMEN IN  
NORWAY**

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April 2010

**RELIGION, GENDER AND CITIZENSHIP:  
A CASE STUDY OF CHRISTIAN AND MUSLIM  
WOMEN IN NORWAY**

**CRSP 602**

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# **1 CITIZENSHIP, GENDER AND RELIGION IN NORWAY**

## **1.1 Introduction**

The overall question to be addressed in FEMCIT is the relationship between the changing forms and practices of gendered citizenship in a multicultural Europe, and the demands and practices which have emerged from 'second wave' women's movements from the late 1960s and onwards. The religious arena, in the form of churches, mosques, temples, and other religious organizations, is one of the places in which gender relations are formed and negotiated. At the same time, the religious arena, including the gendered structures within it, provides spaces where women and men act as citizens. While religious organizations may sometimes produce barriers to or actively limit the practicing of equal citizenship for women and men, at other times they may offer formal and/or informal opportunities for more gender equal citizenship practices.

The aim of our Strand 2 research is to identify and assess how women's individual religious identities and practices within mainly organizational religious contexts may provide both resources and barriers to citizenship. Our project examines links between women's gendered citizenship and their gendered religious identity and practice through studying whether and how organized religion can provide women with a platform for exercising active citizenship.

In line with our focus in Strand 1, we investigate religious identities and practices among ethnic 'majority' and 'minority' women in different contexts, and in order to capture the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and religion we have included both Christian and Muslim women in our research. We ask whether and how women within Christian and Muslim faith traditions use their religious identities and practices to define and mark their identities as women and as citizens, and how religious organizations they participate in provide opportunities and/or constraints for their citizenship practice. We mainly approach these questions through organized or institutionalised religious life, as we are interested in whether and how women experience constraints and opportunities

for active citizenship through their participation in organizational religious structures (churches and mosques). In order to explore possible links between religious women, feminism, and the women's movement, one of the questions we ask is whether the interviewed women's personal religious faith and practice has been influenced by women's movements, and whether or not the women identify with feminism. Moreover, we seek to understand the extent to which they actively embrace or resist an agenda for gender equality.

Our Strand 2 research consists of qualitative case studies in three countries: Norway, Spain, and the United Kingdom. We have chosen these three countries because they offer distinct examples of citizenship/immigration, gender, and religious regimes (defined as current state policies towards citizenship/immigration, gender equality, and religion). While our next aim is to develop a comparative analysis of our findings in the three countries, this working paper presents findings from one of our case studies, that of Norway.

## **1.2 Religion and social change**

The relation between modern gender equality, established in CEDAW, the Council of Europe, the EU etc., and the human right to freedom of religion or belief (UN Declaration on Human Rights, Art. 18) is an urgent issue in contemporary politics. All world religions are based on asymmetrical gender models on earth, implying that freedom of religion and gender equality are incompatible in principle (Børresen, 2007). This contradiction is often silenced, Børresen claims, for example the contrast between EU's gender equality policy and the concordat between member states and the Holy See.<sup>1</sup> In 2005, however, the European Parliament Resolution 1464 'Women and religion in Europe' described the negative influence of religion in terms of extreme violations of women or more subtle forms of intolerance and discrimination that are claimed to be.

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<sup>1</sup> Concordat means an agreement with the Vatican.

*'much more widespread in Europe and which can be just as effective in achieving the subjection of women, such as the refusal to put into question a patriarchal culture which holds up the role of wife, mother and housewife as the ideal, and the refusal to adopt positive measures in favour of women (for example, in parliamentary elections).'*

(EPR 1464, 2005)

Despite common knowledge of religious restrictions of women, many women are in fact religious. Instead of asking if they are unaware of the limits set by religions and act against their own interests, we assume - like Anne Hege Grung (2007: 127) – that they understand these limits. This may imply that religiously based patriarchal values and practices count less than other aspects of faith. Also, it may mean that they are striving to negotiate existing interpretations of holy texts and religious practices (ibid).

Religious institutions and movements are capable of supporting change and do not necessarily act in favour of conservative interests (Nepstad and Williams, 2010: 219). Religion has a potential for establishing notions of solidarity and mobilise organizational resources (leadership, fund-raising capacities, meeting space etc.) for change. When religious collective action emerges and sometimes succeeds, the nature of the social context and larger society is crucial to understand why. It is 'the connections between political power and institutional religion (that) shape the likelihood of religiously based social movements' (Nepstad and Williams, 2010: 423). There are no easy or simple cause and effects, however, and the same factors that facilitate religiously progressive movements can also help mobilizing counterproductive forms of collective action (ibid.: 430).

Religious texts and notions are not self-evident. They have to be interpreted, but interpretations are negotiated and applied in relation to shifting circumstances. Thus, religion may be used to justify efforts to increase women's rights if the social and political environment is favourable, and if there are sufficient resources. In this case study, we are not researching religious women's rights movements, but we do explore if and how women use religion as a resource for change in their everyday life. By giving voice to religious women, we may disturb prejudiced and stereotypical images of them.

By exploring majority and minority religious women, we may bring forth silent attitudes, non-negotiable practices and power relations between them.

In this study we ask how majority and minority religious women in Norway define, construct and practice citizenship in their everyday life. To what extent does religious faith – materialized in religious identities and practices – provide resources and barriers for women’s citizenship? In Norway, the principal antagonism between religious freedom and gender equality has been an issue for a long time in terms of exemptions for the ‘inner life’ of the state church and faith communities (Siim and Skjeie, 2008). We have set out to explore how the contradiction between the right of religious freedom and the right to gender equality are played out in the daily lives of religiously active women. To what extent are the Norwegian citizenship and gender regimes conducive to women’s rights?

### **1.3 The Norwegian citizenship and immigration regime**

Following the image of citizenship as a ‘family tree’ (Lister et al., 2007: 7), Norway belong to the social democratic branch of liberal citizenship. The Norwegian welfare state is based on universalistic principles; benefits include all citizens (Brochmann and Kjeldstadli, 2008: 93). The welfare state is in principle inclusive and treats all legal citizens equally; however, this is a costly good. This makes citizenship valuable for immigrant, but also requires a difficult balance with respect to cost.

When post-war immigration to Norway from countries outside Europe took off in the late 1960s and early 1970s, with an increased supply of unskilled labour (called *fremmedarbeidere* – ‘foreign workers’), action was soon taken to restrict immigration. This was partly out of concern for the welfare state (ibid.: 14), Norway has formulated and discussed anti-racist and anti-discrimination policies since (ibid: 198).

The current immigrant population (as of 1 January 2008) in Norway is estimated at 9.7 per cent of the total population, comprising 381,000 immigrants and 79,000 Norwegian-

born individuals with immigrant parents living in Norway.<sup>2</sup> The authorities are interested in controlling access to citizenship (ibid.: 307), and colliding interests make immigration policy a burning issue.

Based on six indicators of policies regulating citizenship and immigration, Norway is ranked No. 8 in the European Migrant Integration Policy Index,<sup>3</sup> and belongs to the groups of countries that are 'partially favourable for promoting integration'.<sup>4</sup> Norway achieved its highest scores in relation to political participation, and worst with respect to access to nationality. In between were the scores related to long-term residence, family reunion, labour market access and scores related to anti-discrimination policies. Let us take a closer look at the present situation.

Migrants living in Norway for three years or more have the right to vote in local elections (since 1983). After seven years of residence, immigrants with legal residence status can become citizens, and must show proficiency in one of the official languages (Norwegian or Sami). Since September 2008, applicants must pass an official test in either of these two languages. Suggestions for dual nationality/dual citizenship in the new Norwegian Nationality Act (2006), was rejected by the government (Midtbøen, 2009: 535).

The Norwegian Nationality Act is ambiguous and entails both restrictive and liberal tendencies. On one hand, there is the principle of only one nationality, language training, and the possibility of swearing allegiance to the state. On the other hand, all persons who meet the requirements of naturalization have the *right* to formal citizenship in Norway. In addition, there is not a demand for economic self-sufficiency, and the allegiance to the state is part of a voluntary ceremony (ibid.: 538). Midtbøen (2009:

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<sup>2</sup> See [http://www.ssb.no/innvbef\\_en/main.html](http://www.ssb.no/innvbef_en/main.html)

<sup>3</sup> MIPEX measures policies to integrate migrants in 25 EU Member States and three non-EU countries. It uses over 140 policy indicators to create a rich, multi-dimensional picture of migrants' opportunities to participate in European societies. <http://www.integrationindex.eu/topics/2657.html> (8 April 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Sweden was the only country with policies that - in the overall ranking across six strands - were considered 'favourable' for promoting integration. <http://www.integrationindex.eu/topics/2636.html> (8 April 2010).

546) links formal citizenship to larger integration processes, and argues that Norwegian nationality requires a documented *will* to integrate. He sees this connection between formal citizenship (*statsborgerskap*) and integration as a part of a larger European development. Multicultural societies emphasize common basic values in order to create cohesion. The paradox is that this focus on common values can lead to social exclusion based on national, religious or ethnic grounds (ibid.: 546-547).

In Norway, spouses of Norwegian citizens who come to Norway from abroad are normally assigned a dependent legal status for a period of three years (commonly referred to as 'the three year rule').<sup>5</sup> After three years, a permanent resident status can be obtained. Migrant women have fiercely opposed the three year rule, as those who decide to leave a violent partner before the three year period has passed, risk losing the residence permit (Halsaa, Nyhagen Predelli and Thun, 2008). A legal exception to the three year rule was, however, passed in 1990.

The percentage of employed male immigrants was 69.3 in 2008 and 58.7 per cent for female immigrants, compared to respectively 74.5 per cent and 68.5 per cent for men and women in the population at large.<sup>6</sup> This means that the differences are twice as large between immigrants and the general population for women (10 per cent) as among men. The difference in employment rate is in part due to different levels of education, but this does not explain the whole difference.

Among young women with an immigrant background, a large number undertake higher education. When they reach the end of their 20's, however, when they have children and establish a family, fewer of them are employed in this group compared to young women generally. Statistics Norway also notices the large number of young people with immigrant parents from Pakistan, Vietnam and Turkey with high employment rate. The

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<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.regjeringen.no/nb/dep/jd/dok/NOUer/2003/NOU-2003-31/6/1/3.html?id=372823>. See also the *Immigration Act* of 1988 (Utlendingsloven) (<http://www.lovdata.no/all/nl-19880624-064.html>) and § 37, 6 in the regulation of the Immigration Act (utlendingsforskriften) (<http://www.lovdata.no/cgi-wift/ldles?doc=/sf/sf/sf-19901221-1028.html>). A new Immigration Act was passed in 2008.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ssb.no/emner/06/01/innvregsys/>

parent generation from Pakistan and Turkey has a low rate of employment, much because of the low participation of women. The employment rate among men and women with parents from these countries, however, is almost on the same level as Norwegian youth, and among the highest in Europe.<sup>7</sup>

#### 1.4 The Norwegian Gender Regime

In relation to policies promoting gender equality, Norway has a strong national and international reputation of advocating women-friendly policies as both a legal requirement and a substantive aim. Norway has been among the states with the highest percentage of women in political institutions.<sup>8</sup>

The Scandinavian gender regime (Sümer, 2009: 43-52) has been described as 'women-friendly' by Helga Hernes in the book *Welfare State and Woman Power* (1987: 11), based on the combination of 'women's agitation' or 'feminization from below', and official response in the form of 'state feminism' from above. Hernes focuses on women's possibilities to combine motherhood and employment, and welfare state provisions of day care for children and services for the elderly. Hernes describes the transition from the private to more public network of dependency and mutual help as the family 'going public' (ibid.: 18, 45). Hernes claims that although 'the interplay between agitation from below and integration policy from above' resulted in 'Scandinavian state feminism', basic questions of social reorganization remain unsolved. The mutual dependence between production and reproduction became more visible, while the unequal distribution of power between men and women was confirmed. Women, who previously were dependent on their fathers or husbands, now are economically dependent on the welfare state (Hernes, 1987: 31-49), and most importantly 'that one's status as a citizen is strongly affected by one's status as a participant in the labour market and as a client in the welfare system.' (ibid.: 44).

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.ssb.no/valgaktuelt/> (19 April 2010)

<sup>8</sup> See various UNDP reports, including UNDP (2002).

To what extent can universal welfare states and gender regimes based upon ‘women-friendly’ policies become the basis for the inclusion of migrant women and women with a non-Christian religious identity? Existing research displays a number of gender equality problems. Firstly, women still earn less than men on average, a great majority of women work part-time and few women are among top management (Sümer, 2009: 46).

Secondly, the gender equality agenda seems to be divided into separate, segmented ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ women’s concerns. There is a restricted, minority group related gender equality agenda which aims to counter violation of women’s individual rights, focusing on ‘crisis prevention’ regarding honour based violence, female genital mutilation, and forced marriages (Siim and Skjeie, 2008: 323). Governmental action plans aiming at these problems have been developed from the mid 1990s to the mid 2000s (ibid.: 327), and these ‘crisis issues’ have not been included in broader state initiatives to combat ‘violence in close relationships’ (c.f. Bredal, 2005, in ibid.: 327). Moreover, the concern with ‘crisis issues’ is related to proposals about stricter immigration regulations. Due to huge protest from non-governmental organizations, including ethnic minority and humanitarian organizations, and anti-discrimination institutions, the government dropped the proposed 21 years of age rule for family reunification (ibid.: 336).

Thirdly, access and influence are unequally distributed between various majoritised and minoritised<sup>9</sup> women’s organizations and between various gender policy areas. For example, minoritised women’s organizations have almost exclusively been consulted on ‘ethnic minority women’s issues’ related to gender violence (Nyhagen Predelli, 2003b). On the other hand, majoritised women’s organizations have rarely been consulted on ‘ethnic minority women’s issues’ and have more often been engaged in policies relating to private business and the labour market.

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<sup>9</sup> These terms are outlined in the next section.

The Norwegian gender equality policy machinery has been reorganized several times during recent years, and new government institutions supporting gender equality policies have been created. A major reform was implemented in 2006 when a contested integrated anti-discrimination policy was adopted. The *Equality and Discrimination Ombud* to combat discrimination based on gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religion, disability and age replaced existing gender equality agencies and merged the tasks of the *Gender Equality Ombud*, the *Gender Equality Board of Appeals*, the *Gender Equality Centre* and the Centre against Ethnic Discrimination (Halsaa, Nyhagen Predelli and Thun, 2008: 42). Although the new equality and anti-discrimination machinery provides access for feminist and women's groups and influences government policies dealing with equal opportunity issues, the opportunity structure for access and influence dwindled as a consequence of the reorganization.

There is a growing concern with state feminism in a multicultural society: Scandinavian state feminism is characterized by women's labour market participation, access to public childcare and political participation and representation, and a combination of mobilization 'from below' and 'integration politics from above' (Siim and Skjeie, 2008: 338). However, faced with the challenge of a multicultural society, state feminism has to deal with migrant groups practicing complementary or patriarchal gender norms (such as a male-breadwinner system, arranged marriages). If gender equality is constructed as a particularly 'Norwegian' value, as something constitutive of 'Norwegian-ness', it contributes to a problematic 'us' and 'them' divide.<sup>10</sup> One of the most urgent questions is how the present gender equality ideal of women and men sharing as many tasks, positions and responsibilities as possible accommodates people with a gender equality ideal of complementary roles, and to what extent the male-breadwinner family model is recognized and/or challenged.

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<sup>10</sup> For instance, the present Norwegian Prime Minister, referring to Norwegian women's top position in Europe on employment, education and birth rates in 2001, said: 'Equality is quality in this perspective, and gender equality certainly constitutes an important dimension of the equality that is cherished as a defining trait of 'Norwegian-ness'' (Hagelund, 2003b: 208).

## 1.5 Religion in Norway

Norway has a historical Christian majority church, while other religions have first and foremost become established through post World War 2 immigration. Fox (2008) characterizes Norway as having *an active state religion* through the Lutheran State Church.

In 2008, 82 per cent of the population were members of the State Church of Norway.<sup>11</sup> About 10 per cent belongs to other faith and 'life stance' communities. The Pentecostal Movement has 40,000 members, and Muslim faith communities have 84,000 members.<sup>12</sup>

There has been a steady decrease in membership in the State Church of Norway (from 94 per cent in 1970, to 88 per cent in 1980 and 82 per cent in 2008). Only 10 per cent of the members attend church services or meetings more than once a month, but the state church is still important for its members during national and religious holidays, for rituals like weddings and baptisms etc. (Plesner, 2008: 91-92).

The Pentecostal movement/church has traditionally been the largest Christian community outside of the state church. Because of the numerous migration from Poland during the last years, the Pentecostal church is now number three in Norway. On a global basis, however, the Pentecostal movement is considered the 'fastest growing group of churches within Christianity today' (Anderson, 2004: 1).

Contrary to the state church, the number of members of Muslim faith communities has gradually increased and a growing number of Muslims choose to register as members

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<sup>11</sup> The population counts about 3.9 millions.

<sup>12</sup> The Norwegian Humanist-Ethical Association has 76,000 members; the Roman Catholic Church has 54,000 members; the Evangelical-Lutheran Free Church approximately 20,000 members; the Methodists 13,000 members. Other smaller faith communities include Jews, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Ba'Hai communities.)

<sup>12</sup> Seven per cent of the population do not belong to any religious community (Plesner, 2008: 92).

of Muslim faith communities. In 1980 there were 1,000 members and in 2008 almost 84,000. The different Muslim faith communities are based on various strands of Islam, and related to the immigrants' national background (Daugstad, 2009). There are approximately 900 – 1000 Islam converts in Norway, mostly women (Jacobsen, 2009: 19).

### **Majority and minorities**

The concept of 'minority' generally refers to core elements such as reasonably 'stable ethnic, religious or linguistic characteristics which are different from the rest of the population, including a numerical minority position, non-dominance and a separate cultural identity which the minority itself wants to preserve' (Henrard, 2000: 30-48 in Freidenvall, 2010: 5). In this report, the concept of religious minority refers to numerical minorities, and 'minority women' refers to women in these groups. The word 'minoritised', however, refers to the relational character of minority women, potentially being placed in an inferior and marginalized position in relation to both majority women and men, to minority men.

Anne Sofie Roald (2005: 20) discusses the meeting of ethnic Norwegians and people with a Muslim background in her book *Er muslimske kvinner undertrykt (Are Muslim Women Oppressed)*. Relations between the religious majority and religious minorities are infused with power, she claims. The majority is inclined to perceive itself as carrying objective, universal truths – exempt from negotiation – compared to the minorities' representing 'strange' and 'weird' practices that ought to change. With Elias, Roald refers to mental mechanisms that make us inclined to compare our own ideals with the (worst) practices of 'the other' (Elias 1994 in Roald, 2005.: 20). In the empirical chapters, we will see how the majority-minority problematic is conceived by our respondents in various ways.

## **State church and freedom of religion - a normative contradiction**

Fox describes an active state religion as a situation where:

*'The state has one or more official religions and the state actively promotes the state religion through legislating aspects of the religion, granting it control over some aspects of law, requiring religious education for members of the religion, funding the religion often through religious tax collection, and support for clergy and seminary education.'*

(Fox, 2008: 111)

Constitutionally, the Lutheran monopoly in Norway was abolished in 1964, when free exercise of religion was adopted (Article 2). But Article 2 of the Constitution still declares that 'The Evangelical-Lutheran religion shall remain the official religion of the State. The inhabitants professing it are bound to bring up their children in the same'. There are provisions for freedom of religion or belief on the one hand, and provisions for the Evangelical-Lutheran religion to be the official religion of the state on the other (Lindholm, 2009: 3-4). For example, the King of Norway must confess to the Evangelical-Lutheran religion, and at least half of the ministers in Government also have to do so. Only these ministers ('the King in Church Cabinet') can make decisions concerning matters of relevance to the church doctrine, for instance appoint bishops. Although state church bodies have been delegated power and autonomy on many issues, 'the King in Church Cabinet' still executes important functions.

Plesner (2008: 87) describes the state church and the right to religious freedom as the 'two main pillars' in the Norwegian 'religio-political system' (ibid.: 86). Referring to Article 2 of the Constitution, she focuses on 'the conviction that it is possible to secure freedom of religion or belief for all citizens, both the majority and the minorities, in a country with a state church system'. Nevertheless, as Lindholm argues, the Norwegian regime is based on a normative contradiction (Lindholm, 2009).

There is an ongoing public debate regarding the Norwegian state church system. The state church has a 'double identity' as both state church and faith community (Plesner, 2008: 101, with reference to Gullaksen, 2000). It has a privileged legal status, but at the same time it has limited self-determination (Plesner, 2008: 120). A committee

established by the state church in 2002 concluded that the relationship between the state and the church ought to change and called for 'more autonomy as well as less privileges' (ibid.: 123). In the debate about the future of the Norwegian state church, principles of 'equal treatment' and 'self-determination' are tried against the concern for the 'Christian cultural heritage' and the wish to preserve an 'open and inclusive folk church' (ibid.: 120).

### **A secular society?**

Lindholm describes Norway as a secular society, despite the historical role of Lutheranism in the public sphere. For example, the Constitution Day, 17<sup>th</sup> May, is often celebrated with a church service before or after the children's parade. There are prayers for the King and Parliament in church every Sunday, and when the Parliament is formally opened, the representatives pray for the King and the country, and with a service in *Domkirken* (cathedral in Oslo). The Church of Norway has a privileged position in public institutions such as hospitals, the military, prisons, police and nursing homes, where priests are present and have space to organize church service etc. (Furseth, 2009).

Irrespective of the continuation or not of the state church system, Norway has to decide the role of religious faith in public space. There are no general restrictions on wearing religious symbols in Norway, however, there have been individual cases of prohibiting hijab in the work place. These cases have been presented to the Norwegian Ombud as cases of gender discrimination under the Gender Equality Act and more recently, the new Act against Ethnic and Religious discrimination from 2005. The Ombud has found a ban of hijab in violation of both prohibition grounds (Skjeie and Siim, 2008: 332). Skjeie and Siim (2008: 333-334) argue that the Ombud's judgements challenge the 'crisis' frame by addressing hijab as an issue of 'intersecting individual right', and as an 'integral part of official religious pluralist policies and an issue of intersecting religious and gender equality rights' (ibid: 334). The presence of religious headgear in the Military, Customs and some hospitals is contested, but indicate that a number of public institutions are in a process of adapting to the new multi-religious Norway.

Despite processes of change, Lindholm claims that the state does not ‘substantively nor expressively accord equal status to, nor does it impartially respect, all religious or life-stance communities in Norway (...)’ (Lindholm, 2009: 32).

The issue of secularity also includes patterns of behaviour, knowledge and sensibilities in society at large. Jacobsen suggests that Norway as a secular society is characterized by ‘a mixing of state-supported Christian communitarian vision of national community with an unreflected secularity in state bureaucratic institutions’ (Jacobsen, 2009: 29). There seems to be a particular Norwegian secularity that is described as

*‘A religious indifference which simultaneously allows Christian interests to impose themselves relatively unrestricted ... Accommodating a mixture of arrogance and sloppiness on the part of the majority.’*

(Borchgrevink, 2002: 21-22 in Jacobsen, 2009: 29)

For instance, most ethnic Norwegians think about the police as a neutral institution. They seem to be unaware of the fact that several police chambers have appointed their own priests, and do not see that the police uniform carries symbols that have the shape of a Christian cross. This blindness, obviously, is relevant in terms of recognition and inclusion of religious minority groups, and of minoritizing processes.

### **The rights of minorities**

The rights of religious minorities in Norway have gradually been improved, however. In 1814, when the Constitution was adopted, no religious minorities, not even Christian denominations, were allowed to assemble without the permission of the majority church (Plesner, 2008: 92). The Dissenters Act of 1845 allowed Christian denominations of Norwegian citizens the right to establish their own faith communities. In 1851 the ban on Jews was abolished; in 1891 non-Christian faith communities were allowed; in 1897 the ban on monastic orders was set aside but Jesuits were not admitted to Norway until 1956 (Kulturdepartementet, 2006). Only in 1969, when the Faith Communities Act replaced the Dissenters Act, did all faith communities in Norway obtain the same basic rights (for more details, see Plesner 2008.: 93).

The new Anti-discrimination Act (2006) further improves the right to religious freedom because it includes protection against discrimination on the basis of religion and belief (ibid.: 93). The major historical changes are summarized in this way by Plesner:

*'(...) the Norwegian religio-political system has developed during the last two centuries from having all the major characteristics of the confessional state model, with restricted or no access to the country for religious minorities and limited or no freedom of religion for other Christian denominations than the majority church, to becoming a state church system which aims to protect freedom and religion or belief equally for all, even with state financial support to religious minorities.'*

(ibid: 95)

Freedom of religion and non-discrimination on the grounds of religion are clearly established in terms of public funding: The Norwegian state provides financial support for all faith and life stance communities on equal basis. All religious communities, including 'minority' religions and life stance communities that are registered by county officials, can apply for funding in relation to the number of individuals who are members. One result of this system is that religious communities, from the state church to mosques and synagogues, register individual members. Likewise, all registered faith and life stance communities can certify marriages, and religious schools receive state subsidy. Referring to these rights, Lindholm claims that Norway is a secular society with a secular state that 'poles apart' from the original Lutheran order. Moreover, he claims that the Norwegian state of 2008 'protects basic religious freedoms with perhaps remarkable generosity' (Lindholm, 2009: 32). Although religious freedom is guaranteed by the state, there are tensions between the majoritised society and religious minorities, especially Muslim minority communities, in relation to issues such as the building of places of worship and the wearing of headscarves by Muslim women and girls.

### **Gender exemptions and women's rights**

The state's 'remarkable generosity' regarding religious freedom has a distinctly gendered flavour, however: The anti-discrimination legislation admits general exemption rights to communities of faith (Skjeie, 2007; Siim and Skjeie, 2008: 328-329). These rights are contested, and proposals to abolish the exemption of 'the inner life of faith

communities' from the Gender Equality Act are currently being discussed (Barne- og Likestillingsdepartementet, 2008; Økland, 2008; Solhøy et al., 2010).

However, women have gradually demanded access and have been admitted to more formal positions within the state church. Soon after the legal ban on female priests was abolished in 1956, the first female priest was ordained in 1961. Gender equality has gradually gained ground, in line with public gender equality policies. In 1961, six of the nine bishops in the state church argued that female priests were against the word of God, whereas today all of the bishops hold the opposite view. In 1993, another barrier was broken when the 'King in Church Cabinet' appointed the first female bishop. The liberal state church practises, comparatively speaking, are also demonstrated in the – contested – appointment of gay and lesbian priests.

### **The Pentecostal Movement**

The Pentecostal Movement (*Pinsebevegelsen*) was brought to Norway in 1907 by the Norwegian pastor Thomas Ball Barratt. He was influential in establishing and advancing Pentecostalism in Europe from the early 20th century and onwards. Barratt led a religious revival in Norway through his Filadelfia Church in Oslo; a revival which according to Anderson (2004.: 84) attracted pilgrims from all over Europe. The first Pentecostal congregation was established in 1916.

The Pentecostal movement is a lay movement without a fixed liturgy and with no sacraments. One characteristic of this charismatic movement is the focus on direct and personal experience of God through the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The movement consists of a number of rather different and independent Free Church congregations (Assemblies of God, Church of God, The Full Gospel Church, Elim Foursquare Gospel Alliance etc.).

Today, the Pentecostal Revival movement is the second largest non-Lutheran Christian denomination in Norway. There are about 280 local Pentecostal churches in Norway

and over 40,000 members.<sup>13</sup> Each congregation is an independent faith community; however, they have a Leader Council which is an advisory, but not a decision-making body (Thorbjørnsrud, 2005: 285).

Pentecostal doctrine is 'rooted in the patriarchal, individualist tradition of the late 19th- and early 20th-century United States and reinforces dominant beliefs about the natural inferiority of women' (Gill, 1990: 907). However, there is often a contradiction between this doctrine and the reality of women's lives (ibid).

## 1.6 Islam in Norway

Among the Muslim population in Norway, Sunnis are in the majority, with a strong presence of the Pakistani Barelwi movement. The Barelwi movement is an expression of traditional folk-religiosity, with a strong basis in the Pakistani countryside. In Norway this movement is represented by the large organizations Jamaat-e Ahl-e Sunnat, World Islamic Mission and Ghousia Muslim Society.<sup>14</sup> Twenty per cent of Muslims in Norway are Shia (Jacobsen, 2009: 21). Recent migration from Iraq and Afghanistan has led to rapid growth and changes in the Shia milieu.

Islam is a relatively new religion in the Norwegian society,<sup>15</sup> introduced with the migration from Pakistan that started in the late 1960s. Despite impressive efforts by migrant Muslims and by Norwegian converts and scholars based in religion and theology, Islam is still not a familiar system of doctrines and practices among most Norwegians. However, increased use of Norwegian and English in mosques and organizations makes Islam more visible and accessible to non-Muslims (Jacobsen, 2009: 22).

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.pinsebevegelsen.no/sider/tekst.asp?side=395>

<sup>14</sup> The information about the Barelwi movement in Norway is based on Oddbjørn Leirvik's presentation on his extensive website Islam in Norway <http://folk.uio.no/leirvik/islamnorway.html>

<sup>15</sup> The *Quran* was translated to Norwegian in 1989.

According to Roald, it is the Pakistani understanding of Islam that appears as Islam for ethnic Norwegians, who often do not consider the different interpretations and practices of Islam between migrants with an Afghan, Iraqi, Somali etc. background. Likewise, they hardly see that migrants from Muslim families may themselves reject Islam, or identify more as cultural Muslims than strictly practicing – much like many ethnic Norwegians belonging to the state church (Roald, 2005: 22).

There are 30 mosques and Muslim organizations in Oslo. The first mosque that was built for this specific purpose, according to the required guidelines, was finished in 1995. The first mosque in Norway, however, was established by Barelwi Pakistanis in Oslo in 1974 (the Islamic Cultural Centre). The first Shia mosque started in 1975 and today there are seven Shia congregations in Oslo.<sup>16</sup> According to Strandhagen (2009: 40), it is quite common for Muslims to make use of various mosques, although one can be a member of just one. There are diverging opinions of politics within the various mosques.

A number of new organizations were established in the 1990s, among them the Islamic Women's Group of Norway (*Islamsk Kvinnegruppe Norge*) in 1991 (Nyhagen Predelli, 2003b: 24).<sup>17</sup> The Islamic Council of Norway (*Islamsk råd*) was established in 1993 (after a dialogue initiative from the Church of Norway) (Jacobsen, 2009: 21). It is an umbrella organization for 41 membership organizations all over the country, with more than 60,000 members. The Islamic Council has gained some legitimacy, and is active in attempting to unify Norwegian Muslims and to create a common normative Islamic practice on certain issues (Jacobsen, 2009: 22). The Council increasingly acts as 'liaison' with public authorities. The Shia imam Council (*Shiaimamrådet*) was established in 2006 (Strandhagen, 2008: 39). The Muslim Student Society (MSS) started in 1995, the Muslim Youth of Norway (NMU) in 1996. A Shia youth organization

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<sup>16</sup> Shia's usually differentiated between mosques and a religious cultural centre called *husainiyya*. Mosques require specific guidelines (constructed according to precepts, open day and night, and pursue certain purity regulations etc.) which means that the use of a centre is more liberal/free, for instance to include leisure activities for children. Nevertheless, it is common to refer to the cultural centres as mosques (Strandhagen, 2008: 40).

<sup>17</sup> Islamic Women's Group Norway was abolished in 2005.

*DIN* was established in 2007. Basically, religiously based organizing has increased tremendously, also due to state funding. According to Siim and Skjeie (2008: 328), religion is the single most important basis for immigrant organizing in Norway.

The youth organizations are concerned with transmitting Islam to coming generations, and also with establishing autonomous space for young people. In their 'in-between-position', they are important mediators between various strands of Islam, between Norwegian and Islamic culture and between younger and older Muslims (Jacobsen, 2009: 24).

Mosques and organizations were established along national and ethnic lines among the first generation Muslims, but seem to be less so among second and third generation Muslims (Roald, 2005: 23). Jacobsen (2009: 23) confirms that national background and doctrinal differences are commonly acknowledged principles of organizing. Contrary to this, she argues, gender and generation are often overlooked differences.

### **Being in between**

Based on reports in mass media one could easily think that Muslim migrants are mainly producers of social problems in the protestant-secular Norwegian society. The prototype Muslim is presented as if belonging to a backward culture and an outdated faith system, being responsible for a major part of crime in Norway. Muslim women are mostly living as old-fashioned housewives with their men as patriarchal scoundrels responsible for misogynist practices. Contrary to this image, a number of scholars have struggled to explore and describe a more nuanced image of the complex position of Muslim migrants in Norway. Based on empirical research and various notions of identity, they carve out the interplay between change or continuity, renewal or traditionalism; individualism and familism among Muslims. Modern approaches to identity are enriched by postmodern concepts like hybridity, creolization and cultural commuting. Instead of departing from cultural stereotypes, their assumptions are based on empirical research. Categories are seen as contextual and dynamic. For instance, individualization does not necessarily preclude strong family solidarity [*familiesamhold*].

Sociologist Anja Bredal's research suggests that young Muslims often wish to expand the space for individuality, while also wanting to remain within a larger frame of family solidarity (Bredal, 2004: 70).

In a study of arranged and forced marriages, Bredal insists on seeing religious identity as formed reflexively and discursively rather than being a continuation of non-ambiguous [*entydig*] traditions. Jacobsen (2002) underlines the importance of reflexivity in order to understand minority youth's relation to tradition and religion. She partly attributes this to their particular experiences as minoritised, and partly to the general conditions of late modernity.

Annick Prieur has claimed that Islam offers 'strong, but reflexive belonging'. In line with Jacobsen, she refers to one of her interviewees who pointed out that growing up as a religious minority sharpens consciousness and the level of reflection (Prieur in Bredal, 2004: 73). Elsewhere however, Prieur underlines religion more as habitus: Adherence to a religion is a result of enormous socialization work. It is not that one kneels because one believes, but one believes because one has kneeled so much. Religion is in the body ... a bodily, non-reflective knowledge (Prieur, 2004: 156).

Where Jacobsen underlines reflexivity and change, Prieur rather underlines continuity and doxa (ibid.: 74). Religion is a limited, knowledge based field, in which young people have options to form a position independently of their parents. Religion should also be understood as transmitted tradition, silent knowledge, and embodied. Religion is something that just is there (ibid.: 74).

Sissel Østberg (2003) has explored the meaning of religion and ethnicity in identity processes among young second generation Pakistanis in Norway, focusing on changes in social and religious practices (ibid.: 105). She asks if the plurality of late modern societies like Norway result in cultural fragmentation and moral dissolution, or whether it stimulates cultural fluidity and creativity (ibid.: 18). She claims that detraditionalization and critical reflection are distinguishing aspects of late modernity that also influence

Muslim youths in Norway. But detraditionalization, retraditionalization and individualization take place simultaneously – and have to be explored empirically (ibid.: 107). Rather than doing identity work to find definite answers or to make a choice between distinct identities, the aim is rather to ‘achieve a better consciousness of oneself as a kind of narrator of not just one, but several stories,’ she argues (ibid.: 18). A narrative identity is not necessarily in contradiction with a plural identity (ibid.: 18).

Østberg’s research has focused on the role of religion in meaning-making processes in the context of late modern societies where ‘roots’ as well as ‘routes’ are important (Clifford 1994, ibid. : 102). Migrants’ feeling of belonging are related to a network of places, Østberg argues, and they integrate a plurality of elements in their life worlds: elements from Islam as a body of doctrines and embodied practice; elements from secularized Norwegian reality; from a multicultural childhood, from media fiction etc. (ibid.: 102). We are concerned with the identity work accomplished by religiously active Muslim and Christian women: How do they produce meanings of gender when they negotiate elements of religion, geography and generation in contemporary Norway? To what extent do they develop a multicultural social competence, or an integrated plural identity, like Østberg’s young Muslims?

### **Islam and Gender equality**

Roald (2005; see also Nyhagen Predelli, 2004) describes different interpretations of gender equality of Muslim women in Norway. The differences are in part related to their experiences and cultural background, in part their education, how long they have been living in Norway and their inclusion in society (ibid.: 231). The prevailing Scandinavian ideal of gender equality has an impact on Muslim women and men, more visible within second and third generations of migrants than within the first. This is manifest in youth organizations like MSS, NMU and DIN, which are mixed gender organizations, contrary to the traditional division of gender in most mosques. These organizations are laboratories for negotiating and pushing the limits of gender separation and mix in relation to Muslim ideals of ‘respectability’ and Islamic norms for gender interactions (Jacobsen, 2009: 26).

Roald found significant variation regarding attitudes towards gender equality among different ethnic groups (Roald, 2005: 231). For instance, Muslim women from non-Arabic countries often referred to the Quran and hadiths, and less to the traditional legislation, contrary to Arabic women. This was most evident among non-Arabic women from the second generation (ibid.: 228-234). Nevertheless, all the women Roald interviewed agreed that 'Islam' itself was not oppressive, however, Muslim men utilise 'Islam' to promote their own interests (ibid.: 235).

Discussing the potential of 'Norwegian Islam', Roald claims that second generation migrants choose to refer to the Quran and hadiths instead of the dogmas of the later law schools, with the potential for new interpretations that this implies. She also maintains that the most characteristic example of new ideas within the second-generation, is precisely gender equality, 'values that are also core values in the Norwegian society' (ibid.: 91). In a generation or so, she says, Norwegian Muslims *may* be discussed based on their 'Norwegian-ness' and not in terms of being Pakistani, Turkish etc.

Muslim women have increasingly been included in the activities of the mosques and organizations and have created their own meeting places (Nyhagen Predelli, 2008). According to Roald, the prognosis is good that Muslim women's rights' protagonists will soon have equally good chances to get their demands accepted as Christian and Jewish women have (ibid.: 236). The fact that that the Islamic Council of Norway was headed by a woman, the convert Lena Larsen, from 2000 until 2003,<sup>18</sup> quite exceptionally in a comparative perspective (Jacobsen, 2009: 25; Roald, 2005: 101), supports this suggestion. Female converts have a tendency to accept male authority (Roald, 2005: 65),<sup>19</sup> and display that they can also act as important 'energizers in the process of protecting the rights of women' (Jacobsen, 2009).

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<sup>18</sup> Larsen was chosen when the leader of the council withdrew after a scandalous TV interview about Islam and female genital mutilation. According to Roald (2005: 101), the council needs to communicate a positive attitude to gender equality and distance to patriarchal structures, in line with Larsen's suggestion that 'the Muslims needed a convert with good bridge/building qualifications'.

<sup>19</sup> A basic reference to legitimate male supremacy is the Quran verse 4: 38/34 (Roald, 2005: 65).

In the contemporary situation of migration and multicultural societies, Leirvik (2002) asks if Islamic ethics are flexible enough to integrate new moral cognitions, like those brought forward by the women's movement – or if Islam is more rigidly constructed and more resistant than Christianity against the spirit of the age (ibid.: 15). According to Leirvik, the common experience from the first religious dialogue project in Norway was that the distinguishing difference in value issues is not between those who have this or that belief, but between those who have taken a stand on ethical issues and those who apparently have not (ibid.: 183). These are issues for empirical research, like the one we are undertaking. Leirvik claims that classical Islam is plural and flexible to accommodate several different ethics and faith practices (ibid.: 15). Our project is a small contribution to the question of how Muslim women in Norway accommodate to civil society, in comparison to Christian women.

In his discussion of approaches to Muslim ethics among leading Norwegian Muslims, Leirvik (2002: 185)<sup>20</sup> mentions two (ethnic) Norwegian women who strongly articulate a 'rational women's rights ethics' (ibid.: 185). They are well known in the public, in part because they are both converts and academics with a reform agenda. They promote and practice a dynamic type of Islam, and they team up with men in the Islamic organizational life who are favorable to changes. 'To be Muslim is also to interpret the sources, to find new answers to old questions, in relation to the society one is a part of', one of them says (ibid.: 196). The other, likewise, signals the need for a critical development of the Islamic heritage and to go further in reinterpreting Islam and to relate positively to European experiences (ibid.: 197).

### **Religious dialogue**

In line with the Norwegian political tradition of consensus-building and corporate negotiations, Norwegian authorities have engaged in 'religious dialogue' with religious minorities since 1992-93 (Leirvik, 2003). Thus The Islamic Council in Norway and

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<sup>20</sup> The approaches to Muslim ethics are: academic eye for ethical diversity, engaged ethics of duty, curative values, rational Islamic women's rights ethics, religious critical ethics (our translation).

various Muslim religious leaders participate in new forms of corporatist inspired contact with public authorities (Siim and Skjeie, 2008: 328-329). The negative aspect of this is the fact that the religious leaders tend to be men, in all faith communities. Sandra Maryam Moe is the only female leader of the 126 mosques in Norway.<sup>21</sup>

The parliamentary report *Diversity through inclusion and participation* (Mangfold gjennom inkludering og deltakelse) (Kommunal- og regionaldepartementet, 2003) claims that religion is the doorway to social participation: 'For migrants coming to Norway, faith and life stance communities may represent a fellowship of great significance for inclusion and participation in social life generally' (ibid.: 183). The same report also claims that congregations and faith societies have a role beside the religious, because they contribute to belonging, community and are arenas for social networking (ibid.: 184). This means that the Norwegian government 'attempts to enhance processes inside the faith communities that are seen as serving' social and cultural cohesion, and does not regard religious minority communities as a threat (Jacobsen, 2009: 27).

## **1.7 Faith and feminism**

Historically, religious institutions have been reluctant to admit women equal rights. Is Christianity more commensurable with feminism and women's rights than Islam? Is the majority Lutheran state church more liberal than the Pentecostal church?

It is easy to see that churches and faith communities have discriminated women, claims Hauge (1999), but the core question for feminist theology is if this is because of patriarchal misuse of religion or if Christianity (and Judaism, Islam etc.) in themselves by necessity are misogynist (Hauge, 1999: 215, our translation). Hauge differentiates between reformist and radical positions (or post-Christian, post-Jewish, post-Islamic etc), with the latter understanding the established religions as incurably and essentially

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.vl.no/samfunn/article8675.zrm> (11 April 2010)

patriarchal (ibid). Following Hauge's terminology, our respondents clearly belong to the reformist category, since they all adhere to established faith communities.

Focusing on her own religion, Hauge argues that whether Christianity and feminism are commensurable or not, depend of what version of Christianity and feminism one applies. She adds, however, that this never is an unproblematic relation. The Bible, theology, and church life are distinguished by androcentric/patriarchal thoughts and practices. As such, they deserve this critique (ibid.: 216). We suppose that Hauge's claim is just as relevant with respect to Islam, with various strands of Islam being more or less commensurable with different versions of feminism.

Feminist theology is a reflection of the content and meaning of religion with a specific focus on the situation of women, based on recognition of how religion have been used or abused to suppress women, and with the aim to contribute to the liberation of women (Hauge, 1999: 210, our transl.). Feminist theology emerged in the late 1960's in the social context of women's movements, women's research and 'traditional academic theology'. It was deeply inspired by liberal ideas, Latin-American liberation theology and North-American Black Theology (ibid.: 210). Hauge describes feminist theology as white, Western and 'imperialist', without much consciousness of its own situatedness within a power structure. After much critique from African and Latin-American sisters, feminist theology has developed to be a global and multi-religious phenomenon (ibid.: 210).

Kari Børresen (2006, 2007) claims that modern feminism meets different challenges within Christianity and in Islam. In Christian traditions women have gradually achieved 'fully Godlike humanity' based on the concept of creational *imago Dei*. In Islam, however, 'this basic concept of creational *imago Dei* is not available' because God's absolute transcendence in Islam excludes any idea of Godlike humanity, according to Børresen. On the other hand, feminists in Islam can take advantage of the more socio-juridical than theological foundation of Islamic androcentrism, since 'the *hadith* and

subsequent jurisprudence are not immune to independent analysis' (Børresen, 2006: 10; 2007: 15).

Anne Hege Grung questions the roles of various religious texts, and she focuses on the relationship between interpretations of texts and the political and cultural context (Grung, 2007). Grung wants to know if Christian and Muslim women face common challenges and if they have elements of a common strategy relating to their respective holy scriptures regarding gender roles and women's oppression. She has set up a dialogue group<sup>22</sup> of Christian and Muslim women, meeting on a regular basis to discuss texts from the Bible, the Quran and Hadiths.

Grung sees women as potential agents of change, and their religious practices are described as a dynamic and continuous work of (re)interpretation in which they strive to negotiate the space they need and want. This is in line with what Nyhagen Predelli does in her exploration of Muslim women in Norwegian mosques (Nyhagen Predelli, 2008). She outlines contradictory and complex processes of negotiations, sometimes to increase the participation of women, at other times cement or maintain control. Far from seeing the mosque as a static and hierarchical gendered space, Nyhagen Predelli highlights processes of continuous informal discussions, dynamic negotiations about the rights and duties of women and men. The negotiations are decisive in terms of the opportunities and constraints they produce for individual women (ibid.). In this project, we explore such findings further.

Roald identifies a tension in Christian and Muslim 'womantheology' between 'reformist' and 'reconstructionist' tendencies (Roald, 2005). Unlike Hauge, Roald applies the term 'womantheology' instead of 'feminist theology', and introduces a distinction between Hauge's reformists and radicals. In Roald's vocabulary, the reformists are loyal to the faith community and accept the authority of the holy texts but can be radical in their reinterpretations of the texts. The reconstructivists take a more free stand to the

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<sup>22</sup> See also Grung and Larsen's book based on their personal experience with a dialogue group (Grung and Larsen, 2000).

authority of the texts, and also often have more distance to the organized faith community (ibid.: 198). Roald is clearly a reformist who works to change international Muslim debates from within. She calls her position *post-ikwan* (Leirvik, 2002: 197).

One visible difference between change-oriented Christian and Muslim women is related to dress codes, or to the lack of equivalent codes between the two. Regarding Muslim women, Roald claims that the veil 'exposes fully the tension in the Muslim feminist debate between the reformers and the reconstructors' (ibid.: 198). The tension between those with or without the headscarf is not a tension between traditionalism (accepted practice) and modernism (what is right for me), but rather a tension within Islamic modernism/postmodernism; the scarf as an independent highly modern choice (against unwanted sexual attention), reinterpreted as a marker for mild feminist values. We, as researchers, take this to imply that we cannot position our interviewees as reformist or reconstructionists simply based on their dress. None of the respondents covered their face, but some of them wore different kinds of headscarf. And certainly, headscarf or no headscarf, of modern or traditional type, is a reminder of the ongoing religious debates and reinterpretations of faith and practice amongst Muslim women. Our study explores religious women from four Christian and Muslim communities. We have asked them if they have engaged with modern feminism, if women's rights within their religion matter to them, and we will explore potential traces of different feminist positions among the Muslim and Christian respondents. With these issues in mind, we close the section on religion in Norway and continue with a brief chapter overview before presenting the empirical analysis.

## **1.8 Chapter overview**

This report consists of seven chapters. Chapter 2 discusses the theoretical perspectives of women's gendered citizenship and their gendered religious identity which informs our research. Chapter 3 outlines the project design based on qualitative interviews, presents the four selected groups of religious women, the recruitment process, and finally reflects on the role of the researchers. Chapters 4-6 are organized

according to our research questions, although with some changes in the order of the questions. We start a discussion of religious identities and practices in Chapter 4: what does religion mean in everyday life? To what extent – if at all – is religion applied as a flexible resource? In Chapter 5, we explore the understanding of the term citizenship, both in general and in terms of religion. How are religious identity, participation and practice linked to citizenship? Is religion represented to be a resource or a barrier (or both) to citizenship as practice? The next chapter (Chapter 6) is about gender equality. To what extent do the respondents embrace or resist an agenda for gender equality? How are gender equality and women's rights talked about in the interviews? How are gender relations practiced, both in their everyday life and in the religious communities? One section of this chapter focuses on feminism and the women's movements. How do our religious respondents talk about feminism and the women's movement? Finally we offer a summary of the findings and some policy recommendations in Chapter 7.

## **2 RELIGION, GENDER, FEMINISM AND CITIZENSHIP**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter outlines the research focus of FEMCIT WP4, Strand 2. It introduces the theoretical perspectives which inform our research and the analytical approaches applied in the analysis of our data.

### **2.2 Religion: A resource or barrier to women's citizenship?**

As stated in the introduction to this working paper, the overall question to be addressed in FEMCIT is the relationship between the changing forms and practices of gendered citizenship in a multicultural Europe, and the demands and practices which have emerged from 'second wave' women's movements from the late 1960s and onwards. The religious arena, in the form of churches, mosques, temples, and other types of religious organizations, is one of the places in which gender relations are formed and negotiated. At the same time, the religious arena, including the gendered structures within it, provides spaces where women and men act as citizens. While religious organizations may sometimes produce barriers to or actively limit the practicing of equal citizenship for women and men, at other times they may offer formal and/or informal opportunities for more gender equal citizenship practices. Scholars have identified various features of religious faiths, including Christianity, Islam and Judaism, as patriarchal and oppressive to women, but other dimensions have been interpreted as conducive to the 'liberation' or 'empowerment' of women (see, e.g. Brasher, 1998; Ahmed, 1992; Davidman, 1991). The aim of our Strand 2 research is to identify and assess how individual religious identities and practices within organizational religious contexts may provide both resources and barriers to citizenship. Our project examines links between women's gendered citizenship and their gendered religious identity and practice through studying whether and how organized religion can provide women with a platform for exercising active citizenship.

In line with our focus in Strand 1, we investigate religious identities and practices among ethnic majority and minority women in different contexts. Gunaratnam (2003) applies a social constructivist perspective to the usage of the terms 'majority' and 'minority'. She uses the term 'ethnic minority' not in a descriptive sense as such usage would reinforce and reify differences that are created through social exclusion, racism and discrimination. Rather, Gunaratnam views the labels 'majority' and 'minority' and their connotations as socially constructed, and thus uses these terms within quotation marks. She prefers the terms 'minoritised' and 'majoritised' as they signal 'the active processes of racialisation that are at work in designating certain attributes of groups in particular contexts as being in a 'minority [or in a majority]'' (Gunaratnam 2003: 17). In our research we use the terms 'majority' and 'minority' as socially constructed labels, and we use them interchangeably with those suggested by Gunaratnam ('majoritised' and 'minoritised') in order to signal that the labelling of groups of people is in large part determined by existing power relations and differentials between different groups in society.

Another 'layer' of the 'majority-minority' problematic is embedded in the religious sphere, as some religions may be linked with the state and/or with the 'majority' ethnic group in a particular nation state. In Western Europe, Christianity has historically been accorded, and continues to enjoy, a privileged status as the 'majority religion'. Although practices within majoritised Christian religious organizations have been and continue to be gendered in various ways, it is possible that both women and men who adhere to Christian forms of faith and practice may experience less barriers and constraints on their citizenship practice than women and men who adhere to 'non-Christian' or 'minority' faiths. Religions such as Judaism, Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism, and new religious movements, do not enjoy a similarly privileged position in Western European countries, and are in large part associated with various ethnic 'minority' groups. Practices within these minoritised religious faith traditions are also in many ways gendered, and women and men may experience additional barriers and constraints on their citizenship practice due to their minoritisation in relation to ethnicity and religion. Moreover, women within minoritised religions may be further discriminated against due

to their gender, thus constituting a 'minority within a minority' (Eisenberg and Spinner-Halev, 2005).

In order to capture the intersection of gender, ethnicity, and religion, we have included both majoritised (Christian) women and minoritised (Muslim) women in our research. We ask whether and how women within Christian and Muslim faith traditions use their religious identities and practices to define and mark their identities as women and as citizens, and how religious organizations they participate in provide opportunities and/or constraints for their citizenship practice. We approach these questions mainly through organized or institutionalised religious life, as we are interested in whether and how women experience constraints and opportunities for active citizenship through their participation in organizational religious structures (churches and mosques).

### **Feminism and religion**

In order to explore possible links between religious women, feminism, and the women's movement, one of the questions we ask is whether the interviewed women's personal religious faith and practice has been influenced by women's movements, and whether or not the women identify with feminism. Moreover, we seek to understand the extent to which they actively embrace or resist an agenda for gender equality.

Women's place within religious belief and practice has been a contested issue for feminists since the beginning of the 'second wave' women's movements in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and, indeed, since the 'first wave' women's movements of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century (see Morgan, 2002). In the UK context, for example, Christianity, Judaism and Islam have been scrutinised by religious and non-religious feminist women alike, and the question of whether religious belief can co-exist with feminist values has been vigorously debated. The journal of the organization *Women Against Fundamentalism* devoted a special issue to these topics in 1996 (WAF, 1996), where questions such as 'Why can't I be a Jewish feminist?' and 'Is there a space for feminism in Islam?' were posed by participants in the women's movement.

Far from being alienated from the women's movement, religious feminist women have identified with and sought to influence the women's movement in directions compatible with their faith. Moreover, religious feminists have sought to change gendered practices within their own faith traditions by arguing, for example, that women should be allowed to perform various functions that have traditionally been the preserve of men. In the Christian tradition, women have challenged, and in some churches successfully overcome, the notion that functions related to religious leadership and evangelisation should be performed by men only. In the Muslim tradition, and especially in the West, women are taking on new roles related to religious leadership, and the notion that the functions of the Imam are a strictly male preserve have been challenged through high-profile women-led religious events in the UK and the USA (Roald, 2001; Wadud, 2006; Haddad et al., 2006).

Whether or not women's movements have influenced gender and power relations within religious organizations is a complex empirical question. Some non-religious feminists have rejected religion outright, claiming that all world-religions are patriarchal, and have opted for non-engagement with religion (e.g. Okin, 1999; Siddiqui, 2008). Feminist philosopher Susan Moller Okin, who in the 1990s became a reference point for all scholarly discussions about gender and multiculturalism, argued that the protection of minority cultures through group rights or privileges could have anti-feminist consequences in instances where specific cultures or religions endorse male control of women (Okin, 1999). Okin specifically identified Judaism, Christianity and Islam with founding myths that 'attempts to justify the control and subordination of women' (ibid.: 14). Acknowledging that progressive versions of these religions have 'softened' the drive to control women, Okin is nonetheless concerned about 'their more orthodox or fundamentalist versions' (ibid.: 14) which continue to propagate women's subordination. Viewing such patriarchal practices as fundamentally ingrained in certain cultures, Okin famously argued that women in patriarchal 'minority' cultures '*might* be much better off if the culture into which they were born were either to become extinct (so that its members would become integrated into the less sexist surrounding cultures, or preferably, to be encouraged to alter itself so as to reinforce the equality of women' (ibid.: 22-23). A

strong reading of Okin would lead to a politics of assimilation and ethnocentrism, where minority groups would be called upon to rid themselves of any minoritised cultural characteristics and assimilate into the perceived hegemonic culture. A softer reading, however, does not necessarily imply assimilationist policies, but leaves us with the question of how to solve the multicultural dilemma of recognising (through the granting of rights and privileges) ethnic, cultural and religious minorities whilst protecting 'minority' groups (e.g. women and other disadvantaged groups) within such minorities. If cultural or religious groups are allowed to practice gender discrimination, conflicts inevitably arise between women's rights to equality and the group's rights to possibly override such equality rights. On this issue, Sunstein (1999) points to the asymmetry between the fact that 'most civil and criminal law' apply to religious institutions, whilst 'law banning sex discrimination' does not.

The feminist political theorist Ann Phillips has suggested that 'multiculturalism can be made compatible with the pursuit of gender equality and women's rights so long as it dispenses with an essentialist understanding of culture' (Phillips, 2007: 9). Essentialist readings of culture imply that cultural practices are static and unchangeable, which in turn has the effect that minoritised women in particular are seen as devoid of agency and 'victims of culture'. Forwarding instead a view of culture (and religion) as changeable and as contested from both within and outside, Phillips suggests that Okin's strong demarcation between egalitarian and patriarchal cultures is not very useful in moving towards a liberal practice that endorses both equality and difference. Phillips suggests three so-called 'limiting principles' in relation to whether or not social practices should be accepted or not, including protecting minors from harm, preventing physical and mental violence, and ensuring equal treatment of women and men (ibid.: 34). The notion of 'equal treatment' of women and men is of course a highly contested issue, not least within the women's movement itself, as different interpretations of what counts as 'equality' (from feminists and non-feminists alike) compete with each other. In relation to religious belief and practice, the question arises whether it should be tolerated and/or accepted that women are accorded less rights, status and privileges than men. Moreover, even if such beliefs and practices are tolerated and accepted, should they

also be endorsed, either directly or indirectly, by the state (through financial or other regulations)?

In contrast to secular feminists, religious feminists have accepted the notion that religion may be used to support gender inequality and the discrimination of women, but they have generally rejected the notion that religions are *necessarily* patriarchal (e.g. Roald, 2001; Wadud, 1999 and 2006). Rather than rejection, religious feminists have chosen a route of engagement with their own religious tradition in an attempt to change gendered practices from within. They have started a process of reinterpreting their religious faith to reconcile it with their feminist beliefs. Such reinterpretations have taken place across a variety of religious belief, including Christianity and Islam (e.g. Daly, 1994; Mernissi, 1991; Wadud, 1999; Cochran, 2005). Their position has found resonance with religious feminist and scholar Martha Nussbaum who is very critical of Okin's view of religion as irreversibly patriarchal. Nussbaum charges Okin with a fundamentally Marxist analysis of religion, where religion 'is little more than a bag of superstitions' ultimately aiming to control women (Nussbaum, 1999: 105). Highlighting instead aspects of religion as conducive to providing people with meaning, purpose and a sense of community, Nussbaum argues that internal religious debates within various faith traditions have been 'highly pertinent to religion's role in the search for women's equality' (ibid.: 107). She suggests that religion can 'contribute to the struggle for justice', including the struggle for gender equality, and that religious feminists are thus potential allies of secular feminists (ibid.).

Today, women from religious faiths including Christianity, Islam and Judaism continue to grapple with questions of faith and gender justice (see Manning, 1999), but Islam has become singled out as the most contested religion of the day due to perceived links between the Islamic faith and religious extremism in the form of terror attacks in New York, Madrid, and London. Moreover, Islam has become a symbol of women's oppression, as the religion itself (rather than certain interpretations or practices of it) is sometimes linked with both harmful and violent practices such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation and with non-violent but allegedly patriarchal practices such as

veiling. Paradoxically, according to Dustin and Phillips (2008) the acceptance by both government officials and women activists of the notion that such practices are 'grounded in culture not religious belief' has sustained and further legitimated a practice in which the UK government either abstains from interfering with religious belief and practice or privileges religious belief and practice through anti-discrimination and other laws.

Although the increased diversity among women due to immigration has had an impact on the willingness of the women's movement to take on intersectional perspectives on gender, race, and class, we have argued (Nyhagen Predelli et al., 2008) that women's movements have yet to seriously engage with issues of faith and belief, and the way in which religion can have an impact, either positively or negatively, on women's rights and on women's position in the home and in society. Rather than dismissing or ignoring the voices of religious women as irrelevant or non-conducive to feminism, the women's movement needs to engage with religious women and build alliances with feminist religious women. In the UK, an example of such engagement is that of the Women's National Commission which has been instrumental in developing and supporting the *Muslim Women's Network* established in 2002. This network can be said to be part of the broader UK women's movement and thus by its very existence it may contribute to the deconstruction of an alleged inevitable opposition between religion and feminism. We would argue that women's movements must voice clear demands to be heard when governments engage with women's faith groups, and continue to demand the protection of established women's rights from erosion caused by pressure from conservative religious groups.

On some issues, faith-based organizations may actually erode or undermine gender equality and women's rights 'by creating pockets in society where 'religious freedoms' justify the marginalization of women' (Ghodsee, 2007; see also the section below entitled 'gender, religion and citizenship'). Religious freedom is protected in international conventions, and covers both individuals as well as religious communities. Such protection has been established mainly due to the oppression and persecution

experienced by religious minorities throughout history. Today, the protection of religious freedom often collides with claims to women's rights and with rights of gays and lesbians, and the rights of women and sexual minorities often have to 'yield' to the rights of religious communities to practice in ways that discriminate against women and sexual minorities. We do not want to suggest that the protection of religious freedom is illegitimate. It could be that religious communities are sometimes justified to have the right to discriminate against women or sexual minorities. The crucial question is on what ground and to what extent. While Nussbaum (1999: 111) claims that faith communities have a right to unequal treatment of women and homosexuals within 'the core of worship', she does not define the limits of such a core. Solhøy, Strand and Økland, on the other hand, contest the claim that there is an unassailable core in religion that has the right to be protected. They argue from the standpoint that the right of religious communities to practice unequal treatment or discrimination must be justified in each particular case.

### **Religion, gender and power**

Sociology of religion scholars argue about how to define the phenomena they study. Inclusive definitions are often very broad and functional, and focus upon what religion 'does', including providing meaning, purpose and hope. For example, Anthony Giddens defines religion as 'a *cultural system of commonly shared beliefs and rituals* that provides a sense of ultimate *meaning and purpose* by creating an idea of reality that is sacred, all-encompassing and supernatural' (Giddens, 2006: 534; our emphasis). Exclusive definitions are much narrower and focus upon what religion 'is', or the content of religious belief, including whether or not it includes a belief in 'divine beings'. The starting point for our research includes a deep acceptance and acknowledgment of the importance of religious belief and practice in the lives of women and men in modern society. We do not examine the theological foundations of religious beliefs, but take the existence of religious beliefs and practices for granted. At the same time, we are interested in how religion can create meaning and identity for individuals (for women in particular), and how religion can be used as a flexible resource by individuals to support their own beliefs and practice.

The notion of religion as a flexible resource conveys the idea that religion is not so much a set of eternally fixed rules and beliefs as a malleable resource that can be adapted to various social circumstances. Religion is, in other words, a 'dynamic toolkit' (Bartkowski and Read, 2003; see also Swidler, 1986) that can be used to support a range of views and practices among adherents of a particular faith tradition. Women can thus find backing for both gender traditionalism and more egalitarian views on gender relations in their own religious traditions.

Both Christianity and Islam include elements that can be interpreted as discriminatory and subjugating, and/or as liberating for women. In particular, a literal reading of foundational religious texts will often yield evidence of discrimination against women. However, a 'softer' reading of such texts, allowing for adjustments to contemporary contexts, including gender ideologies which support equality between women and men, allows potential for more 'women-friendly' and gender equal understandings of religious canons. Women must, to be sure, relate to the patriarchal features of their own religion, but as agents they are also capable of finding ways to achieve power and influence through religious faith and practice. Women have a tradition for mobilizing energy and resources through religious organizations (Warner, 1993; Wuthnow and Lehrman, 1990), and the religious arena is one of the spaces where the formation of and negotiations about gender relations are taking place (Nyhagen Predelli, 2008, Brasher, 1998, Stacey, 1998). Religious beliefs, practices and organizations are themselves gendered, to the extent that women and men are allocated different rights and duties and perform different religious roles.

Linda Woodhead (2007) has proposed a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between religion and gender, and in her view *power* is central to this relationship. Woodhead approaches religion as a system of power (to which the notion of sacred power is unique), and distinguishes between religion's descriptive *situation* in relation to gender, and religion's normative *strategy* in relation to gender (ibid.: 569). On the one hand, religion is situated in relation to existing distributions of secular power,

including gender power. For example, religion is empirically situated in relation to the (secular) state and the ways in which the state and society is gendered. On the other hand, religion can be normatively used to mobilize claims-making or action in relation to existing distributions of secular power, including gender power. For example, a church or any religious organization may mobilize for or against particular state policies, including policies that seek to advance gender equality.

Woodhead (2007: 569) distinguishes between four main ways in which religion can be situated in relation to gender: as mainstream, as marginal, as confirmatory, and as challenging. Religions that are situated as mainstream can be seen as *integral to* or a part of the existing hegemonic regime, including the existing gender regime. In Western Europe, various Christian faith traditions have been and often continue to be associated quite closely with the state. The Church of England, the Roman Catholic Church in Spain, and the Lutheran Church in Norway, are all examples of 'majority' religions that are still closely linked with the states in which they are located. However, the way in which they opt to relate to gender, or their strategies in relation to gender, might change and even fluctuate over time, and whether or not they resist or support changes towards gender equality is thus an empirical question.

Religions that are situated as marginal in relation to gender are, according to Woodhead, those that 'sit[ ] at more of an angle to the social and gender order' and as such are treated as 'socially deviant' by the majority (ibid.). Religions that are situated as confirmatory in relation to gender, on the other hand, 'seek[ ] to legitimate, reinforce, and sacralise the existing distribution of power in society, particularly the existing gender order' (ibid.). Finally, religions that are situated as challenging in relation to gender 'seek[ ] to ameliorate, resist or change' the existing gender order (ibid.).

Furthermore, Woodhead distinguishes between four ways in which 'religion as power' may relate to 'gender as power' (thus referring to religion's strategy in relation to gender). Firstly, a mainstream religion can act to *consolidate* existing gender differences and inequalities. An example is Orthodox Judaism, a form of religion which

'sacralise[s] gender difference and inequality' (Woodhead, 2007: 572) but which, nonetheless, manages to attract women precisely because of the traditional gender roles it endorses (Davidman, 1991).

Secondly, a mainstream religion 'can be used to give access to power from 'inside' and use it in ways which may be subversive of the existing gender order' (Woodhead, 2007: 569). Such a *tactical* pushing of the boundaries of the dominant gender order has, for example, been observed within the 19<sup>th</sup> century evangelical missionary movement. By allowing women to proselytise among potential Christian converts, and thus giving them an independent role in the mission field, the missionary movement was (albeit unintentionally) subverting the dominant gender order it otherwise upheld (Nyhagen Predelli, 2003a). Missionary women were thus effectively 'bargaining with patriarchy' (Kandiyoti, 1988) by gaining an independent role and entering the male domain of preaching, whilst not radically undermining the patriarchal gender regime of the mission. Moreover, in her study of the evangelical-Charismatic 'Women's Aglow' movement in the United States, Griffith (1997) has shown how women accept a role of female domesticity and patriarchal family rule, while using women-centred activities to exercise autonomy and empower themselves as wives and mothers.

Thirdly, a religion might be in a position of marginality to the dominant gender order, but aim towards improving it - a situation Woodhead labels as 'questing' (ibid.). A religion can thus be 'used as a means of access to [the hegemonic] power from the outside', without aiming to radically alter existing power relations but rather 'improv[ing] one's position - and well-being - within it' through a focus on inner life and spirituality (Woodhead, 2007: 575). According to Woodhead, the New Age movement or self-spirituality are the forms of religion that most clearly represent a type which 'tacitly accept[s] the dominant gender order, whilst seeking to shift the balance of power within it' (ibid.).

Fourthly, a religion may be in a position of marginality to the dominant gender order but actively 'try to contest, disrupt and redistribute' the existing gendered distribution of

power (Woodhead, 2007: 569). Such a 'counter-cultural' strategy is exemplified by the Goddess feminist movement, including witches and Wicca (ibid.: 576; see also Salomonsen, 2001). A focus on 'the divine feminine in their own lives and in society', coupled with female empowerment strategies and a deep commitment to gender equality, are the main characteristics of this fourth way in which religion as power may relate to gender as power (Woodhead, 2007: 576).

In our project we ask whether and how women experience constraints and opportunities for active citizenship through their participation in religious organizations, and we attempt to link citizenship practices within religious organizations to the actual gender regimes promoted by the Norwegian, Spanish and UK nation-states. More broadly, we are investigating the relationship between gender equality, citizenship, and religious belief and practice.

### **Gender, religion and citizenship**

Feminist studies of 'citizenship' have opened up the term from a narrow political-legal definition to a broader and more inclusive cultural-social definition, and include attempts to analyze the extent to which women in various communities exercise citizenship in this broader sense (Lister, 2003, Tastsoglou and Dobrowolsky, 2006, Siim, 2000). The classic view of citizenship as delineating legal and political rights and duties has been challenged on several fronts, including its limitation of citizenship to the public sphere and its narrow view of citizenship as 'status'. Feminist scholarship has thus claimed that citizenship encompasses *practices* within all spheres of life – be they political, economic, social, cultural, religious, domestic or intimate. An emphasis on practice implies that citizenship is not a fixed attribute of a particular group of individuals included in a given polity, but that citizenship is contested, fluid and dynamic, and involves processes of negotiation and struggle (ibid.). A feminist perspective on citizenship would also argue that classic citizen rights such as holding a passport and voting in political elections are not gender neutral but may be distributed and applied in ways that are discriminatory of women in general and of ethnic minority, immigrant, and

refugee women in particular (Lister, 2003; Tastsoglou and Dobrowolsky, 2006; see also Yuval-Davis and Werbner, 1999).

From this type of feminist argument it follows that if women do not have the same rights and opportunities as men to participate in all areas of life, that is, if women are not free to choose whether they want to act as full citizens at work, in the family, in civil society and in politics, then they are not treated as equal citizens and are hence discriminated against. In so far as rights and the freedom to choose do not guarantee equal outcomes for women and men, a radical implication of feminist theories of citizenship is that *practices* should be inclusive of women and men in all aspects of life. A precondition for inclusive practices, and hence for democracy, is *agency* - '[a] conscious capacity to choose and act at a personal and political level' (Lister, 1997: 38). Women are on the one hand agents that may put forward citizenship claims and demands in various contexts. On the other hand, their agency may be constrained or conditioned by the particular characteristics of the socio-economic, political, and religious structures in which they are embedded.

Religious practice poses a particular dilemma for a broadened notion of citizenship, as patriarchal religious laws, norms and practices are often at variance with state-implemented laws on gender equality and international conventions on human rights such as CEDAW (Convention for the Elimination of All Discrimination Against Women). For example, in the context of Islam and human rights, traditional Sharia law legitimates and even 'requires legal discrimination of women' (Mayer, 1991: 99), and in effect undermines the protection women in Muslim states have under international conventions such as CEDAW (ibid.: 137; see also Moghadam, 2002). In the Norwegian context, the state law on gender equality prohibits discrimination against women, but religious associations are exempt from gender equality legislation and can legally discriminate 'on the basis of gender or sexual orientation when such discrimination is based on religious doctrine' (Skjeie, 2004: 6; see also Skjeie, 2006). We might say that for religious associations, including the Norwegian State Church, the issue of gender equality is deemed a private matter by the state, as religious associations are exempt

from laws dictating gender equality in leadership and participation. Likewise, in Spain and the United Kingdom, religious communities are free to implement gender-discriminatory practices which would contravene gender equality laws in other social spheres such as education and the labour market. We would argue that, by virtue of their status as 'voluntary associations of civil society' (Lister, 2003: 30), religious organizations are part of the public sphere and should thus be subject to feminist investigations of citizenship. In a sense, religious institutions, in overlapping the private and public spheres, can be seen as 'borderlands' where the contestation and negotiation of citizenship may become especially acute. It can be argued that the religious arena, in its different formations across a variety of religious belief and practice, presents a test case for the inclusion or exclusion of women in the broad definition and practice of citizenship that is currently being promoted by feminist scholarship. In the words of Tita Loenen (2007: 5, 'where should one draw the line between permissible differentiation and unacceptable discrimination' on religious arenas?

A particular problem arises when the state not only tacitly accepts or tolerates practices that discriminate against women, but also actively endorses such practices through financial support. In Norway, Spain and the UK, religious organizations whose practices contradict gender equality laws applicable to other areas in society can draw on public financial resources to support such practices. Principles of religious freedom and non-interference from the state are thus privileged through financial practices, whilst principles of gender equality must, as Skjeie has argued, effectively 'yield' (Skjeie, 2006). Such yielding is however difficult for feminists to accept. Moreover, rather than giving a 'blanket freedom' for religious communities to discriminate against women, it could be argued that any religious practice that implements discrimination should be justified by religious communities on a case-by-case basis (Solhøy, Strand and Økland, 2010).

## **Religion, citizenship and identity**

Our project attempts to examine 'religious citizenship' in particular contexts, those of 'majority' and 'minority' religious organizations including churches and mosques, with a focus on women's beliefs and practices. The idea that religion and citizenship are connected is not new; indeed, full citizenship rights are sometimes exclusively conferred by nation-states upon members of particular religions. Moreover, linkages between democracy and religion are being discussed in contemporary debates by authors such as Habermas (2006), Kymlicka and Norman (2000), Spinner-Halev (2000) and Weithman (2002). The term 'religious citizenship' appears, however, to be of a more recent coinage, its usage gaining momentum alongside the development in citizenship theory towards an increasing number of distinctions between different citizenship dimensions such as ecological, technological, sexual, and others (see Isin and Wood, 1999).

Although the term 'religious citizenship' appears to be increasingly used by scholars (including Permoser and Rosenberger, 2009; Levitt, 2004; Yip 2003; Yip and Keenan, 2004), few offer a precise definition of what religious citizenship entails. An exception in this regard is Wayne Hudson (2003: 426), who makes a distinction between a 'nation-state definition', a 'civil-society definition', and a 'rights of persons'-definition of religious citizenship. Our own thinking about religious citizenship is more inspired by feminist developments of citizenship theory, where citizenship is regularly presented as encompassing the following three dimensions: status and rights, participation, and identity and belonging (Lister et al., 2007; see also Bellamy et al., 2003). Status and rights refer to both collective and individual levels, where the state assigns a certain status and rights (such as the status of national/state religion or minority religion, and the right to religious practice) to collectives and individuals.<sup>23</sup> Status and rights are also conferred upon collectives and individuals by religious institutions themselves. Religious institutions often design hierarchies in which different groups of people (lay men versus religious leaders; men versus women) are assigned different status and

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<sup>23</sup> Hudson (2003: 426) refers to this dimension of religious citizenship as part of a 'nation-state definition' of religious citizenship.

rights.<sup>24</sup> In turn, the status and rights conferred by nation-states and by religious institutions have implications for the *participation* of various groups and individuals as citizens acting within nation-states and within religious institutions. There is not a deterministic relationship, however, between status and rights on the one hand, and participation on the other. Despite in many instances lacking both status and rights, women have been able to circumvent and challenge discriminatory rules and conventions, and to carve out independent roles and dignified practices for themselves. In doing so, they have often drawn on their own sense of identity and belonging as a resource for empowerment and action. Religious identity and belonging can thus be a (re)source of citizenship practice. As outlined above, however, religious identities may provide both resources and barriers to citizenship, depending on what frameworks of religious meaning individuals draw upon, and how they interpret and use such frameworks to support their own actions and practice. Religion is thus a flexible resource that individuals can use to support their own identities, beliefs and practice, and as such it may have both empowering and disempowering effects.

Religious identities, as other identities, are not unitary, stable or fixed. Rather, identities are 'in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions' (Hall 1996: 4). As such, identity is a continuous *project* (Calhoun 1994) which we constantly work on, reshape and change through the interplay between our own life-course, our personal agency, and the social and institutional contexts in which we are located and positioned. In the words of Linda Alcoff,

*'[s]ocial identities are not simply foisted on people from the outside, as it were, but are more properly understood as sites from which we perceive, act, and engage with others. These sites are not simply social locations or positions, but also hermeneutic horizons comprised of experiences, basic beliefs, and communal values, all of which influence our orientation toward and responses to future experiences.'*

(Alcoff, 2006: 287)

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<sup>24</sup> Hudson (2003: 426) refers to this dimension of citizenship part of a 'civil-society definition' of religious citizenship.

Identities, including religious and gendered identities, are thus constructed through a dynamic interplay between internal (within the individual self) and external processes which cannot easily be disentangled and observed. We find Sissel Østberg's notion of 'integrated plural identity' useful in this regard, as it captures both the floating and shifting (plural) aspects of identity and the stable and connected (integrated) aspects of identity (Østberg, 2003: 46). According to Østberg, our identities can be plural because we present ourselves in different ways depending on the particular situation or context (situational identity). Despite presenting such fragmented and varying pictures of our identities, each one of us is *her own integrated self*, in the sense that we are conscious of our (constantly created) self and how it changes over time. In this understanding of identity construction, the contradictions that may be detected in our story-telling do not necessarily demonstrate a lack of coherence in our selves. Rather, such contradictions display how we actively navigate and negotiate between multi-faceted aspects of our identities. In Østberg's terminology (ibid.: 18), our *narrative identity* is plural as it consists of many stories or multiple identities. Identities can be characterized by difference, instability, volatility, and context, but the individual does not let go of the feeling of 'being a self'.

Contemporary, modern approaches to identity (including the approach forwarded by Østberg, 2003) are enriched by postmodern concepts like hybridity and creolization, where identity categories are viewed as contextual and dynamic. The concept of creolization refers to 'the intermingling and mixing of two or several formerly discrete traditions or cultures' (Hylland Eriksen, 2007: 112). The notion of hybridity is according to Hylland Eriksen 'a more general concept than creolization, and [...] may be used to refer to any obviously mixed cultural form' (ibid.: 113). 'Hybridity' seeks to capture how individuals who live in a 'cultural borderland' (for example due to mixed national and cultural heritage) are not primarily characterized by cultural conflict and powerlessness, but rather by options and cultural creativity. A 'hybridity approach' means that individuals are not prisoners of culture, but reflexive, creative and active users of resources available to them (Bredal, 2004: 52). In a study of arranged and forced marriages, Bredal insists on viewing religious identity as actively formed both reflexively

and discursively, rather than as a simple continuation of unambiguous or fixed traditions (ibid.).

Concepts such as hybridity and creolization, and also those of syncretism and bricolage, have thus been introduced by new theories of identity in late modernity in which binding traditions are understood to be superseded by the obligations to be responsible for one's own life and to make individualized choices (as opposed to relying on tradition and social/collective networks). Theories of late modernity have, however, been critiqued for overestimating individual choice and freedom. Yvonne Mørck (as cited in Bredal, 2004: 53) has, for example, suggested that certain stages and life situations may be more influenced by the continuity of traditions rather than by change.

Anderson's notion of 'identity work' (Anderson, 2000) is useful in describing the active work that goes into creating our narrative identities. Anderson views identity work as '(...) the dialogue between collective identities ascribed to us from others and our own identifications with various manifest and imagined communities of belonging' (ibid: 291). Identity work is thus (in line with Calhoun, 1994) a continuous project which refers to both reflexivity and constant attention to the question of 'who am I?' and to how different social contexts both constrain and provide opportunities for different forms of behaviour and practice. In our research, we are concerned with the identity work accomplished by religiously active Muslim and Christian women: how do they produce meanings of religion and of gender, and how do they construct their identities in relation to religion, gender, ethnicity, nation, and tradition?

### **Religion and gender equality**

Our research is based on the notion that religious belief and practice has both private and public aspects, and that the institutional practice of religious belief should ideally be governed by gender equality laws. We do not support, however, the notion that gender equality laws should be one-sidedly imposed upon religious associations. Rather, the road to gender equality within religious contexts should be built and sustained from within, by women and men who support the gender equal rights and participation, *in*

*combination with* strong recommendations and pressure (including prevention of the use of public funds to support gender inequality) from external factors such as the state and women's movements.<sup>25</sup> Notwithstanding the choice of strategy, the desirable outcome must be that women and men have equal rights and are free to choose the extent to which they want to act as full citizens at work, in the family, in civil society and politics and in religious observance.

As noted above, Phillips (2007) argues that multicultural practices cannot be accepted unless men and women are treated as equals. What gender equality means is of course a complex issue and feminists are also divided on what such equality entails. Different viewpoints include equal rights, equal opportunities, equal participation, and equal outcomes – all of which entail different opportunities and limitations for women's demands and multicultural demands. Furthermore, if equal rights and practices are only being supported and monitored in designated 'public sphere's such as education and the labour market, and not in designated 'private spheres' such as the family and religious organizations, then it is difficult to sustain the notion that gender equality must encompass all areas of life, despite the insistence of feminists that citizenship practices must be gender equal in both the public and private spheres (see, e.g. Lister, 2003). From a feminist viewpoint it follows that the family and religious organizations should not be considered private, in as much as they constitute important areas for the formation and contestation of gender relations and as such require political interventions. The question is then what kind of political interventions are required, and how are they to be implemented and reinforced? Clearly, the state has a choice in whether to formulate and promote policies that support the development of more gender equal practices from within the family and religious organizations. However, women who favour gender equality in the so-called 'public sphere' may be accepting of gender hierarchies and complementary (rather than equal) gender roles within the alleged 'private sphere' (Siim, 2005). Religious women may simply not care at all about gender

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<sup>25</sup> For an elaboration of the use of external protection (of women's rights) to reduce internal restrictions upon women and other disadvantaged groups, see Shachar (2001) and her concept of 'transformative accommodation'.

and positions, the lack of female preachers, of the 'God our Father' discourse (Høen, 2008; Thorbjørnsrud, 2007). In our project we explore the discourses of religious women on gender equality. We ask whether religious women find women's movements and feminism relevant to their lives, thus exploring their concern (or lack thereof) with women's rights and gender equality.

Our research analyses how women's experiences and participation in churches and mosques can be interpreted as contradictory and complex as women's active participation is sometimes encouraged, while at other times their participation is constrained through practices which cement or maintain the disciplining and control of women. In religious organizations both formal and informal negotiations take place about the group rights and duties of women and men. These group rights and duties are decisive in terms of the opportunities and constraints they produce for individual women and men who wish to be active citizens on arena such as churches or mosques. The 'successful integration and participation of [religious] citizens and residents into European societies' (Triandafyllidou et al., 2006: 1) may be crucial for an inclusive multicultural citizenship, but the integration and participation of women into religious communities and organizations may be equally important for an inclusive gendered citizenship.

### 3 RESEARCH METHODS AND DATA

#### 3.1 Brief overview of the research design

Our research design includes in-depth interviews with religious women from within the traditions of Christianity and Islam, and has been adapted to overall comparative ambitions of the project (religious women in Norway, Spain and the UK). The WP 4 research team has assessed different recruitment strategies in relation to the landscape of majoritised and minoritised religious organizations present within the three country contexts. For example, we have carefully considered the possibility of recruiting women from gendered religious organizations; that is, from organizations that are intentionally formed to establish collectives of religious women.<sup>26</sup> Looking at the national level (capital-based), we found that Norway did not display a sufficient number of such organizations that would have enabled us to achieve a successful recruitment strategy covering both ‘majority’ and ‘minority’ religion and women because ‘minority’ religious organizations for women are generally absent at the national level. This is likely to be a reflection of the historical time-period of immigration experienced by Norway.

As an alternative strategy for identifying minority ‘religious women’s organizations’, we discussed the possibility for recruiting women from migrant women’s organizations that organized religious women, for example the Somali Women’s Organization (*Somalisk kvinneforening*), or the Pakistan Women’s Organization (*Pakistansk Kvinneforening Norge*). We soon realized, however, that these organizations would not allow us to compare across religious belonging. Although the members may be religious, the organizations are primarily based on an ethnic/national basis.

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<sup>26</sup> Examples of majority organizations are the Inter-cultural interdenominational organization of Christian women AGLOW Norway (*AGLOW Norge*), and of minority organizations the Islamic Women’s Group Norway (*Islamsk Kvinnegruppe Norge*).

Hence, we chose a recruitment strategy that enables us to produce rich and comparable data through focusing on religious organizations from within majoritised and minoritised organized faith communities. Whilst Christianity has the largest number of followers in all three countries, Islam forms the second largest religion in all three countries due to immigration. A focus on both churches and mosques was thus deemed most feasible in order to facilitate recruitment and data production. We decided to adopt a four-dimensional strategy, including Christian 'majority' churches (in the form of the state religion) and Christian 'minority' churches (in the form of a 'free church' Christian faith tradition), Muslim 'majority' mosques (representing the largest Muslim immigrant group in each country) and Muslim 'minority' mosques (representing a smaller Muslim immigrant population in each country).

Christian majority churches were easily identifiable in each country, and a large church was chosen in each country context. In terms of Christian minority faiths, there are many traditions to choose from, including Methodists, Baptists, Pentecostals, and so on. In Norway, as well as in Spain and the UK, we have selected Pentecostal churches as our majority-minority faith with no ties to the state.

In terms of the major Islamic group, our strategy was to focus on the largest immigrant Muslim group in each country (Pakistanis in Norway and the UK, and Moroccans in Spain). All Muslims belong to the same *Ummah* or community of religious believers, but various historical processes of differentiation have led to a great variety of law schools and sects. Sunni-Islam, which represents the most widespread belief tradition and includes four major religious law schools, accounts for about 80 per cent of Muslim believers (Esposito, 1998). Shia-Islam, the second largest faith tradition within Islam, has its own religious law schools and represents about 20 per cent of Muslim believers (ibid.). In Norway, Spain and the UK, the largest immigrant Muslim groups are Sunni Muslims. In order to reach a minority Muslim group in each country, we opted to recruit from Shia mosques.

The following table represents our final recruitment strategy:

<b>Christianity</b>	<b>Islam</b>
<b>Majority-majority religion</b> Norway: Lutheran State Church Spain: Roman Catholic Church UK: Church of England	<b>Minority-majority religion</b> Norway: Pakistani mosque (Sunni) Spain: Moroccan mosque (Sunni) UK: Pakistani mosque (Sunni)
<b>Majority-minority religion</b> Norway: Assembly of God (Pentecostal) Spain: Assembly of God (Pentecostal) UK: Assembly of God (Pentecostal)	<b>Minority-minority religion</b> Norway: mosque (Shia) Spain: mosque (Shia) UK: mosque (Shia)

### 3.2 Characteristic features of the four religious groups

The four selected groups vary considerably in size, in aims and activities, and in their relations to their primary faith group. Thus, it is necessary to elaborate on these differences before going into the content of the interviews.

On the one hand, the four groups seem to have been set up for quite different reasons, and this is reflected not only in their activities, but also in the identities of the interviewees. Our findings of systematic variations between the faith groups, then, must be very carefully read with this as a decisive contextual feature. On the other hand, all groups are religious groups, and thus they all recruit women of faith.

We have tried to catch the similarities and the differences between the groups by constructing two axes, indicating that all the groups are positioned along the same two continuums, irrespective of any difference. One continuum stretches out between the aims being introvert and extrovert as the two extremes. The other continuum stretches out between spiritual and practical activities. We emphasize that this is a way of characterizing the group and not the general characteristics of the religion, nor of the

individual members of the groups. Thus, when we characterize the four groups it looks like this:

The first group (A: majority majority) is rather close to having introvert faith aims and spiritual activities. The main aim is to seek spiritual guidance and the group is inspired by the Christian retreat movement that has been operating in Norway for some 30 years now (see *Kirken i møte med den åndelige lengsel i vår tid*, 1999). This is a small group, in terms of its number of members, operating with a horizontal structure with no formal leader, working independently from the congregation. The women interviewed in this group are approximately between 40 and 60 years old. They all have higher education.

The second group (B: minority within majority) is positioned as having more extrovert aims and practical activities than A. The main aim is to create a social community in the combination of faith and hobby. It is a relatively small group with a rather informal structure and an appointed leader, working independently from the congregation. The activities include extrovert tasks like fund-raising. Members of the group are not obliged to belong to the 'mother congregation'. Average years of age of the respondents from this group is higher than for group A.

The third (C: minority-majority) and fourth group (D: minority-minority) are more mixed, along both axes, than group A and B. Their aims and practices seek to combine the introvert and the extrovert dimension as well as the spiritual and the practical dimension in complex ways. On the one hand they are probably more introvert than group B, but at the same time also more practical. Their aim is clearly to seek spiritual guidance, making them relatively introvert, and this is combined with aims such as promoting social and cultural issues and practical tasks like legal advice and fund-raising. Both C and D are numerically large compared to A and B. They have a more formal leadership structure, and closer ties to the 'mother mosque'. The distinction between C (minority-majority) and D (minority-minority) is unclear, but there are indications that D is focusing more on introvert faith issues than C. There is a large spread in the age of our

respondents in both groups, with more quite young women from D and more older women in B.

### **3.3 Selection of research participants**

We wanted to recruit religious active women from the four groups, active in terms of being engaged in activities that are directed towards 'women's interests' or 'women's issues'. This includes, but is not limited to, women's and children's welfare, women's role in the church/congregation/mosque, women's spirituality, marriage/relationships, women's role in society, charity, fund-raising and political lobbying. We wanted to recruit women who were engaged in these activities outside the main gender-mixed or male-dominated religious services. In other words, we were looking for separate women's groups.

It soon turned out that it was difficult to locate such women's groups in Norway in the Church of Norway (majority-majority). Most relevant groups were gender-mixed, and the women's groups we were able to identify related to churches, usually seemed to be social groups that met for coffee, exhibitions etc. After discussing our concern with a number of centrally positioned women in the state church, we did locate a relevant women's group that was willing to be interviewed. The members were very busy women, and finding time for individual interviews was quite time-consuming.

The problem with identifying a majority-minority women's group was that the people we contacted did not think that they actually had a women's group that met our criteria. Once this problem was solved, we realized that some of the women were hesitant towards being interviewed, and rejected our enquiry. The first interviewees had a very positive experience with the interviews, and soon convinced more women to participate.

Recruiting women from minority groups was quite different. For one, Islam has a strict division of gender roles, resulting in women's only groups. Also, these groups were considerably larger in terms of number of members. Once we were introduced and

accepted, there were more people to approach. The main problems with recruiting from minority religions were firstly, to locate relevant mosques with a women's group, secondly to select the actual mosques, and thirdly to find respondents. Once the mosques were chosen, we were easily accepted, and the imam and the leader of the women's groups were very service-minded. They informed about the project, asked women to volunteer, and gave us the names that we could contact for an appointment. It was difficult to find time, however, partly because of Ramadan and then because of summer vacation. We nearly gave up recruiting the last interviewee because we were unable to locate a woman that fitted our criteria and was willing. The last interviewee was not strictly a religious active woman, according to our criteria.

### **3.4 Research ethics**

Ethical approval of the Norwegian data part of WP 4 has been obtained from the Norwegian Social Science Data Service. All research participants have received a letter of information about the research project and they have all signed a written consent form which stated their right to withdraw from the project at any time in the research process without being required to explain any reason for withdrawing. No one has chosen to withdraw from the study. The respondents have also been promised anonymity and their individual identities are kept confidential. In the report, interviewees are referred to as 'interviewee', 'respondent' or 'research participant'. We have tried to avoid linking direct quotes from individuals with the churches, congregations and mosques they are from. They vary considerably in terms of number of members, and some of them have a certain profile that makes them easier to recognise even if the individual respondents are not named. Norway has a small population which has made the issue of anonymity quite challenging. It is often difficult to contextualise the analysis in order to keep the interviewee anonymous and relevant information is sometimes lost. However, we have tried our very best to prioritise anonymity of individuals throughout the presentation of our research findings.

None of the interviewees wanted to read the whole interview transcript or their quoted statements. We have promised to inform the respondents when the report is available (online or otherwise), and to disseminate our findings to their groups if and when they would like us to come.

### **3.5 In-depth interviews**

The interviews have been based on a qualitative approach to research. We have conducted in-depth interviews with the help of topic guides. Such an approach offers the opportunity to focus on a limited number of cases whilst exploring topics and meaning in depth, resulting in the production of 'thick description' data (Geertz, 1973). Following Rubin and Rubin (2005: 30), we define our approach to interviewing within the tradition of interpretive constructionist thinking, in which 'responsive interviewing' (ibid.) entails the understanding that both the researcher and the interviewee come to the research situation with their own feelings, personality, interests, and experience. Moreover, a dynamic relationship is created in the interview situation which might challenge both the researcher and the interviewee in terms of his or her understanding, and the interview setting thus provides an arena for dialogue and conversation which aims at 'depth of understanding, rather than breadth' (ibid.). A strategy of engagement in the research interview, rather than disengagement and distance, is a valued aspect of feminist methodology and research, and emphasises connections between knowledge, theory and language, and experience (Ramazanoğlu, 2002; see also Kitzinger, 2007). Further reflections on how our own backgrounds and experiences have influenced our research can be found in the next section.

In the report, the different types of research participants (majority-minority women) are presented and represented through different 'voices' (Baklien and Solberg, 1997: 22). These voices are sometimes expressed through direct quotations from the interview transcripts, while at other times they are expressed through statements produced by the researchers - statements which summarise and interpret what the research participants have said (ibid.). Moreover, our own 'researcher's voices' are expressed through the

evaluations and interpretations that are made by us on the basis of interviews and document-based data. While our aim is to keep as much distinction between these different voices as possible, we might not always have succeeded in achieving clear distinctions recognisable by our readers. Again, based on the view that research data are produced through interaction between the researcher and research participants (Kvale, 1997), we acknowledge that it is neither realistic nor advisable to succinctly separate all the different voices that speak through the discourse produced in our report.

A qualitative approach offers comparable data (across cases), but contrary to other research strategies this approach does not produce findings that can be generalised. Strictly speaking, our findings are thus limited to the organizations that have been included in our study. Nevertheless, our findings indicate issues and problems that are probably indicative of a broader set of women's organizations than those included in our study. Our analysis has been based on an inductive approach and has thus been grounded in the data.

One topic guides were developed and used for the interviews. The topic guides have been used as flexible research tools. The topic guides is included in the Appendix.

The interviews were conducted in the time period March-August 2009. We started doing pilot interviews in March 2009 and did most of the interviews during April-June 2009. The interviews have taken place at different places; in the offices of the relevant interviewee, at our workplace, a few have been conducted at cafes or in places where the group had meetings. The interviews were recorded and have all been transcribed by research assistants. They have been analysed during the autumn 2009 and spring 2010.

Quite a few of the respondents have a busy schedule and the recruitment process went slower than expected. We used the snowball method to identify the relevant groups, and contacted imams; we used e-mails and made numerous phone calls, and sent the

recruitment letter to recruit women. All the relevant groups that eventually were asked to participate in interviews were positive. In the beginning the recruitment process seemed to be smooth and the first interviews were conducted shortly thereafter. However, some of the women have been difficult to make contact with and even if they have said yes to participate in the project it has been difficult to make interview appointments with some of them. The recruitment process has been time consuming.

### **3.6 Insider/outsider problematic**

#### **Positioning the researchers**

Beatrice Halsaa and Hannah Helseth did the qualitative interviews, and Beatrice Halsaa and Cecilie Thun have done the analysis of the interview material. The interview team differed in terms of age; one is in her thirties and one in her sixties. Halsaa and Helseth often interviewed together, with Helseth as the main responsible person for doing the interviews, with Halsaa coming in with supplementary questions. The research team felt at ease with this procedure, and also felt from time to time that the age difference could be an advantage in terms of relating to the interviewees on the basis of similarity (or difference) of age.

Most interviews were made at the interviewees 'sites', whether their (religious or secular) workplace/university) or in mosques, and some were made in public places (cafés). We always brought a voice recorder, and had technical recorder problems twice, in one instance we deleted the interviewee from the sample because of this, the other time the interview was transcribed and expanded with the help of our notes.

The 'insider/outsider problematic' in this research project is a complex issue. None of the researchers in the Norwegian part of this study identify as 'religious' or belong to a religious community. However, all the researchers belong to the ethnic majority population in Norway and have attended the Norwegian public school system with teachings in Christianity, and are most familiar with the Christian majority religion (group A; the Church of Norway). Being ethnic majority Norwegians, we also shared that

position with both the Christian groups in our study (group A; the Church of Norway and group B; the Pentecostals). The researchers have different practices regarding women's rights and feminist activities, but we are all self-defined feminists.

Before entering the field and during the analysis process we have used memory work informally as a tool in order to reflect on our own thoughts on religion, our previous experiences with religion, and also our prejudice against religious people. Among the issues that came up during memory work was:

- Despite not regarding ourselves as religious persons, we have sometimes envied these respondents' firm stand in life, their sense of direction and – not the least – their level of existential reflection.
- A number of times, we realized that our comprehension of what it may mean to practice a faith like Christianity or Islam was shallow and superficial. The respondents' thoughts turned our own understandings of religion and faith upside down, and displayed our limited understanding.
- We realised to a fuller extent how much 'cultural Christians' we are, being brought up in and belonging to a Christian culture, and how little we knew about Islam.

In the interview situation, the Christian women did not behave or talk as if they had a lot to explain or to defend, and we probably did not invite them to do so to the same extent as with the Muslim interviewees. We felt more alien to the Pentecostal women than to the majority Christian women, and had to ask about several facts of their tradition. Muslim women themselves often took the opportunity of the interview to outline and explain their practices, prescriptions and doctrines to us. We were taken to be representatives of the unknowing, critical majority population.

The researchers who did the interviews were clearly outsiders to the two Muslim groups, often without a similar national or ethnic belonging, often without skills in the main language of immigrant women, and being alien to their religious rituals and doctrines. We were warmly welcomed, however, and the women we met in the mosques were generally friendly, informative and seemed to regard our project with

sincere interest. It was quite obvious that they also took this as an opportunity to correct potential misunderstandings of Islam, one was particularly prepared for this purpose and openly informed us about it. The Christian women likewise welcomed us warmly. We were treated more like insiders to the majority Christian women, who took our knowledge of certain names and practices for granted. This was slightly different with the Christian minority women who soon learned that we did not belong to their community. None of them displayed any sign of wanting to defend their faith or practices, but they willingly explained when we asked.

However, an interesting point arose in the analysis of the interview material. Thun, who did not take part in the interviews, read the interview transcripts in the analysis process and to her, for instance the issues of spirituality emphasized by the interviewees in group A (majority Christians) was very unfamiliar. She did not have the same sense of being an 'insider' to the majority Christian women. Instead, some of the issues in the interview transcript from group C (Sunni Muslims) in particular, and to some extent group D (Shia Muslims) were more familiar to her, due to her previous research on Somali girls and women (which are Sunni Muslims) (Thun, 2004).

The feeling of being an 'insider' to the majority Christian women in the interview situation, may be because of a sense of belonging to the shared community of 'we Norwegians', implying a shared history, values and reference points based on a Christian heritage. These things are usually unsaid, but they may still be present in the interview situation, and provide a certain context for the interview.

Lastly in this section, it is worth noticing that we as researchers as well as our respondents are situated in a context of negative public attention towards Islam. This may be one reason why the Muslim interviewees felt the need to defend and to emphasize the positive aspects of their religion. This context may also have contributed to a stronger focus on religion as resource, rather than barrier, in our analysis of the interview material.

### **3.7 How are issues of gender, feminism, religion, identity and citizenship talked about in our interviews?**

In Strand 1 of FEMCIT WP4 we applied theoretical perspectives inspired by the political opportunity structure approach, frame analysis, and Bacchi's 'What's the problem represented to be' approach (Nyhagen Predelli, Halsaa, Thun and Sandu, 2009). In Strand 2 we have found Bacchi's approach to have continued relevance to our analysis. Although Bacchi is first and foremost interested in various actors on political arenas, including governments and non-governmental actors, and how they identify and define social policy problems, her approach is useful also on arenas that are associated with civil society more than with the state. Bacchi (1999) argues that actors give a particular shape to social 'problems' through the ways in which they are spoken about and the proposals advanced to address the problems. It is not 'the problem' itself that requires exploring, rather, it is how the problem is *represented*. Competing understandings of social issues can, according to Bacchi, be labelled as 'problem representations' (Bacchi, 1999: 2). She argues that it is important to identify competing representations of 'problems', because they will include concomitant representations of possible and desirable solutions. Bacchi is concerned with both structure and agency, or with both constraints and opportunities. She draws attention to the fact that we are all situated in discourses which may limit how we view the world, while we at the same time can use language constructively, intentionally and politically to shape the way we describe problems and prescribe solutions.

On the religious arena, we examine how individual religious women use language and discourse to construct particular problem representations of the relationship between themselves as women, their religious belief and practice, and the opportunities and constraints they experience in practicing citizenship within religious organizations. We also examine how religious women understand the concept of feminism, and how they talk about the women's movement. Bacchi's focus also requires a 'reflexive scrutiny' of discourses and concepts, which engages a wide range of voices that may challenge our

pre-existing and possibly biased understandings (Bacchi, 2005: 207). Such voices should include those that may struggle to be heard and voices that may be silenced by more powerful actors. By interviewing representatives of both majoritised and minoritised women within different religious organizations, we seek to identify different voices in current debates addressing the relationship between gender, religion and citizenship.

The following questions are addressed in the analysis of our interviews with religious women:

**A. Religion, identity and meaning**

How is the meaning of religion represented in the interviews?

Is religion represented as fixed, as flexible, or both? What aspects are talked about as fixed, or as flexible?

How is religion practiced?

**B. Citizenship**

How is citizenship talked about? (in general? In terms of religion?)

Can/is religious participation and practice be linked to citizenship?

Is religion represented as a resource or as a barrier (or both) to citizenship as practice?

**C. Gender equality**

How is gender equality and women's rights talked about?

How is feminism and the women's movement talked about?

How are gender relations practiced?

Before presenting our analyses of the interviews, we would like to underline that we have approached the texts with gratitude and respect.

## 4 IDENTITY, MEANING AND RELIGION AS A FLEXIBLE SOURCE

### 4.1 Introduction

We have asked selected groups of religiously active women from Christian congregations and Muslim mosques about the meaning of religion, inviting them to describe themselves and their religious identity. We depart from established arguments about the meaning of religion and its relation to identity: According to Greil and Davidman, 'religion is intimately bound up with people's sense of who they 'really' are' (Greil and Davidman, 2007: 549). Describing the normative significance of religion, Modood claims, 'namely, it offers identities that matter to people' (Modood, 2007: 79). We expect this meaning-making function of religion to be confirmed in our interviews. This does not necessarily imply fixed and stable religious identities and content of religious beliefs. To what extent this is so or not, is one of our research questions.

Scholars in religious studies claim that there is an ongoing reinterpretation within Islam and Christianity (Leirvik, 2002), and we will explore indications of such identity work within and between our four religious groups.

Living as a religious minority has an impact on the negotiations between norms and doctrines on the one side and religious practices on the other (Leirvik, 2002; Jacobsen, 2002). How will the various minoritised positions of Pentecostal and Muslim women affect the identities? We have not selected respondents according to age criteria, but we expect age to be relevant, for instance with respect to gender issues and to 'Norwegian Islam' (Islam adapted to Norwegian culture and society)?<sup>27</sup> Based on previous research, we expect to find that (some of the) young Muslim women – like

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<sup>27</sup> The concept 'Norwegian Islam' (Vogt 2000) is a parallel to 'Euro-Islam'. This is a contested concept introduced by the political scientist Bassam Tibi who claims that Muslims in Europe should 'bid farewell to the idea of converting others, and renounce the Jihad. The Jihad is not just a way of testing yourself but also means using violence to spread Islam. The third thing they need to give up is the Shariah, which is the Islamic legal system.' <http://www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/0,1518,druck-440340,00.html> (March 22. 2010) 'Euro-Islam' refers to discussions of Islam and Muslims in Europe and the potentially emerging 'new' versions of Islam that combine established duties and principles of Islam with contemporary European norms and practices. See for instance <http://www.euro-islam.info/> (March 22 2010).

many second generation Muslims - turn to the *Quran* and the *Hadith* instead of the dogma of the law schools. This would confirm claims of a strong potential for Muslim reinterpretations and adaption to contemporary Norwegian society. However, we may find the opposite tendencies, also discussed in (Roald, 2005: 91). This means that 'Norwegian Islam' is a fluid concept that may imply opposite tendencies, including a withdrawal from the Norwegian society in order to live a life restricted to one's 'own' ethnic and religious sphere. With questions like these we now turn to our interviews.

## **4.2 Religion as meaning-maker**

We started the conversations with women from the four selected religious groups by asking them to elaborate the meaning of religion for their personal identity and in their personal lives. We had been quite anxious about this topic, thinking maybe that the women would find it hard to answer. This was not the case, and the responses were generally quite comprehensive and rich. We have systematized them according to the analytical distinction between what religion *does* and what religion *is* (Woodhead, 2007). In this section, we present their elaborations according to what religion *does*. Our findings support the claim that religion gives a feeling of identity and belonging. It is intimately bound up with the interviewee's sense of who they 'really' are (Greil and Davidman, 2007: 549). Also, roughly speaking, the interviewees talked in rather similar ways about the meaning of religion, irrespective of their belonging to the Church of Norway, the Pentecostal congregation, the Shia or the Sunni community. According to our respondents, to be religious means a number of basic things.

### **Foothold and foundation**

First and foremost among the many descriptions of what religion means in their everyday life, religion or faith are claimed to be the very 'foothold' and 'foundation' in the lives of the respondents. Faith gives them direction at difficult crossroads, and faith guides them in all aspects of life, to paraphrase the interviewees. Faith is also said to offer them an 'ethical standard' that they can apply in their own lives, and faith in this

sense is also described as something to 'aspire' to. Faith provides coherence, in otherwise 'compartmentalized lives'.

We were struck by the profundity of the representations of what religion does, as well as by the ease with which the interviewee's shared their reflections with us. We have included a number of citations below in order to illustrate the tremendous impact of religion on these women:

*'The faith is the girder [bærebjelke] in my life, a foothold or foundation in life that shifts wind and weather and road conditions ... is the essence, that holds me firmly, that is there, in a way. (...) It is the most basic, actually, that I am created and willed by God.'*

(A3)

*'(I am) very proud of being a Muslim, I believe it is important for me to live according to, it guides me and encourages me, in society, at home in relation to individual persons, how to bring up my children, help others, care, and show understanding for those who are different from me. ... My whole life is governed by religion.'*

(C3)

*'Religion means everything ... it seems to be a dangerous word, right. To be subjected to, and to follow prescriptions, like brainwashing and stuff- but I regard it completely different, like a system. That tells me how to love, how to improve my living, and so on. Manners and stuff. I don't just look at the mandatory things one really should do, like pray, fast etcetera, because that sounds very tiresome. For me, it is my body of laws [lovverk].'*

(D1)

*'Religion is really my value foundation, my whole life, the most important in life ... to put it simply, it is the basic values that make up the foundation for all my decisions, and everything, all the choices I make... Of course, one fails every now and then, but it is what is there, the basis ... for example for how I spend my time. I am conscious of what I use my time for, lots of time in the congregation, with my family and alone. For tasks that are mine alone. And of course, like ethical and moral issue have a great say, like choices I make regarding ethics and moral are based upon what I believe in ... and the way I bring up my children, and obviously I try to be honest in all situations, and in working life.'*

(B2)

*'Religion permeates most of what I am doing, I am concerned about wondering, understanding .... Less concerned with right and wrong and dogmatic principles, but very concerned about this. This rather mystical, incomprehensible, that after*

*all gives me a direction in life. It permeates with respect to work, attitudes to things that other people might not think are related to religion. ...'*

(A6)

*'Religion is something you live, that you have in yourself all the time. It is not something you bring out at certain times. It is, I say, there all the time. (B5) It is something one has inside which is always there. Something, it is not something you put away and stuff. No.'*

(B5)

These citations give rich evidence to established claims of what religion *does* for people, or how religion *functions* as a provider of meaning in genuine and profound ways. Religion is described by our respondents, displayed above, as a value foundation, a permeating issue, a girder. It is therefore something that you always actively 'live' [live]. Obviously, religion is a key dimension in these women's lives.

Based on our respondents' remarks, agendas of gender equality and social reforms (such as women's movement's) need to take religious beliefs seriously. If agendas that include measures to promote women's rights are formulated in ways that are compatible with – or at least not principally colliding with - religious belief, they may mobilize women like our respondents. But if religious women cannot somehow appropriate feminist or gender equality reform agendas, these women are likely to ignore or even struggle against them.

### **Community, company and belonging**

When the interviewees were asked to reflect about the meaning of religion in their lives, they also often underlined faith as a provider of 'community', 'company' and 'belonging'. Although belonging is a core element in identity, and as such a 'natural' topic to address within the research context, the focus on this aspect was striking. The numerous references to belonging among the interviewees enrich the otherwise rather abstract concept of citizenship as rights and duties. Belonging is a basic concept in recent theories of citizenship (Siim, 2007), and is elaborated further in Chapter 5.

The expressions of our respondents regarding belonging and identity confirm that religion functions as a social glue of great significance. They also correspond with the claims that religious groups represent significant communities for inclusion and participation. This has been asserted for instance in the *Report to the Norwegian Parliament on diversity through inclusion and integration*, with the heading 'Religion as a doorway to social participation' (Kommunal- og regionaldepartementet, 2003-2004, Section 1.1.7).

When our interviewees talk about community and belonging it is interesting to note that they do not restrict their discussions to local and national communities. This is in line with Permoser and Rosenbergers' (2009) concept of 'religious citizenship' as partly 'derived from religious membership, and religious citizenship transcends nationality and therefore increases the rights of Muslim immigrants'. However, this is evident not just among the Muslims who have a migrant background, but also among Christian women with or without a missionary background.

Several respondents refer to transnational belongings when they outline the meaning of religion. Thereby they indicate how religious communities rupture national borders as the frame of identity:

*'Wherever you travel in the world, you can go into a church and be a part of a community. Without having to go around in a town, or a country, there is always a connection/context [sammenheng] for you. Now, I don't know what it is like to live without being part of a congregation, because I always have, but for me, belonging to a congregation or a Christian community, in particular in times of crisis, I have experienced that it is in no way indifferent. There are people who care, almost like being part of a family of brothers and sisters.'*

(A3)

*'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 also 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.'*

(A4)

These citations are a strong reminder of how religion functions to provide identity. Feeling at home is basic, but 'home' is also a complex concept. Home means belonging and roots, but may also imply social control and loyalties that inhibits autonomy. Whether 'home' and belonging is positive or negative for the individual persons depend on the context, such as being positioned as belonging to a majoritised or minoritised faith community (Leirvik, 2002; Roald, 2005). One of the Muslim interviewee's told us about of her grown up daughters. She was in a state of deep depression because of all the negative focus on Islam in mass media. The interviewee managed to change the situation, however, by drawing on the positive aspects of Islam. She described how she had invited all her daughters along to support each other, and to address the strengths of Islam and the option of being proud of oneself as a Muslim:

*'And then she (the daughter) improved a bit. Because she was totally alone at work, and there was always questions (about Islam) addressed to her. She was alone, but she did not know how to respond, you see? Consequently, it is very important to understand who one is. One should never hide away one's identity, identity is very important for a human being.'*

(C2)

This citation illustrates that questions or critic related to one's belonging can have quite damaging effects on religious identity and ability to respond. Support from a faith community can then be crucial to restore a sense of *pride*. On her own, this person did not cope well with identifying with and belonging to a minoritised faith group, but the community (her family) reached out and restored the damage to her self-respect.

Another interviewee gave a clear-cut representation of religion as a vital source of strength and *empowerment*. She described how reading the Bible made her feel stronger in several ways. She read the Bible every day, and reading the holy texts helped her to 'carry [bære] each day, and to meet other people' (B1).

Religion provides *safety, care* and *hope* for our respondents. There were several statements referring to the conviction that we are born in order to cooperate, and to help one another. We should all strive to display empathy and care for each other,

interviewees underlined, irrespective of religious belonging. One of the women explained in this way:

*'Let's say I have a Norwegian neighbour, and if I see that they have problems I'll go and help them. It doesn't matter to me, I see him and her as human beings, I don't see him or her as a Muslim or Christian. Well, religion is ok, but as long as you respect, respect is the very highest, very highest in a community, and in the whole world.'*

(D2)

Another woman described her belief that God was 'the creator of all human beings', including of herself, and how fundamental that is for her identity. To be created by God, and to be not only responsible to God, but also to be loved by God is 'a very, like a positive foundation' she said (A5). Then she went on to elaborate how she did not find her understanding of reality – created by God - as weird, probably presupposing that we might think so. She described how she identifies with *all people* because she thinks that everyone is created by God and is equally valuable. She did not find this to be weird, but underlined how she understood it as exactly the opposite. She sees herself as valuable and worthy, and believes everyone else to be equally valuable and worthy of her respect - because we are all created by God.

This representation of God was quite typical of the Christian women we met. They did not see God as a withdrawn figure. They think that He is actually here, with us. God is a figure that we can be in contact with, and this is why they pray to God.

The image of God as nothing separate from but rather as intertwined in everyday life. God is one who cares in a very literal sense, who gives these women a deep confidence in life, irrespective of the things that happen. This trust in God should not be seen as an expression of fatalism, one of them explained to us. It is rather an expression of the vital importance of the conviction that God really cares and that she herself is important (A5).

This way of talking about God was most strongly exposed by women from group A, but this interpretations of the interviews finding should be handled with care. It may be attributed primarily to the particular aim of group A, and consequently to what kind of women the group is likely to recruit compared to the other three groups. Thus, we don't see this finding as an intrinsic characteristic of the religious identity of people belonging to the Church of Norway in general.

Faith was also described as a source of *peace, tranquillity* and *quietness* across all four religious groups. Muslim women often referred to these features of faith with reference to Islamic doctrines:

*'The five columns, frames around spiritual life, are what should be read, the prayers. Five times a day. I do it because it gives me strength, and it cleanses the heart and controls the passions and the temptations. ... When I come from this (prayers) room, if something has happened and I am on fire, then I just forget and I calm down a little and I have peace and quiet. Many people say; you are so calm. And this is why I fast, it has taught me to practice love.'*

(C4)

If we – as researchers who do not belong to any faith community but grew up within a Christian culture - thought that Islam is much more a set of rules and restrictions than Christian faith, or that the specific Muslim prescriptions to pray and likewise makes it less authentic spiritually speaking, the interviewees convinced us of the contrary. The citation above displays that Muslims prescriptions are compatible with genuinely religious experiences, along similar lines as Christian women describe.

Faith based prescriptions do not preclude faith as being a source of creativity. One woman very explicitly focused on this issue:

*'No, it, in many ways it invites, invites me to creativity. It invites me to be creative in the bright and dark moments of life. ... We all live, in various ways and various fields, in relation to our personality, then. And so this gives me a foundation also in death and pain. That is not the last there is, because there is something, there is hope – in the middle of darkness there is hope. Out of ashes flowers grow.'*

(A3)

A religious identity does not preclude an active, creative and formative role for each person. Often, this is rather what is required by faith, but this is a topic for Chapter 5 on citizenship.

Some of the research participants described the women's group as a kind of *therapy*. They told us that it was sometimes hard to draw the line between therapy and explorations of religious issues, with respect to their own lives as well as to other women in their group. This is yet another indication of how far and deep religion permeates identity.

Lastly, we will briefly mention that religious identities also structure daily life and practices. This is most pertinent among those who have a habit – prescribed or not – of saying prayers regularly, and of prioritizing their inner life. Spiritual guidance is of no use if you don't set aside time each day for yourself, one of the interviewees explained. It is necessary to have 'time for quietness, for stillness and the company of God, to get in contact with this outside of yourself. (...), she said, and also explained that 'quietness with God' was a source of nutrition (A6). Irrespective of potential rewards, religious practices are time consuming, and influence life in the short run as well as long run.

An extended time perspective on life that includes death is quite important with respect to religious identity. We have the impression that this differs between the Christian and Muslim groups, however. Muslim women had a habit of referring to life after death, and to the Day of Judgement, in a way that Christian women did not do (C1; C2). In fact, most of the Muslim women referred to the Day of Judgement when they explained Islamic prescriptions to us, and outlined how they try to implement them. The frequent references to potential reward or punishment could be interpreted as if the respondents had a rather external relation to their faith (they loyally followed the religious prescriptions in order to gain or not to lose something). The issue of internal/external relations to faith is complex, however. The habit of giving accounts of the Day of Judgement was always expanded and deepened by the Muslim women with references to personal aspects of faith as well as to issues of personal choice. This will be

elaborated further in the next section when we turn from the functions of religion to the content of faith.

### 4.3 What religion is

Religion or faith has *content* as we discussed in the introduction, a set of doctrines and prescriptions. When we asked the respondents to tell us about the meaning of religion in their lives, they not only took the functional approach outlined above. They also shared their thoughts about the content of their faith, what their religion *is*. The analytical differentiation between religious functions and content is based on Woodhead (2007), not on the interviewees, as we have outlined in Chapter 2.

Contrary to the overwhelming similarities in the representations of what religion *does*, the representations differed a lot with respect to what religion *is*. Firstly, the responses indicate a broad range of religious conceptions. Secondly, Muslim women from both groups often referred to the obligatory aspects of Islam, to the prescriptions they are expected or obliged to adhere to, whereas Christian women hardly mentioned equivalent issues. Women from group A, however, were distinguished by the strong and consistent way in which they emphasized religion as a personal relation to God and religion as a dialogue between themselves and God.

Regarding the differences between the selected four groups on the issue of the meaning of religion in their lives, we once more want to underline the necessity of careful reading. The differences between groups, elaborated in Chapter 3, reflect the different aims of the four groups, but in addition they also correspond to differences between Islam and Christianity as religious institutions. Islam has a more duty-oriented ethics and is more practice-oriented than Christianity, and the Pentecostal movement is a lay movement without a fixed liturgy and with no sacraments, as explained by one of the respondents (B3: 8)

## Religion as a set of rules

Muslim interviewee's were inclined to talk about Islam's five pillars or duties when they outlined the meaning of religion in their lives. Several interviewee's elaborated the duty of *Salah*, the ritual prayer which must be performed five times a day (three times for Shia's); the *Sawm*, or duty to fast during the month of Ramadan, the *Zakat* or duty to give alms (C5), and the *Hajj*, the duty to do the pilgrimage to Mecca. There were also a number of comments related to Muslim dress code, or the obligation to dress decently (D1; D2); to satisfy your husband in marriage (D1), the duty to convert others etc. (C5). Some phrases expressed by Muslim women were never used by Christian interviewees. References to God-given 'prescriptions' or 'recipe's given by God' and emphasis that 'the Creator knows best' (C1) belong to a Muslim discourse, at least in our material. This illustrates that Muslim women tended to elaborate on different issues than Christian women, and more often referred to religious doctrines and prescriptions:

*'The point is that when you talk about responsibility it is with respect to what you will be asked, what God will ask you about regarding your situation. God has distributed the answers, because on the Day of Judgement, which we believe in, God will ask in relation to the questions you got, and if the answers were not defined it would be difficult if God should ask you. You believe in a life after death. And this is where it is difficult, I believe, because people, people question why it is this and that, and maybe they have not understood the totality, why one should take the responsibility. Yes, because you believe in a life after death, and you have got duties and you have to reply on Day of Judgement.'*

(C1)

*'The Quran is the guide, to put it that way. You find about it, your whole life, right. So everyone tries to follow it. As well as what we find in Sunnah.'*<sup>28</sup>

(C5)

*'Obviously, when one becomes religious there are automatically limitations, rights. One cannot attend parties, eh, well you may attend but you are not to drink, right. And then, well, what's the point, right? ... Because, suddenly (you have to explain) "I cannot shake hands with you", and so there are lots of limitations ... And then there are restrictions concerning swimming.'*

(D1)

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<sup>28</sup> The '[normative](#)' example of Muhammad's life is called the [Sunnah](#) (literally 'trodden path').

These citations illustrate the habit of referring to duties, a number of restrictions in everyday practices, and also to Day of Judgement as a definitive and dividing event. The strong focus on these issues by Muslim women is partly related to the fact that we as interviewers knew little about Islam and openly said so, and to the interviewee's wish to inform us. Also, we suppose, this eagerness to explain the duties and prescriptions is related to the fact that Islam is a minority religion, and stigmatized as such (Leirvik, 2002; Roald, 2005). The urge to defend and repudiate accusations based on prejudice was strong, and a distinguishing feature of the Muslim women we talked to.

### **Religion as a dialogue**

Unlike Muslim women, Christian women hardly ever referred to religious prescriptions. What struck us with a similar strength, however, was the emphasis on religion as a relational phenomenon:

*'I have a personal God-relation, I approach God as a relation in my life, an important relation (...) And then it is also about the role of God [Gudsrollen] being so real and important, so, we, we, we take it as a completely realistic thing, this me and God, this is what it is about, then, to work on this relation. And I felt that I needed it, because I felt there was a distance between me and God. That I talk to a fellow human, you for instance, in a completely different way than I talk to God. And this way to work, that we have in this group, makes me change this stuff. And it is very life-affirming.'*

(A1)

This was most noticeable among Christian women from group A, who talked consistently and with deep conviction about religion as a personal relation with God. Once more, this must be seen in relation to the aim of their faith group to strengthen exactly this bond to God.

### **4.5 Messy categories**

There are, however, a number of exceptions from the just mentioned difference between the focus of Muslim respondents on a set of doctrines and the focus of the Christian respondents on inner, personal relations and dialogue. All respondents,

irrespective of group, invested time and energy in identity work (Anderson, 2000). They did not have a doxic, silently transmitted religious identity, but a reflexively formed religious identity (Jacobsen, 2002). For instance, one of the Muslim respondents claimed that although Islam had prescriptions, and ‘some even important’ (prescriptions), she herself was not dependent on them.

*‘The most important thing for me is to have peace, so if I find peace in faith, I follow (the rules), if not, I don’t.’*

(D5)

She also said

*‘I am satisfied with what I follow from religion. Because I mostly follow what my heart says, I have to say.’*

(D5)

This expression conveys personal choice and a reflexive identity:

*‘It is important for me to do things not because I have to. I don’t like to do things because I have to. I want to feel that I am in some control and that I have, that I have a choice, right?’*

(D4)

This citation is crucial because it illustrates a modern, reflexive Muslim religious identity – different from the popular image often displayed in Norwegian and international popular media. Faith, for this woman, is clearly more than a product of socialization and tradition; it is more than naturalized conventions. The faith of our Muslim respondents is not a matter of tradition or socialization alone. They all also take a personal approach to faith, and display features of a *personal identity* (Anderson in Thun, 2004), or *subjective* religious identity (Fangen, 2007: 411). Several Muslim respondents seemed to be characterized by an *integrated, plural identity* (Østberg, 2003): They have a plural understanding of themselves, consisting of several and often contradictory elements related to their transnational belongings as well as to their minoritised positioning within the Norwegian society, but at the same time they appear as integrated personalities. These aspects of Muslim religious identity are important with respect to religion as a

resource, because reflexivity allows for revisions and change contrary to naturalized faith.

### **Choice and tradition**

One Muslim woman, following the *Hanafi*<sup>29</sup> law school, told us that she did not have ‘all the time it would take’ to interpret the prescriptions herself. Based on her statement about compliance with the law school, and in line with Norwegian popular image of Islam, we might be tempted to categorize her religious identity as fixed and stable, without much scope for interpretations and negotiations. The woman’s conscious discussion of religious interpretations that succeeded the first statement was, however, a reminder that faith and identities are not that easy to describe. She said:

*‘It takes a lot of knowledge to interpret. So it is about making a conscious choice regarding which law school you want to adhere to. It is important to be conscious about this, because mixing them is sort of wrong. Either you adhere to this interpretation, or that.’*

(C1)

The comment displays an interesting mixture of reflexivity and choice on the one hand, and adherence to tradition on the other. This position, which is probably also related to education and to class, gives scope for applying religion as a tool for change. It allows for reason and common sense. This interpretation was reinforced when the respondent explained various ways of practicing Islam, for instance of saying the prayers. Then she expanded her argument this way:

*‘I feel that one is in a process all the time. As a Muslim there are no standards, in a way, there is no standard Muslim. We are learning new things all the time. Being born a Muslim means getting it in with the mother’s milk, it becomes a habit, and you don’t really know why you do it. And when you are asked, you don’t really know. I have noticed this in particular when I meet someone who has converted to Islam. I guess it is like that with all religions, but then I feel that maybe they (converts) know more about why one does or doesn’t do things than I do personally. So, in a way there is a process [utvikling], like (what I said earlier about) the new and the old generation (of migrant Muslim’s). This is very interesting, right, because in a way one does things by force of habit. Then you get a question, and you don’t quite know why you do this. And then you begin to*

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<sup>29</sup> *Hanafi* is one of four ‘schools of law’ within the Sunni Muslim tradition.

*search, why does one really do this? So, well, this is really interesting. But then there is this thing about knowing, maybe, to really be serious or sincere concerning one's faith.'*

(C1)

This citation surely expresses a personal, reflective religious identity, in line with the complex understanding of identity as discursively formed rather than being a continuation of unambiguous tradition (Bredal, 2004).<sup>30</sup> The claim that 'there is no standard Muslim' is in line with scholars like Leirvik (2002) who have stressed the ongoing interpretation and negotiation work among Muslims in diaspora. The reference to 'generation' is also in line with several respondents' argument that age or generational differences matters with respect to religious attitudes and practices. The distinction between the 'old and the young' generation with respect to immigration status or residence time is valid.

In line with the references to age and generation, some of the Muslim women discussed the relationship between culture and tradition on the one hand and religion or sacred prescriptions on the other (D1; D4). They tended to blame cultural traditions for various taboos related to Islam, such as gender segregation (D1) and forced marriage (D4). This cleansing of Islam of negative practices and attributing these to Muslim culture is, one might say, an example of using religion as a tool to increase respect and recognition.

One of the young interviewees claimed that Islam is not at all severe, although she thought that most (ethnic Norwegian) people seem to think so. And she went on to explain that:

*'Many don't read it (the Quran) at all, nor the Bible or the books of the Pentateuch [Mosebøkene]. But they have their opinions, based on what their parents and grandparents say, right. I think this is a bit mistaken. One should obtain knowledge oneself. So, I cannot just sit and listen to my father, what he knows about Islam, that he maybe has heard from his grandfather or grand-grandfather, right? I have to*

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<sup>30</sup> For further information of discussions of identity as reflexive or traditional in Norwegian research on Muslims, see Bredal, 2004: 72-74.

*provide knowledge myself, in order to understand others and myself and what Allah says, and which roads are the right ones and which paths I should take and stuff.'*

(D2)

Once again the issue of generation (Leirvik, 2002; Jacobsen, 2006, 2009; Roald 2005) pops up: One should not just listen to what older people say, but rather educate oneself. One ought to understand, and not simply follow established traditions.

Another young Muslim woman told us that moving out of her parents' home and then meeting a Norwegian convert had been two major, motivating incidents with respect to making her want to understand Islam and not follow the inherited prescriptions. She wanted to understand 'the logic of Islam, Islam as a system' (D1). Her expression is interesting because it displays a mixture of reflexivity and loyalty to tradition. Reflexive (aspects of) identities were more prominent among the Muslim minority women (D1, D2, D4, D5) compared to the Muslim majority, and more prominent among the younger than the older women.

### **Christian restrictions**

Some of the Christian research participants were also concerned with religious prescriptions, and explained in detail how their practices had been formed by religious regulations. Contrary to the Muslim women, this issue was more often mentioned by women belonging to the Christian minority, and interestingly the stories about rules of conduct generally emphasized the restrictions as belonging to the past. They were illustrations of how it used to be in previous times within their congregation:

*'Obviously, growing up a Christian means a lot of restrictions regarding what you do and don't ... I have grown up with lots of those sacrifices, we could not go to the cinema, not to the theatre, could not dance.'*

(B3)

Religious restrictions are not reserved for Muslim communities, but for Christian women, in particular from group B, the restrictions are presented as a thing of the past, thus signalling improved conditions and modernity. We also notice that Christian women

who mention regulations imply that the restrictions were part of the culture of their faith community and not of the faith doctrines themselves. This is similar to the Muslim women who made a distinction between liberal religious doctrines and restrictive cultural practices and social control within their communities. And it differs from the Muslim women who refer to sacred texts and traditions in order to justify Muslim practices. This last citation in this section is a clear expression of a faith free of nitty gritty detailed prescriptions:

*'And then life has on many occasions taught me that the longer I live, the more Christianity means for me, and the simpler it gets. So, my theology becomes more simple [enkelt] all the time. I relate to Jesus every day. And so, so this, that all we disagree on, all we talk about, all the doctrines, all that, that one person means this and another means that and stuff, I can't bear relating to this so much. I don't manage to take a stand any longer, I kind of have taken a stand, and that is the most important.'*

(B3)

This seems to be a deeply 'relaxed' religious identity. The respondent has taken a stand pro Christianity and Jesus. She is reconciled and safe with her faith, and mundane quarrels are no longer that important. It is probably not accidental that this attitude belongs to a Christian woman in a society where Christianity is the majority religion. She does not convey a duty to explain or defend her position. 'Relating to Jesus' is a sufficient statement. It is hard to foresee a parallel expression from Muslim migrants in Norway. Like Leirvik, we recognize the particular challenges of living as a Muslim in a Muslim minority society (Leirvik, 2002: 14). The Muslim minority has to cope with an uninformed majority (with respect to Islam) as well as a hostile contemporary cultural and political climate. Positioned as a religious minority in an unfriendly context, our Muslim respondents may have felt tempted or obliged not just to explain their faith as much as possible, but also to defend it.

Overall, our interviews indicate that a reflexive religious identity is distributed across the faith groups (A1, A6; C1; C3, C4; D3; D2), along with socially rooted and embodied religious identities (to be born in the congregation/creed A1, C5 etc). We have seen that Muslim women are going back to their religious sources - the *Quran* and the *Hadith*

– as part of their identity work. This seems to generate arguments and empower them with respect to paternal control within their religious communities and against the stigmatization and discrimination from society at large. Christian women are also concerned with identity work, and apply select passages from the *Bible* to counteract traditions they do not like.

#### **4.5 Women and men to admire**

Religion is a provider of norms and of narratives. They were displayed in various ways when we asked the interviewees if there were men and women in their religious tradition that they admired. On the one hand, the Christian and Muslim women were similar in the sense that they mentioned famous figures from the past (such as the Prophet, the 12 Imams, Jesus and Maria), contemporary public figures (politicians, intellectuals, missionaries), figures that they knew personally (like a teacher, a priest, an Imam), and members of their own families (an aunt, a husband). They also often used similar words to describe why they admired these persons. This means that the normative reference resembled each other across the four religious groups (the admired persons were honest, stood up for other people, were able to ‘see’ other persons, communication etc).

On the other hand, there were also some interesting differences between the Muslim and the Christian women. The most striking was the extent to which they applied religious narratives. Most of the Muslim women referred to narrations of Islamic ideals when asked about female and male figures that they looked up to (C1; 3; C4; C5; D1, D2: 19, 21, D3; D4). There was a strong focus on historic figures from Islam’s ‘golden age’ in both Muslim groups, according to their different faith denominations. Core incidents from these historic women’s lives were described, sometimes in detail. Often mentioned were figures like Aisha – wife of the Prophet and a learned woman; Khadija, the first wife of the Prophet and a business woman; Fatima – daughter of the Prophet who claimed land and challenged male religious leaders, and Zainab – daughter of Fatima and sister of Imam Husain, taken prisoner during the struggle at Kərbala in 680

AC and thereafter playing a major role in the religious strife between Shia and Sunni Muslims.

The Christian respondents usually did not talk about famous women from the Bible, but when they referred to them they did so rather briefly. We assume that the different ways of applying religious narratives may partly be explained by simply different ethical genres (Leirvik, 2002), with the narrative genre being more widespread among the Muslim respondents.<sup>31</sup> In addition, we also believe that our position as researchers has had an impact: The Muslim respondents, being aware of our ignorance regarding the history of Islam, explained the stories of their admired figures, often in detail and with enthusiasm. Sometimes we encouraged them to do so, but not always. Also, the continuous public critique of Islam and of Muslim women as weak and victims of misogynist religious cultures imply that Muslims are negatively situated. The interview gave them a chance to speak against the public image, and they all took the opportunity to do so. The Christian respondents probably took it for granted – and rightly so – that we were familiar with the persons they referred to since we were all ethnic Norwegians.

During the interviews, we noticed how the various female figures from the Quran described by the Muslim respondents play significant roles in contemporary gender struggles. The functions of these narratives are several: They give guidance, strength and hope to the individual respondent regarding her own rights as a woman in her everyday life. They serve as counter proof to accusations against Islam of being a patriarchal religion. They may convince strangers to Islam, outsiders like us, of the historical heritage of gender equality within Islam. Likewise, the strong female figures potentially play a vital role in the internal gender negotiations within Islamic communities, as evidence of what a real or ‘authentic’ Islamic community should be like. Several references to well educated women – who know Islam well, even by heart –

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<sup>31</sup> Leirvik (2002: 22) describes three ethical genres in Islam: a) the *prescriptive genre* – an orientation towards rules like the *Hadiths*, the *Quran's* guidance or the examples of Muhammad; b) the *narrative genre* – the retelling of good and elevating examples, as in the mysticism; and c) the *discursive genre* – an analytical and discussing approach to ethics, a concern with the foundation of ethics rather than the concrete shaping of morals.

point in the same direction. One respondent, for example, said that lack of competence in Islam is a problem because she feels she is unable to discuss her religion properly.

Several Muslim women related their admiration for particular persons to women's rights in contemporary society. One of them mentioned the hijab debate and described how she admired girls and women who stand forward and who have an opinion, and stand up for their choice. She commented on the 'A-møbel-saken' (a case related to a furniture store called A-house),<sup>32</sup> told us that she actually knows and admires the involved woman:

*'It was cool because she was involved and had a court case. It is interesting that you stand there and do not just struggle for yourself but also for likeminded. That was historic, maybe?'*

(C1)

Another woman mentioned the Pakistan lawyer Asma Jahangir<sup>33</sup> along with 'lots of women who works actively for the wellbeing of women and their rights' (C3). 'As a Muslim woman you should not be quiet, silent and kind', one of them said, but rather be like Zainab who courageously took the floor when needed and spoke against injustice. *'In Norway there are no learned women'* she said, *'but some of them know a lot and they are clever and take part in public debates.'* (D4).

Based on our small sample, it seems fair to say that there is a significant potential for change in gender relations within Muslim communities in Norway. The direct or indirect references to women's rights were numerous and sincere.

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<sup>32</sup> In 2004 Ambreen Pervez lost her job at A-møbler (a furniture store) in Oslo because she wore a hijab. The company claimed that the hijab was against the dress code of the store, which forbids the use of a cap and other head cloths. Pervez had had a summer job at A-møbler, and then she did not wear the hijab, but then she accepted an offer for a part-time job, and also decided to wear their hijab. She brought her case for the Gender Equality Ombud, which concluded that A-møbler could not forbid their employees to wear a headscarf as long as it does not put people's lives and health in danger. A-møbler accepted the decision.

<sup>33</sup> Asma Jahangir is a [human rights activist](#), and has been the [United Nations Special Rapporteur](#) on Freedom of Religion or Belief since 2004. Previously, she served as the UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial, Arbitrary and Summary Executions. She is also chairperson of Human Rights Commission of Pakistan.

The Muslim respondents had several references to men they admired. One of them explained her admiration for all the Prophets because 'each of them has a quality that is particularly outstanding and special'. Then she added that 'generosity and patience' are valuable, and elaborated the history of one Imam who combined masculine and feminine characteristics: *'He is rough and sensitive at the same time – he is a favourite. Amongst the Shia, people are like crazy about him.'* (D4)

The Christian women we interviewed did not often refer to Biblical figures. They were inclined to mention contemporary religious women, or more recent figures like Mother Theresa and Annie Skau (a Norwegian female missionary). The women from Group A also often mentioned Catharina of Siena, Theresa of Avila and men like Ignatius of Antika and Frans of Assisi. These persons were intimately related to the respondent's interpretation of faith, in line with the 'retreat' character of their group:

*'I find resonance or yearning, and they touch some of the longing, some of my own longing to give oneself over with life in a way. To indulge in God and to live determined, and to have a commitment in everyday life at the same time. This strong integrated totality of faith and life, that these persons have. And not the least the experiences they had by taking God seriously. That I think was exciting to read. Inspiring. They are in a way, a long way ahead, but they still pull a yearning in me which is kind of clear, or which touches something, very strongly, in fact.'*

(A4)

Several Christian women also referred to women's rights. One of them mentioned women who 'dare to stand up for themselves, to be themselves' (A3). Another referred to ongoing changes in gender roles, and that women are now allowed to be in service and to be leaders. She described her admiration for a female missionary this way: *'She has realized her vision, she has made a genuine choice'* (B1) and completely devotes herself to this – in contrast to the old ideal of women who should remain in the kitchen, make food and serve.

We have noticed a certain difference between the Christian and Muslim respondents when they emphasize honesty as admirable. The Christian women seemed to refer to truthfulness related to the difficulties of living according to Christian faith, the doubts they have from time to time, and the pain that accompanies the mistakes they do. When the Muslim women talked about honesty, they seemed to refer to religious prescriptions, in line with not stealing, paying respect to your mother and father etc.

One of the Christian woman admired men who believed in her, and who had challenged her 'in particular through their preaches' to think beyond what would have been natural with her background:

*'These men stood for something that was worth while listening to, and made her walk in a direction, walk further, take education (...). I admire their engagement to want things beyond themselves. They don't have to be Christian for me to admire them. Engagement and the will to matter for other people.'*

(A5)

A Muslim respondent also described how she also admires men who are active and promotes the well-being of others. She mentioned the leader of the Friday prayers, who took the initiative to lead the prayer, and in a way established a Muslim milieu: *'Without that person we would not have had the Friday prayer.'* (C1) Another Muslim woman says that in addition to the Prophet, she also admires several men in the congregation. She admires the Imam because he has 'a fine personality', and is someone to whom she can speak openly: *'Lots of people talk about strict Imams', she says, 'but this man is nice and you get responses to anything you question. He is easy to communicate with.'* (C5)

Another Christian respondent was concerned with the shame many women carry for not being good enough. She said that she admired women who were true with respect to themselves, because that would enable them to be more true to God : A3 : 5. This woman admired men for similar reasons:

*'He is very honest about being a human, to talk truthfully about life, the fragility and vulnerability of life, and the strength in life – or that people should not be measured*

*by their earning power or intellectual capacity, but by being a human being (...)  
(A3) The important thing is that men are true, that the whole personality is  
included, that the connection between head and heart is there.'*

(A3)

We end this presentation of admiration of men and women within the various religious traditions with this citation. The reference to talk truthfully and to be a complete person seems to be an appropriate way of expressing at least part of the core of our respondent's identities - across faith groups.

#### **4.6 Summary**

During our analyses of the rich responses from the interviewees, we have been struck by the numerous similarities across faith systems, congregations and mosques. They confirm notions of what religion *does*, or the basic functions of religious faith irrespective of religion. The respondents display more differences when it comes to religious content, or what religion *is*. Here we see distinctions between the groups although the borders are blurred. Despite differences, the responses remind us of Leirvik's claim regarding the Norwegian religious dialogue project:<sup>34</sup> The distinguishing difference in value issues is not between those who have this or that belief, but between those who have taken a stand on ethical issues and those who apparently have not (Leirvik, 2002: 183). Inter-faith discourse has established that people who are engaged in religious and life stance groups share important ethical values irrespective of other differences across the groups, and that they differ from people who have not taken a stand on ethical issues. In our material we find that all the interviewee's demonstrate a clear (conscious and articulated) stand on ethical issues such as showing respect, caring for

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<sup>34</sup> The Dialogue project started at the end of the 1980's, with organized contact between Christian and Muslim people. The conference 'Norge som flerkulturelt samfunn' (Norway as a culturally diverse society) in 1988 was a major event based on face to face relations between equals according to Leirvik, 2003. The religious dialogues has continued since then, with The Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities in Norway established in 1996, The Oslo Coalition on Freedom of Religion or Belief established in 1998, and *Religionsdialogisk forum* (Forum for Religious Dialogue) established in 2003, you mention some of the involved institutions.

others, speaking the truth and being honest. Their stands are based on a substantial reflexive relation to faith issues, across the Christianity-Islam divide.

The similarities seems to be most outstanding when we look at what religion *does*, compared to what religion *is* (Woodhead, 2007).

All but one of our interviewees (D5) maintained that religion played a *fundamental*, basic or pervasive role in their lives. Their talk about the meaning of religion fully indicated the depth and extent of signification that faith may have. This suggests that our interviewees all have a 'personal' rather than 'formal' relation to their religion. Also, they all engage - more or less - with the normative foundation of the religion. We will return to the issue of what religion *does* (the various functions of faith) and what it *is* (the content of a faith). However, we want to underline that the distinction is not always clear-cut. The discussion of culture versus religion is an example: When a faith community develops certain traditions and practices, which is what communities always do, the practices easily become 'naturalized' and then mixed or confused with the written and prescribed content of the faith.

One of the striking similarities - across the different religious belonging (congregations, mosques) - was the interviewees focus on the importance of always showing *respect* for others. A typical statement was: *'I want to pay everyone deep respect, and to contribute to sharing what I have become part of regarding God and religion. Without being nagging.'* (A5: 5) (A5: 20). Along the same lines were the focus of being honest and decent, of caring for others (B4), and of striving not to be the judge/judge of others (D1; B2; D1).

Another – less surprising – similarity across the faith groups was the respondents' focus on the religious practices of *reading* the sacred writings, and to *praying*. Although the actual habit of saying the prayers differed considerably - from efforts to implement the Islamic prescription to pray five times a day, to the habit of what one of the Christian

interviewee's labelled as a 'spontaneous' way of saying the prayers – the practicing of reading and praying permeated and structured the lives of our respondents.

A third characteristic uniting our respondents is their focus on the *entirety*, unity or totality of life; the entirety of faith and practice, of knowledge/thinking and doing. Several interviewees referred to this totality as distinct from a dualistic approach to the relation between life and faith (B4; B5). The justification or explanation of this urge to *practice faith* differed somewhat, however. The Muslim women often referred to prescriptions, while the Christian women hardly ever mentioned prescriptions. Muslim respondents also often talked about values, which were also mentioned by Christian women. Muslim women hardly talked about virtues, however, which were often discussed by the Christian women.<sup>35</sup>

There was a general view of religion/religious practices and interpretations as changing – often intertwined with reflections on social or cultural change. Change is associated with various issues, but in line with Jacobsen's (2009) findings, gender, generation and geography are among the most outstanding features with respect to change. Claims of change are underpinned differently, however: Christian women often refer to women's access to new religious positions, while Muslim women often mention the new emphasis on the female dress code, irrespective of their personal preference for or against wearing the hijab. Old and young women across the faith groups maintain that there are less restrictions on the younger generation compared to the older (such as norms of selecting friends and marriage partner within the faith community). Generally, there are strong indications in support of hypothesis of increasing reflexivity and detraditionalisation (Jacobsen, 2002; Østberg, 2003), discussed in Chapter 2. We also noticed that geographical/national belonging tends to be a point of reference when the respondents are asked about potential changes in gender norms: Christian women with

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<sup>35</sup> The distinction between values and virtues is based on Leirviks' (2002) discussion of three ethical strands in Islam: *Duty ethics*, which is oriented towards prescriptions and is systematized in Islamic laws. *Virtue ethics*, which is oriented towards ideals for personal refinement [dannelse], and exist within mystic and philosophical ethics. *Value ethics*, which is oriented towards the highest ideals for life and looks behind the values that duty or virtues are meant to forward; man as meant to resemble Godly qualities (ibid: 20-21).

a missionary background claim that their community is more liberal that it used to be. Some women with an ethnic minority background refer to change in the sense of more strict prescriptions as a consequence of living in diaspora, but others maintain that there is relatively more freedom for women in their faith group in Norway compared to their country of family origin. Some of the (Christian) interviewees also talked about change referring to more ecumenical attitudes and practices.

Another aspect of similarity across religion is the reference to being *different* because of their religiosity (A11). Although this experience of being 'different' was often described in positive terms across faith groups, such as being a person worthy of trust, we noticed a definite difference between respondents within a majority faith group and respondents in a minority group. Except for one woman belonging to the Christian majority who complained about the alleged lack of knowledge and interest concerning Christianity among Norwegians, the negative aspects of being 'different' was an issue for some women belonging to the minority within Christianity and to almost all Muslim women. They not only said that religion situates you (B4; D4), but also elaborated on how much they had to explain and defend their faith, in particular Muslims after 9 September 2001.

There was a striking inclination among the Muslim women to reflect on what they perceived as similarities among practicing religious persons across faith groups, like decency and ethics, - (C1; C4; C5; D1; D2). This discourse of religious similarities was absent among the Christian interviewees. In one case, a Christian respondent underlined what she perceived to be fundamental differences between Islam and Christianity. However, she was then referring to the faiths' foundations more precisely to how she saw the understanding of Jesus to be 'fundamentally different' within the two religions.

As a preliminary effort to analyse the various responses to our question of religious persons that they admire, we suggest a certain categorization: The A group clearly outlined persons in ways that resembled *virtue ethics*, that is an orientation towards ideals for personal refinement (Leirvik, 2002 20-21), whereas the C and D groups were

much more in line with *duty ethics*, an orientation towards prescriptions that are systematized in Islamic laws. The Group B did not fit into these categories.

The general impression is that none of the respondents have a naturalized (silent, unquestioned, embodied) religious identity. Although quite a few of them are 'born into' their faith community, they display an earnest reflective attitude to their faith. They tend to see their faith as a constitutive part of their lives, and almost none have ever resigned from their religious community. But they have wondered, and doubted, and searched for information, deeper understanding etc. This means that they have a firm religious identity. They know where they belong and where they stand, so to speak.

The religious identity of the Muslim women, and several Christian women, is firmly intertwined with their ethnic identity and/or geographical belonging. It may be a mixture of 'I am' in terms of decent or country of origin plus a more circumstantial subjective ethnic identification that may include several places:

*'I am a Muslim from Iran'; 'I grew up in the Pentecostal movement. I was a missionary child, originally, grew up in Africa.'*

(B1)

This mix is always mentioned by interviewees from Group C and D, and sometimes amongst Group B and A.

Regarding everyday practice, we have been struck by the consistent references to frequent and usually regular religious activities like praying, reading, fasting and going to the mosque/church/platform. In addition, the interviewees often mention a number of social activities, such as doing voluntary work for the congregation/community. Women from the Christian communities seem to be more entrenched in faith related congregational activities than Muslim women. This is probably a consequence of their majoritised position and institutionalised activities. Muslim women often have to struggle with a range of practical issues such as language skills, qualifying themselves for paid work, figuring out how to cope with dress codes (mostly the hijab issue), finding

a place and time for praying and are more concerned with practical activities related to everyday problems. For women from the two Muslim communities, creolized everyday practices or cultural commuting (Østberg, 2003) were quite noticeable.

Another relevant issue is related to Leirviks' (2002) claim of an ongoing work of negotiations and interpretations within Christianity and Islam. Where do the interviewees situate themselves with respect to contemporary faith practice and the classical traditions? Negotiations are clearly taking place not only among the Muslim women, but also among the Christian women. We have noticed traces of shifting interplays between traditional belief practices and renewed interpretations of the faith foundations among our interviewees of all faith communities.

#### **4.7 Religion as a flexible resource**

The issue of flexibility in relation to religious belief and practice can be addressed in several ways. We regard it as a matter of adapting faith practices and belonging to changing social circumstances. Here the focus is on the potential of religion to support or resist a range of different interpretations of religious doctrines, and of prioritizing some rather than others. This is relevant with respect to gender relations, since religious doctrines, traditions and practices have given backing to both gender traditionalism (gender segregation and hierarchy) as well as to more egalitarian gender views (whether complementary or equal gender roles). In this study, the issue at stake is if and how the interviewees indicate an approach to religion as a flexible tool/resource or not. In particular, we are interested in their relation to patriarchal features of their faith tradition and community: How do they relate to faith as a system of power (sacred power, situation strategy and resource)?

Woodheads' (2007) concept of 'tools' seems to connote rather strategic or conscious actions to accomplish something – to adapt prescriptions and/or practices to one's own interests or to changes within particular social contexts. It does not refer to less conscious behaviour or to slow social processes and institutional changes without

identifiable agents or aims/to religion as an institution. Thus, we have used 'resource' instead of 'tool'. The challenge remains, however, of how we can capture the interplay between religion as a social institution and religion as a tool for religious agents of change.

We need to be able to differentiate (indications of) religion as a flexible tool or resource on the individual and community level from narratives of institutional change. We should also probably differentiate between direct or explicit references to the instrumental application of religion as a tool for change / and our interpretations of such uses. Below is a preliminary effort to categorize the examples, issues or incidents mentioned by the interviewees according to *level* (individual, community and institutional) and the *character* (explicit or implicit) of the elaborations, based on the interviews.

**Table 1.1 Examples of religion as a direct and indirect resource on various levels**

<b>LEVEL</b>	<b>DIRECT/explicit</b>	<b>INDIRECT/implicit</b>
Personal/individual level	<p>Altering the ideal of women’s role from being silent in assemblies, or submitting to men in marriage to struggling to gender equal.</p> <p>Struggle for women’s rights in the congregation/mosque</p> <p>Leaving a church/mosque congregation or moving between in order to find more appropriate interpretations.</p> <p>Changing one’s interpretation of Islam as not prescribing the hijab to prescribing it (or the other way round) (C4)</p> <p>Being more aware of one’s faith because of encounters with different people (A6)</p>	<p>Starting to read the sacred scriptures in one’s native language in order to understand better</p> <p>From conservative/ fundamentalist to liberal attitudes to faith</p> <p>Revise notions of decent behaviour, allow dancing, playing cards, alcohol</p>
Congregational/ Community level	<p>Allowing women to sit on the male side, to sit in the front (C4), only men to be in the front (A4), only men on the platform</p> <p>From gender segregation to gender mix (D1)</p> <p>Introducing classes/measures for women</p> <p>More respect for women in Islam (C2)</p> <p>More conservative gender roles as a consequence of Diaspora, small and narrow milieu’s (D1)</p> <p>Struggling for change (B3)</p>	<p>Recruiting a liberal priest/ Imam</p> <p>From a tradition of recitation to reinterpretation (C1)</p> <p>Stricter practicing after 9.11 (C2)</p>
Institutional level	<p>Opening up for female priests, older (B2; B3)</p> <p>Installing technology that allows women to follow the same readings etc as men</p> <p>Flexible time/place for saying the prayers (C4), more flexibility regarding Pentecostal baptism (B3)</p> <p>New legislation (Dissenter Act, gender equality legislation)</p>	<p>Changed doctrines or interpretations of doctrines</p> <p>“Norwegian Islam”</p> <p>The retreat movement, retreat sites</p> <p>From gender to sexuality as the main issue of contestation</p>

In this chapter we have observed the fundamental meaning of religion in the lives of the respondents. We have seen the complex ways in which religion has been applied by our interviewees as a flexible resource with respect to women's rights. More generally, we have confirmed Leirvik (2002) and others' perspectives on congregations and mosques as dynamic and changeable institutions. We now move on to the next chapter, focusing on citizenship.

## 5 ANALYSIS: CITIZENSHIP

### 5.1 Introduction

In the following we will explore the term 'citizenship', both in general and in terms of religion. In the previous section of this chapter on religious identity, we saw the importance of belonging to a religious community, and we will explore this further in this chapter. Identity and citizenship is closely connected as we will see.

The first part looks at how our respondents talk about citizenship, and we discuss briefly how this term is used in the Norwegian language. Then we will explore their understanding of the term citizenship and what they considered to be 'a good citizen'. In the second part we will address 'religious citizenship'. This was a new term for our respondents; however, they all thought it made sense to include religion in a citizenship terminology. Here we explore how religious citizenship is understood, and how religious identity, participation and practice are linked to citizenship. In the third part we ask whether religion is represented to be a resource or a barrier (or both) to citizenship as practice. The last part of this chapter focuses on multiculturalism and views on living in a multicultural society.

### 5.2 Understandings of citizenship

*'Well, that [citizenship, medborger] is a word that I didn't have in my vocabulary (...). But when I hear the word [medborgerskap] then I think it has to do with being a citizen [borger] and to have the ability to influence, or to figure out and live together as citizens [borgere] in a society. That's the associations I get. (...).'*

(A6)

*'Then I think about being with my neighbours and those who live nearby. That is to be a citizen [medborger]. And to have a good relationship to your neighbours, to chat and to have a cup of coffee together. To go for a walk together. That is what I think being a citizen [medborger] is all about.'*

(B1)

*'Citizenship [medborgerskap] to me that means that you are a part of something. That you're not being egoistic in a way. (...) That you take part in the whole system, that you take responsibility for others as well. (...) Like for instance when you live in an apartment building you don't live all by yourself, you have neighbours, right. So then to be a citizen [medborger] you need to be*

*together, to know about one another, to take responsibility for one another. (...) So in the society at large you also need to take responsibility, you can't just be egoistic. (...) After all we all live together in society. (...)*

(C1)

*'(...) Then I think about community [fellesskap]. To be a fellow human being, to help each other, to cooperate. (...)*

(D1)

The word 'citizenship' in Norwegian usually refers to the legal aspect of citizenship [*statsborgerskap*]; to be a Norwegian citizen means that you are granted legal citizenship in Norway. However, citizenship in a more broad term, the way we use it here [in Norwegian translated to '*medborgerskap*'] is not a common word in Norwegian, except in academic language (see discussion in Chapter 2; see also Brochmann, 2002b: 56-60<sup>36</sup>). The interviewees also address this, and the first quote above illustrates this by stating that *medborgerskap* 'is a word that I didn't have in my vocabulary (...)' (A6). However, the word *medborgerskap* seems meaningful to them and gives them various associations, as we shall see in the following.

### **Being part of a collective**

The interviewees especially emphasize the collective aspect; to be a citizen with others, to be part of a community, and to belong to a community. Moreover, they mention the ability one has to influence, to take responsibility for others, and to help each other, both in the local community and in the society at large. Some of the interviewees also bring up the international aspect of citizenship, and the responsibility one has to think beyond oneself; to think about the community both nationally and internationally.

The quotes above illustrate an anti-individualistic view of being a citizen [*medborger*]. Whereas the Norwegian word *statsborger* ['citizen'] relates to individual rights and duties towards the Norwegian state, the word *medborger* ['citizen'] gives associations to relations between people in a community, either in your neighbourhood or in society at large.

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<sup>36</sup> Grete Brochmann (2002b: 56-60) uses the Norwegian word *samfunnsborgerskap* in order to cover different aspects of the English word citizenship. She uses *statsborgerskap* about the legal dimension and *medborgerskap* about the social dimension (identity, loyalty, belonging, trust, and participation).

## Belonging – to feel at home

*'(...) When I look at my children, they, their hearts only beat for Norway. My heart beats for both Norway and [my country of origin].'*

(C2)

*'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. (...)'*

(D2)

These quotes above include words like 'heart' and 'love', and they illustrate how the term *medborgerskap* [citizenship] is connected to emotions. The interviewees talk about a sense of belonging and to feel at home. 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. The second quote links citizenship [*medborgerskap*] to identity. The interviewee feels both Norwegian and from her country of origin. She does not refer to the legal side of national identity, rather to her feelings of being Norwegian and from her country of origin.

These issues of belonging and national identity are not solely relevant for the interviewees with an immigrant background. The ethnic Norwegian respondents with a missionary background also describe similar feelings of belonging to different places.

Int: *'Do you feel Norwegian even if you grew up in another place?'*

A4: *'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. (...)'*

This interview extract 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 connected to Norway or to being Norwegian.

## Inclusion and exclusion

The sense of belonging is connected to a sense of being included. One of the interviewees has parents from another country, but she is born and raised in Norway. She says that she feels Norwegian and explains it by saying: '(...) *this is where I feel at home*' (C5). Later in the interview she says that she has a different background, but she feels included in the Norwegian society. Another interviewee explains that she came to Norway over twenty years ago, and says: '*From the first day we moved here, we felt that we were welcome. (...)*' (D3). She feels at home in Norway, not only in her country of origin, and she misses Norway when she goes back to visit her country of origin.

However, the stories in our data material are not only stories about inclusion. One of the Muslim interviewees with an immigrant background answers as follows when she is asked whether she feels included as a Norwegian citizen [*medborger*]:

*'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 held. Instead I say 'multicultural nationality'. We have multinational children. (...) They often say 'utlendinger' [foreigners]. We're not 'utlendinger'[foreigners], we're 'innlendinger' (laughter).'*

(C4)

This quote illustrates a feeling of being excluded from a notion of 'true' Norwegian citizenship [*medborger*]. The interviewee 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'. The Norwegian word '*utlending*' means to be a person from another country<sup>37</sup>, a foreigner. The word '*innlending*' is the opposite of '*utlending*' and means that you have a status as a

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<sup>37</sup> <http://www.ordnett.no/ordbok.html?search=utlending&publications=23>

Norwegian.<sup>38</sup> The word 'foreigner' means to be a visitor, a stranger, and it gives associations to being an outsider. It is the opposite of being included as a citizen [*medborger*] and to belong to the Norwegian society.

The interviewee's identity as a Norwegian-Pakistani woman and her children as multicultural is not acknowledged by the Norwegian society. In her opinion, she is still viewed as just Pakistani, as a 'foreigner'. Later in the interview, she describes how it still hurts when people say 'foreigners'. By using the word '*innlending*', which is not often used in Norwegian, the interviewee emphasizes that she wants to be acknowledged as an insider in the Norwegian society; as an equal citizen.

The interviewee also addresses the use of the term 'minority', a term which 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 less worth than the 'majority', or that they are like children – not fully adults.

It is evident that the interviewees experience citizenship on different levels or in different areas of their lives; from the local neighbourhood to the 'society at large', and also in a more global context when they talk about belonging to different countries. The sense of belonging and recognition differs in these various contexts. The interviewee cited above also mentions the mosque as a place where she feels that she belongs and where she feels recognized as who she is as a person. Places like the neighbourhood community, the workplace and the mosque are described like 'pockets' in society where she feels included, whereas the Norwegian society at large is experienced as more exclusionary.

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<sup>38</sup> [http://www.ordnett.no/ordbok.html?search=innlending&search\\_type=&publications=2&publications=3&publications=17&publications=20&publications=23&publications=33&publications=36&publications=1&publications=5&publications=11&publications=12&publications=18&publications=19&publications=21&publications=22&publications=9&publications=10&publications=7&publications=8&publications=15&publications=16](http://www.ordnett.no/ordbok.html?search=innlending&search_type=&publications=2&publications=3&publications=17&publications=20&publications=23&publications=33&publications=36&publications=1&publications=5&publications=11&publications=12&publications=18&publications=19&publications=21&publications=22&publications=9&publications=10&publications=7&publications=8&publications=15&publications=16)

The belonging to a religious community is described as *'very important'* (A4) by the Christian informants as well, and we will explore that more in-depth later in this chapter.

### **'A Good Citizen'**

The interviewees were asked what they considered to be 'a good citizen' [*god medborger*], and all the answers were strikingly similar in all the four groups, and related to tolerance and respect, love and care.

### **Tolerance and respect**

*'First of all you have to respect other people and understand other people. And you have to get knowledge. (...) My neighbour, it doesn't matter if that person is Norwegian or from a different country, it doesn't matter. What I see is him or her as a human being. Only as a human being. (...)'*

(D2)

According to this interviewee, a 'good citizen' is a person who has respect for other people and who shows understanding. Moreover, one has to view other people as equal human beings regardless of gender, nationality or religion. Later in the interview, the respondent also emphasizes care for other people and a responsibility to 'guide' other people who are doing 'bad things'. She argues that one has an obligation to help other people and not to look the other way. One cannot decide over other people, but try to guide that person to do the right thing and talk to him or her as a friend. She refers to Allah who would not approve of someone who looked the other way and refused to help others.

Several of the interviewees also specifically mention respect and tolerance for each others' religious beliefs:

*'Citizenship [*medborgerskap*] to me is the same as human compassion. We are all human beings and we have responsibilities, for instance to follow the rules regarding crossing a street. (...) It is the same for all other rules; one has to respect those rules – as long as one has the freedom to practice your religious rituals, religious prayer and religious duties. So that we can pray here, build a mosque, be together on Fridays, and there is not hindrance. Likewise it is also important for me to respect the other people who live here, also those without a religion. (...)'*

(C3)

This interviewee underlines respect for common rules and regulations, and also mutual respect for each others' religious beliefs, including those who do not have a religion. Citizens should obey the same rules, but also give each other freedom and space to have different beliefs.

### **Love and care**

*'To live in a relationship, the ability to relate to others, the ability to love your neighbour as yourself [elske din neste som deg selv]. Sometimes you give, other times you receive. It is the message of love. Love your neighbour as yourself.'*

(A3)

*'I guess it means to care about others, like if they are experiencing a difficult time, if they're ill and so forth. To care. (...) And to be together despite different faiths.'*

(B1)

*'To care about other people. To cooperate in order to achieve the best goals in a society, to pull society forward. Or to push society forward... and to view everybody as equals, maybe. (...) To look inside the person. In order to live a better life, the best possible life in a society. (...)'*

(D1)

The first quote refers to the Christian notion of charity [*kristen nestekjærlighet*]; 'you shall love your neighbour as yourself'. The same emphasis on love and care for other people is a common theme in all the interviews in all the four religious groups. The women in our data material underline the importance of seeing other people as equals – regardless of different religious faiths and so forth.

### **Contribute to a better community with your fellow citizens**

*'(...) It's not just about you as an individual, but rather to see yourself in a context. (...) That you want to contribute. (...) When you speak about the Norwegian dugnadsånd [positive attitude to voluntary communal work]. I participated in a dugnad [voluntary community work] this weekend, and I've noticed that people contribute with what they know and what they have, even if it's just being present and being sociable and talk. (...) But it's both about to being able to and wanting to be a part. I do understand that those who are not able to participate have good reasons why they don't. But in a way it is the responsibility of society to help them to be able to take that citizenship [ta det medborgerskapet]. So I'm thinking that it's not only an individual responsibility to be able to do that, but it is an ideal then that each person immediately would want to contribute.'*

(A6)

*'[A good citizen] is a human being who flourishes [blomstrer] with all the gifts that are immanent in that human being, and who finds the place where one is best fitted. A person who's allowed to flourish, is a person who can contribute the most to community. (...) It's a saying; 'God's glory is a human being' and I truly believe that. (...).'*

(A1)

According to the interviewees, participation and contribution to a community is an obligation. The first quote above refers to *dugnadsånd* which is a Norwegian word which means a positive attitude to voluntary work, usually in your neighbourhood and your local community. People can contribute in different ways based on their various abilities.

*'You need to take responsibility, a common responsibility. (...) To be in a dialogue with one another. (...) You are not only a 'citizen' [borger], you are a 'citizen' [medborger], you are part of a larger system. So it's not just you and your life, we all have to function together.'*

(C1)

This quote addresses the inter-relational aspect of citizenship and the difference between the words '*borger*' [citizen in the legal sense of the term] and '*medborger*' [citizen in a wider sense] which we have discussed earlier.

The word 'dialogue' is used in this quote, and other interviewees also mention communication between people as a condition for a good society. One interviewee says that lack of good communication can lead to misunderstandings and a distance between people. She especially mentions relations between Non-Muslims and Muslims in Norway, and she argues that in order to close the gap, there is a need for dialogue and to get to know each other. Otherwise there will be misunderstandings and this will lead to problems on a societal level. The interviewee mentions stereotypical images of Muslim men and women; for instance that she wears a hijab, and some people might assume that she is subordinate to her husband, while in fact she has always been active in society, in different organizations and has worked for gender equality and worked to abolish domestic violence and so on.

To summarize: As 'a good citizen' you should see yourself as part of a bigger picture, not put yourself in the centre at all times; contribute and take responsibility

for other people on all levels in society. It also implies to treat others as equals and to involve in dialogue with other people.

### 5.3 Religious citizenship

‘Religious citizenship’ [*religiøst medborgerskap*] was a new term for our respondents; however, they all thought it made sense to include religion in a citizenship terminology. The term ‘religious citizenship’ also addresses the interviewees’ sense of belonging to a religious community in particular, and they expressed what that meant to them. Earlier in this chapter we have written about the sense of feeling at home in a religious community, and also to be part of a world-wide religious community.

*‘I think it’s meaningless that a secular society in a way ignores religion completely (...). If one should think about a multicultural society, ideally one should accept the differences instead of ignoring them. (...) Well, if you ignore that, it’s like you’re kind of disrespectful. It’s like you try to hide that part of people’s identity. (...)’*

(D4)

*‘I think it would be strange not to include [religious citizenship in the definition of citizenship]. When you mention political, economical, and familial, it is only natural for me to think about the religious. (...)’*

(A6)

These quotes illustrate a view of religion as something deeply integrated in one’s life; as a part of one’s identity. Another interviewee explains how ‘Islam is a way of life’ and that your values and the way you behave is influenced by your religion (C5). This view of religion as an essential part of one’s life is shared by all of our interviewees.

Based on these findings in our research project it might seem strange to address ‘citizenship’ as a more general term and ‘religious citizenship’ as separate issues like we initially did in our interview guide. To be ‘a good citizen’ and ‘a good Christian’ or ‘a good Muslim’ is basically the same for our interviewees; these aspects are intertwined. Being ‘a good Christian’ or ‘a good Muslim’ include showing love and

care, respect and tolerance for each other. Some of the interviewees also connected these things particularly to being religious:

*(...) Well, I don't want to categorize ['sette ting i bås'], but on average I would think that people in a religious setting are perhaps more inclined to take responsibility for their surroundings. And especially the way things have become here in Norway; now it's all about 'because I deserve it', it's constantly 'me' in the center. And I think that it's not that easy to get trapped in all that ['den fella er ikke like lett å gå i'] for those who are members of a religious community. (...) Most religions are really about caring for other people. (...)'*  
(B2)

According to this interviewee, the Norwegian society has become increasingly egoistic; everything centres on the individual. However, religious people can more easily resist this and be a counterweight to this development in society because they allegedly have a religious platform where care and love for fellow human beings is a central virtue.

#### **'Religious citizenship' – an inclusive term?**

*'It [religious citizenship] is a new term for me. (...) It makes sense. (...) When I hear that term [religious citizenship] it includes all religions. (...)'*  
(A3)

*'I believe in God and that unites all the large worldwide religions; Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. So we see that it is a lot in common, so in a way I identify with Christians and Jews in the same way as I identify with Muslims. So in a way it is a common religion.'*  
(C1)

*'I can tell you how it was in the time of the Prophet. In my opinion that's the way it should be nowadays as well. (...) The Prophet came to tell people about Islam, right, but there were people who were following Jesus, and Moses, and they were allowed to continue to have their religion, they didn't have to become Muslims. In the time of the Prophet they lived as Jews and Christians. So Muslims were told to leave them alone because they had their own religion. If they don't want to convert that's their call. Unless of course they fought against Islam, then it was allowed to fight back. So in my opinion we should all live together in a society, that's religious citizenship. And even if you're not religious.'*  
(D1)

*'I am very ecumenical [økumenisk; felleskirkelig]. I mean that there is one Church. The things that separate us are very insignificant. It is one God, one Church. (...) The foundation for the Christian denomination [trosretning] is the salvation [frelsen]. When it comes to Islam for instance, that is a different*

*denomination [trosretning]. (...) So that is fundamentally different. I mean that the key to God goes through Jesus. So if you were to talk about a common church, that would include those who have Jesus as an intermediary to God. But on the other side, I respect those who have a different view. (...)*

(B4)

These quotes indicate that 'religious citizenship' at least could include the respect for other religious beliefs. However, the interviewees differ in their responses regarding who they would include in the 'religious community' they are religious citizens of.

The first quote above illustrates an inclusive view of 'religious citizenship', namely a view where all religions are included. The second quote also highlights the commonalities in the worldwide religions. The third quote emphasizes respect for each other's religious beliefs and that religious citizenship should mean that everyone can live together in peace regardless of religious affiliation.

The fourth quote first and foremost emphasizes the ecumenical [*økumenisk; felleskirkelig*] community and the similarities between the different Christian denominations; to be precise the salvation through Jesus. This makes the Christian faith very different from Islam. However, the interviewee underlines that Christians and Muslims should respect each others' religions.

This could of course be mean that they talk about religious communities on different levels.

*'(...) We meet, because we are human beings and we want to meet as human beings. But maybe the religious dimension, if I can use that word, can strengthen something. Maybe. Or it can create a feeling of alienation. (...)*

(A4)

One interviewee explains that a religious belief, whether you are a Christian, a Hindu or a Muslim, can provide a common platform of faith from which you can obtain mutual respect and understanding. In her experience, some Hindus or Muslims may wish to be with Christians rather than secular Norwegians because the Christians actually believe. Another interviewee also mentions the possibility to find a common ethnic and moral ground, despite differences in religious beliefs. However, coming from different religious backgrounds can also lead to alienation, according to the quote above.

#### **5.4 Is religion represented as a resource or as a barrier (or both) to citizenship as practice?**

In this section we ask whether religion is represented to be a resource or a barrier (or both) to citizenship as practice, and we will address experiences of inclusion and exclusion. The interviewees from all four religious groups talk about religion as a resource in quite similar ways. However, when they talk about barriers there are more differences between the Christian and the Muslim respondents. The minority position as being part of an 'ethnic minority' and also the Norwegian society's view of Muslims in general are issues which are articulated. The Muslim women focus more on how the Norwegian society portrays Muslims, whereas the Christian women focus both on how the secular society treats religious people and on internal restrictions in their religious communities.

##### **Religion as a resource to citizenship as practice**

*'My religion encourages me to contribute in society and to do good (...).'* (C5)

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, and in the previous chapter on identity, both identity and the sense of belonging are central aspects of religious citizenship. When our respondents were asked in what way religion could be a resource to citizenship in practice, they emphasize belonging to a religious community as a base in life and a source of self-confidence. They also stress that religion guides you to become a better person and gives you direction in life. Especially the Muslim women emphasize how the Quran tells them what to do and how to behave in certain situations. However, the answers did not vary much across the four different religious communities.

*'Wherever you travel in the world, you can go into a church and be a part of a community. (...).'* (A3)

Several of the interviewees highlight the belonging to a religious community, not only the local church or mosque, but also a world-wide religious 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 also 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.'*

(A4)

One of the interviewees with a background as a missionary child describes how she felt like she was 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. She did not have the same experiences and the same references. However, her Christian faith has been a constant part of her life and when she came back to Norway she felt that she belonged also in a Norwegian Christian setting. Within the congregation she has felt included and has had the sense of belonging that she needed especially when she was in her adolescence.

*'(...) I don't know what it is like to live without being part of a congregation, because I always have, but for me, belonging to a congregation or a Christian community, in particular in times of crisis, I have experienced that it is in no way indifferent. There are people who care, almost like being part of a family of brothers and sisters.'*

(A3)

Belonging to a religious community is also experienced as positive in a time of crisis. Several of the interviewees describe how much they appreciate the support from others both locally and internationally, for instance during illness in the family.

*'(...) 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. (...)'*

(B2)

To be included in a religious community provides a sense of belonging and security. In the quote above, this belonging is described as a solid base in life that gives direction.

*'(...) I don't know whether it has got to do with the congregation or not, but I've always been like that (...), I've always been active, I've been active in youth work, in girls' scouts, leader of the school team, well, I've always been that kind of person. Whether that has something to do with – it can have something to do with the congregation, that you have a security in a community. It can be.'*

*That you are used to see people who speak – I've attended meetings since I was a little girl, right, and I've related to Sunday school teachers who have a point of view and who dare to speak about it. So we were encouraged to say things, especially there. It might have something to do with it, yes, I think so.'*

(B4)

*'What I've learned there [in the girls' group in the mosque] has helped me in other parts of my life as well; to work in a group, teamwork. It has been very rewarding, I've received much confidence. I've been there and talked in front of people, made suggestions, cooperated with people, right? I feel that it has built up my self-confidence as well, and it has helped me when I'm doing other things; like schoolwork, and about working in a group (...)'*

(C5)

Interviewees from different religious communities describe how their participation within the religious community has helped them in other parts of society as well. The belonging to a religious community has provided them with a feeling of security and self-confidence. Moreover, the interviewees explain how their participation at Sunday school, at various meetings or groups from an early age has encouraged them to speak in front of a group of people and also to work together in groups.

One interviewee said that she has learned many social skills by being a member of a religious community. Ever since she was a child she has been accustomed to being around other people in large social gatherings, to meet people of all age groups, and to be sociable. She has also been used to speak from the platform in her congregation in front of many people, and this has helped her to be able to speak in front of people in other places as well.

Some of the interviewees also mention the leader training that they have been given within their religious community. One interviewee from the Pentecostal movement said that she grew up in a large congregation and she has been given opportunities that perhaps smaller congregations cannot provide. She has been entrusted with important leadership tasks in her congregation.

### **Religion as a barrier to citizenship as practice**

*'(...) 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. Yes. But I feel that we who are sort of Norwegian Muslims, we have a responsibility, not just towards other Muslims in the younger generation,*

*but also towards the society at large. I feel that if it exists this false image of Islam and Muslims, it's largely our responsibility to correct this image. (...)*' (D4)

Issues of barriers and exclusion brought up some similarities between the four religious groups in our data material, for instance experiences of being a minority in a secular society. However, differences between the Christian and the Muslim respondents were also evident. The quote above illustrates the feeling of being a 'Muslim Norwegian', in the meaning of not being acknowledged as fully Norwegian, points to a minority position as being part of an 'ethnic minority' and also being part of a stigmatized religious group. Because of these differences this section deals with each religious group individually and at the end a separate part will discuss common experiences among the Muslim respondents.

This section will address both barriers and exclusion experienced by the respondents which are due to prejudice and stigmatization by the Norwegian society at large, but also internal restrictions within the various religious communities. The interviewees differentiate between inclusion and exclusion on different levels; they can for instance feel included in the local community and at work, but feel excluded by the Norwegian 'society at large'. Here we mainly focus on barriers with regards to participation in society, but also experiences connected to feelings of exclusion and lack of recognition.

### **Congregation A**

*'(...) 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. (...)*' (A4)

*'(...) Many Christian children at school are very careful about saying that they are Christians. They keep their faith as a secret. I know that from my own experience. They feel very lonely.'* (A3)

These quotes illustrate an experience of being a minority as a Christian in the Norwegian society. The quotes are from two interviewees from congregation A which belongs to the Church of Norway which we have labelled a majority group in

our data material. However, the feeling of being a minority as a Christian is evident. One of the interviewees talks about an 'identity as a Christian'. Being a 'personal Christian' and having an 'identity as a Christian' is experienced as being very different from the majority of the Norwegian population who are being passive members of the Church of Norway. Some of the interviewees talk about a feeling of being alone and being part of a small minority in the Norwegian society when they grew up.

One of the interviewees from congregation A points to the debate about Muslims and their religious rights. However, in her view, Christian children have the same experience. She claims that it is easier for secular Norwegians to accept Muslims who pray and fast during Ramadan than to accept Christian children who say that they pray or believe in Jesus.

### **Congregation B**

*'You can experience that people think you are strange because you're a Pentecostal [pinsevern] 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's ignorance which is the main reason. (...)'*

(B2)

The interviewees have experienced that people outside the Pentecostal movement have met them with scepticism and prejudice. One of the interviewees says that:

*'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.'*

(B3)

One of the older women in the Pentecostal congregation remembers the Dissenter law [*Dissenterloven*]<sup>39</sup> when she started working as a teacher. She was for instance not allowed to teach Christianity, and she felt put on the sideline as a Pentecostal.

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<sup>39</sup> The Dissenter law from 1845 affected persons who were Christians but not members of the State Church of Norway ([http://fagsider.org/kirkehistorie/lover/1845\\_dissenterloven.htm](http://fagsider.org/kirkehistorie/lover/1845_dissenterloven.htm)). The law provided Christians outside the State Church religious freedom and the right to organize. However, they were not allowed to teach Christianity in schools.

According to the interviewee, it was an important shift when that law was abolished [1969].

The women from the Pentecostal movement also addressed internal restrictions and barriers in their 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. (...)'*

(B3)

This quote emphasizes the positive aspects of belonging to a religious community, but it also points to aspects of social control within the community. The interviewee describes the congregation as a restricted and close-knit community which sometimes can feel 'narrow'. One of the interviewees 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.

Several of the interviewees thought it was difficult to be a part of the Pentecostal movement when they were teenagers. Most of our respondents in this category are older women, and they claim that the difference between Pentecostal youth and other youth was bigger when they were young. One interviewee states; 'it was a bit scary to be among others when we were teenagers' (B2). As a teenager she was not allowed to dance or drink alcohol and she never attended parties, which made her different from other teenagers.

According to another interviewee, a few generations back many things were perceived as sinful within the Pentecostal movement; it was a sin to get a perm, or to go to the school theatre. It was not allowed to have friends outside the congregation. She rebelled against the congregation when she was younger, but she never turned against Christianity. She rebelled against a pattern which everyone was supposed to fit into. The interviewee remembers that she and her brothers were not allowed to do sports. She was only allowed to be a girl scout because she could wear a dress.

According to the interviewees, many things have changed in the Pentecostal movement since they grew up:

*'(...) We cannot live 30 years back in time. We actually have to live – we are a part of the world we live in – and we can't demand that our children should be very different from other children. (...)'*

(B2)

The interviewees contrast their childhood and youth with the upbringing of their own children, and they all emphasize the vast change. One interviewee describes her teenagers as 'more free' (B2). They socialize with others outside the Pentecostal movement. The interviewees say that their children do not have the same restrictions regarding dancing and going to the movies, the theatre or to do sports.

One of the interviewees has distanced herself more and more from the Pentecostal movement over the years, but is still a member. Earlier, Pentecostal girls had to dress in a certain way, and that made them very visible and different from other youth. This has changed, however, she argues that the movement is still very preacher-dominated, and the members are more or less being told 'this is what you are supposed to mean' (B3).

Some of the interviewees from the Pentecostal movement address the 'image of perfectness' [*perfektstempel*]. As a Christian you were not supposed to have problems:

*'(...) But I do think there are many successful families. (...) And I remember when people started to get divorces, and that was not fully accepted. So we had some children, who came every other weekend, and I tried to get them together on Saturdays, but it was difficult to mix those children with the children from the so-called large successful families. (...)'*

(B4)

This quote describes the Pentecostal congregation as a quite closed community which consisted of large extended families and people who married each other within the congregation. It was expected that Christians were 'the successful people' and it was difficult to acknowledge that everything is not perfect. It used to be hard for children of divorced parents to fit in. There are many so-called successful big extended families in the congregation, and children of divorced parents felt like they

were on the outside in a way; not part of a group. The interviewee claims that things have changed also on this point and that it is easier for people to ask for help now. It used to matter what family you belonged to, but now she thinks it has become more open.

### **Mosque C**

*'(...) It depends on how you understand the term 'integration' in the 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 (...).'*

(C2)

This interviewee addresses the term 'integration' which is frequently used in the Norwegian media debate about ethnic and religious minorities. She says that she attended social events at her work place, but did not drink alcohol. However, she felt a bit uncomfortable and she argues that one cannot be integrated if that is what 'integration' means; namely to be places where people drink a lot of alcohol. According to the interviewee, her religion does not forbid her to be there, but she feels uncomfortable. Some ethnic Norwegians might also think that her husband has forbidden her to attend social events, but that it not the case, she insists.

Religion as a barrier to participation in society is here linked to the meaning of 'integration'. The interviewee explains that her religion provides her with certain norms that guide her behaviour. However, according to the interviewee, 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 ethnic Norwegians who automatically assume that she is forced to behave in a certain way because she is a Muslim woman. She also problematizes the meaning of the concept 'integration' and indirectly suggests that ethnic Norwegians/society at large expect Muslims to assimilate; to act exactly as ethnic Norwegians, which in this case means drunken Norwegians at parties. So instead of addressing barriers due to religion, the interviewee also addresses what equal participation means. In her opinion, 'integration' also means to accept differences. The ideal of equal participation then would also entail the choice not to participate.

Several of our respondents say that their Muslim faith is not a barrier, but it is the society at large which does not accept Muslims. According to one interviewee, religion is not a barrier as a teacher, or as a mom. 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.

Some of the interviewees claim that their status as 'immigrants' and language problems are greater barriers than religion for participation in the Norwegian society. One interviewee says that immigrants were more welcome, more included, and more active in Norwegian traditions when she arrived in Norway in the 1970s. Now, more people are engaged in their own activities. More people from her home country live in Norway now, and she feels more comfortable with them, and they are easier to be with. However, she does not like this division between immigrants and ethnic Norwegians.

Another interviewee feels excluded from the Norwegian society mainly due to language. She thinks it is difficult to understand the language used in the media, in newspapers, and letters from public offices. She speaks Norwegian quite well, but it is difficult to write a job application and she has to depend on her children. She was once asked to join a political party, but she said 'no' because of the language. She has also been part of a consolatory council, but she felt like she was on the outside because of the language barrier. She has plenty of ideas, but lacks the words to explain her ideas.

### **Mosque D**

*'According to Islam (...) a woman can function in all positions in society and can serve the society so to speak. I don't think that Islam or religion can stop her from doing that. (...) However, minor practical problems can make it harder for a Muslim woman in society. For example, I have a big problem with shaking hands, right? It doesn't only apply to women; it's supposed to be the same for both sexes. Muslims cannot shake hands with people from the opposite sex. It has to do with body contact, it sets limits. As a woman, that's very difficult for me, and especially where I work. (...) And at parties and so on. I find that very difficult. Often I actually have to drop it and it makes me ... it makes me feel bad.'*

(D1)

According to this interviewee, Islam is not a hindrance for women's participation in society. However, the interviewee has experienced what she perceives as minor practical problems as a Muslim woman in the Norwegian society. Other interviewees mention swimming which is a problem because it is for both women and men.

One of the interviewees says that immigrants have to adapt to society, but in her opinion, the larger society also has to adapt to some extent. She will eventually try to work for more gender divided alternatives [*kjønnsegregerte tilbud*] in Norway, like for instance swimming only for women. She thinks that would make Muslims' daily lives easier. However, she argues that it is hard to get the greater society to accommodate these wishes and demands. The interviewee emphasizes that her wishes have not collided with her faith. For instance she likes to snowboard and that is not a problem. However, if she would have liked to be a ballet dancer that would have been more difficult, but not impossible. In her life she has to consider things carefully, but 'that's just the way life is. (...) if you are patient, then things work out'. (D4).

### **A stereotypical image of Muslim women**

In this section we focus on the experiences and the thoughts the interviewees have concerning the stereotypical image of Muslim women. The Muslim women in our data material, both Sunni and Shia Muslims, were all generally concerned with the stereotypical image of the oppressed Muslim woman. They address the association people allegedly make between Islam and oppression of women, and through the interviews they want to correct that image. As we will discuss in the next chapter, several of the interviewees emphasize the Prophet Mohammad's respect of women and the way he improved women's status in society when he lived. One interviewee states that 'he (Mohammad) was the one who actually started to say that women and men are equals and they should not be treated differently' (D2). The general view among the interviewees is that Islam has been misused. One woman says that some Muslim people practice Islam wrongly, while another says that enemies of Islam are responsible for this stereotypical image of Islam as a religion that wants to 'hold women down' (D3).

One interviewee says that Muslims in Norway and other non-Muslim countries are confused about women's and men's rights and duties. In her opinion they learn one thing at home about their own religious traditions and another thing about their own religion from the larger society. She argues that they often get these black and white pictures of Islam from society and she especially mentions the view of Muslim women. They are poorly described, she claims, and she finds these stereotypes of oppressed, naïve [*dum-snill*] women very annoying (D4).

One interviewee also points to other consequences of a stereotypical image:

*'I think that it isolates them, they feel much marginalized. Ehm, it makes it difficult for them to participate in society. If you for instance, let's say you attend a class with many older Muslim women they have many stories about being discriminated against, badly treated and so on. They have many stories like that and it's like they get very sceptical and paranoid and – well, it's very much like that. (...)'*

(D4)

In her view the stereotypical image leads to prejudices against Muslim women in Norway which contributes to isolation and marginalization. She argues that stories about how they are discriminated against and treated badly make it more difficult for them to participate in society. Some of the older Muslim women do not know the Norwegian language and they feel almost paralyzed and get scared of leaving the house.

Another concern raised by the interviewee is that debates about real problems like for instance female genital mutilation become almost counter-productive. The debates go in circles and politicians use them in political campaigns as punch lines. When these issues are used in political debates where it is not relevant it can harm more than actually help. Then Muslim women feel attacked. According to the interviewee, change has to come from within and she argues that if an Imam addressed these issues it would have a lot more impact than if Siv Jensen (leader of the right-wing *Progress Party* in Norway) does it.

### **The Hijab**

*'(...) I don't understand why many people make problems out of minor issues, or they don't want to understand, or there are some who think that the removal*

*of the hijab will set women free and that they are not free if they wear a hijab.  
(laughter) (...)*

(C3)

*(...) 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 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 hinder. It shouldn't be a problem. They have to see, they have to set some goals: How should we fight crime? How should we stop criminal gangs?*

(C4)

Several of the Muslim interviewees mentioned the hijab debate<sup>40</sup> in Norwegian media. The quotes above illustrate a view that the hijab debate is blown out of proportions. The first quote addresses the hijab as a symbol of female oppression and what seems to be an oversimplified view of what the hijab 'means'; a woman wearing a hijab is perceived as not 'free' whereas a woman without a hijab is 'free'. This statement indicates that the reality is not that 'black and white'; women wear hijabs for different reasons and mostly of their own free will, and women without hijab can in fact be oppressed.

The second quote states that the hijab is first and foremost a religious garment, a symbol of obedience to God. The interviewee also thinks that the hijab debate takes the focus away from more important issues like crime. In her opinion one should rather focus on fighting crime than women wearing hijabs.

Another interviewee says that the *debate* about the hijab creates a distance between Muslims and Non-Muslims in Norway, not the hijab in itself. In her opinion, the media is to blame in the hijab debate and she claims there is a lack of knowledge about hijab and Islam in general. She used to wear a hijab, but she stopped wearing it because she wanted to show society that she is a brave, strong and resourceful woman. These statements suggest that the hijab has become a symbol of the oppressed Muslim woman, and that for non-Muslims the hijab gives connotations to

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<sup>40</sup> The hijab debate that is referred 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.

the opposite of a 'brave', 'strong' and 'resourceful' woman (C4), namely a cowardly, weak and subjugated woman.

Another interviewee has experienced that her hijab had been automatically interpreted as a sign of her being forced to wear it:

*'(...) 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 ... (...).'*

(D4)

This interviewee also remembers a similar response when she was in high school and said no to go to the movies simply because she did not like the kind of movies her peers went to. Her class mates automatically assumed that her father would not let her go. The interviewee feels that she as a Muslim has to defend herself all the time. She gets verbally attacked and always has to answer. 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 because it is not worthwhile. In her opinion, it takes a long time to change peoples' image of Muslims. The only way to do this is to get to know each other. She says that ethnic Norwegians who live in areas with many Muslims and other immigrants become more open-minded.

A third interviewee has also experienced many questions about why she is wearing a hijab. However, she does not find that problematic. She has answered them and explained it in a friendly manner. In her opinion you avoid problems if you answer in a friendly manner and accept that people are wondering and they are asking questions. You need to enlighten that person. According to this interviewee, communication is essential and as long as you communicate well with other people it is not a problem whether you are Muslim or Christian.

A fourth interviewee says that 9/11 2001 marked a watershed in many Muslims' lives:

*'(...) I see a very big change in women's lives, or all Muslim's lives, since 9/11. Right. What happened in America. After that I've seen a huge change for*

*Muslims. (...) Before that I didn't see many people in Pakistan who wore hijab or burqa – and it was not very common here in Norway either. But now I see that everyone or – it has become a very typical Muslim thing. (...) I don't know if it is to show, right? To be proud of it. Earlier we didn't have the need to show that we are Muslims. I don't know, now it's increasingly common among young girls. I don't know if they wear it because they think that they are Muslims or if they wear hijab because they think it looks nice. I don't know really (laughter).'*  
(C2)

This interviewee points to a positive aspect after 9/11. She elaborates this later in the interview and says that Muslims have gotten closer to their religion; they have started to practice their religion more, they go to the mosque, they pray, they read the Quran in their own language and understands it more. They used to read the Quran in Arabic, but now they read it more thoroughly and can see that Islam is not the way it is described in the media. She emphasizes that Islam is not supposed to be practiced the way that terrorists do and that terrorists are not real Muslims. They say that they are, but Islam never says that you should kill yourself; it's a sin.

*'(...) When something bad happens in Muslim countries or if a person has done something – lately it has been suicide bombs which I find very provoking, it makes me mad that a Muslim would do that. For me, it can't be a Muslim; a Muslim can't do such a thing. Then he or she misuses Islam. When these things come on the TV news (...), I feel ashamed. And when I leave the house I think that everybody is looking at me, that I or we are guilty. I feel a little guilty. I don't know why. It's wrong to blame a religion, right? It creates a problem. And it makes people who belong to that religion very angry.'*  
(C2)

This interviewee has not experienced negative reactions towards her as a Muslim in Norway, but she says that Muslims in other countries are treated badly. The quote illustrates the need to separate the actions of a terrorist from the Islamic religion. The interviewee emphasizes that a suicide bomber who legitimizes a terrorist attack with reference to Islam, is misusing the religion. The need to clarify this in an interview situation with ethnic Norwegians, and the feeling of shame which she describes, can be because of a feeling of stigmatization of Muslims; all Muslims as potential terrorists, not Muslims as individual human beings.

The negative aspect of 9/11 is that Islam has been connected to terrorists and the hijab has become a symbol of oppression of women, however, the positive aspect is

that especially younger Muslims actively work against these negative images. They do that by turning to Islam and by reading the Quran in languages they can understand. One of the interviewees says that young girls come to the mosque and they have read the Quran several times.

## **Summary**

We have discussed the term 'citizenship', both in general and in terms of religion. The interviewees especially emphasize the collective aspect; to be a citizen with others, to be part of a community, and to belong to a community. Moreover, they mention the ability one has to influence, to take responsibility for others, and to help each other, both in the local community and in the society at large.

'Religious citizenship' was a new term for our respondents; however, they all thought it made sense to include religion in a citizenship terminology. The term 'religious citizenship' addresses the interviewees' sense of belonging to a religious community in particular, and they expressed what that meant to them feeling at home in a religious community, and also to be part of a world-wide religious community. To be 'a good citizen' and 'a good Christian' or 'a good Muslim' is basically the same for our interviewees; these aspects are intertwined. Being 'a good Christian' or 'a good Muslim' include showing love and care, respect and tolerance for each other.

We have explored how religious identity, participation and practice are linked to citizenship, and whether religion is represented to be a resource or a barrier (or both) to citizenship as practice. The interviewees from all four religious groups talk about religion as a resource in quite similar ways. However, when they talk about barriers there are more differences between the Christian and the Muslim respondents. The minority position as being part of an 'ethnic minority' and also the Norwegian society's view of Muslims in general are issues which are articulated. The Muslim women focus more on how the Norwegian society treats Muslims, whereas the Christian women focus both on how the secular society treats religious people and on internal restrictions in their own religious communities. The Muslim women in our data material, both Sunni and Shia Muslims, were all generally concerned with the stereotypical image of the oppressed Muslim woman.

## 5.5 Multiculturalism/a multicultural society

In a Norwegian context, the concepts multiculturalism and multicultural are sometimes mixed and used both descriptively and politically (Brochmann, 2002b: 27). Like Brochmann, we use the concept *multicultural* descriptively – to describe ethnic, cultural and religious diversity in a society – and we use the concept *multiculturalism* about a political strategy for 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). According to Parekh, a society can choose to respond to its cultural diversity by welcoming, cherishing and respecting it (a multicultural response) or by seeking to assimilate minority cultural communities into its mainstream culture (a monoculturalist response). A strategy of ‘integration’, allowing minorities to keep their cultural roots in a new context, was introduced in Norway in the early 1970s. This strategy was seen as very different from the strategy of assimilation of the Sami population in Norwegian history. Until after the Second World War, the Norwegian authorities used violence and suppression towards the Sami minority, and therefore the concept of assimilation became almost illegitimate in modern democracies (Brochmann, 2002b: 30).

Integration has been the key concept since the 1970s; however there has been a change in the way integration is defined in Norway. Hagelund (2003a) identifies a change ‘from understanding the problem of integration mainly in terms of social problems, addressing issues such as housing, employment, education and so forth, to integration policy increasingly also being a field for problematization of culture and cultural difference’ (Hagelund, 2003a: 183). In the policy documents from the 1970s and 1980s, immigrants should be protected from assimilation. The documents from the 1990s, ‘culture has become a more ambiguous concept with repressive potentials that must be tamed’ (Hagelund, 2003a: 183).

According to Jacobsen and Gressgård (2002), the parliamentary report *On immigration and a multicultural Norway* (Om innvandring og et flerkulturelle Norge), St.meld. nr. 17 (1996-97) have multiculturalism as an ideal. In the introduction the ideal is ‘the same opportunities of participation in society and cultural development for all inhabitants who have different values, forms of expressions, faiths, and ways

of living' (Jacobsen and Gressgård, 2002: 216, our translation). However, the rest of the parliamentary report emphasizes Norwegian law, history, tradition and ways of living which limits the cultural diversity, and this suggests politics of assimilation, Jacobsen and Gressgård claim. This is particularly evident regarding gender and gender equality. Gender equality is said to be a goal in the Norwegian society and (immigrant) traditions and cultures which suppress women are presumed to hinder gender equality and integration (Jacobsen and Gressgård, 2002: 217).

The most recent parliamentary report *Diversity through inclusion and participation* (Mangfold gjennom inkludering og deltagelse – ansvar og frihet), St.meld. nr. 49 (2003-2004). The report underlines 'recognition and respect for cultural diversity', but also the 'tension between the individual and the group' and tension between 'respect for traditions and the freedom to break with traditions' (Gressgård, 2005: 73, our translation). According to Gressgård (2005: 73), the focus is on individual cultural diversity (not group based cultural diversity) and the main political challenge is to integrate/include in order for the individual to adjust to Norwegian values. These basic values in the Norwegian society are values like democracy, human rights/individual rights and gender equality (Gressgård, 2005: 74).

*What does multiculturalism mean to you, or the fact that people from different cultural backgrounds are living together in society? Is multiculturalism important to you in your religiously based work?* These are questions we asked the interviewees in our study. The respondents then started talking about issues regarding a multicultural society, not multiculturalism as a political project. Firstly we will present findings from the interviewees with an *ethnic majority* background (both from group A and B), and secondly we will present findings from the respondents with an *ethnic minority* background.

## **An ethnic majority perspective**

### **Different experiences in a multicultural society**

*'It [a multicultural society] is in a way my guilty conscience (...) I live in Oslo and there are many people here from many countries and nations, and I don't have contact with any of them. I mostly have contact with Norwegians or North-Europeans. So multicultural ..., well many people live here, and it would be*

*nice if we could have a dialogue, interact, participate in joint activities, getting to know each other. (...)*

(A1)

When asked about a multicultural society, in the meaning 'different cultures living together', this interviewee instantly talks about her 'guilty conscience'. The feeling of guilt is one that often figures in memories about whiteness (Berg, 2008: 219, see also Halsaa et al., 2008: 57-58). Ideally the interviewee would have liked to interact with 'people from many countries and nations', but she usually socializes with 'Norwegians', meaning ethnic Norwegians. Despite her wish to interact with people who have different cultural backgrounds, she rarely does that. Oslo is described as a multicultural city; despite this, the city is ethnically divided.

*'[A multicultural society] is natural, so to speak. I chose to work at a school [with pupils from different ethnic backgrounds] after I returned from abroad (...). I thought that I needed to work at a place where it is a bit international, where there are impulses (...).'*

(A4)

This interviewee has a missionary background, and for her a multicultural society is what she describes a 'natural' to her. She became a teacher at a school with many Muslim pupils. She describes this as a 'choice', suggesting that she actively sought a multicultural working place. The interviewee felt that her own religious faith was a resource in her work and an access to her Muslim pupils and their parents. They had a connection, a common understanding of right and wrong, which is in line with Leirvik (2003). According to the interviewee, she did not always agree with their views, but she was able to understand their point of views.

### **Enriching, yet difficult**

*'I think it [to live in a multicultural society] is enriching. But at the same time I think it's important that we don't eliminate the Norwegian cultural heritage because then we lose touch with our history and I don't think that's wise. So I think we are about to show too much consideration to immigrants, and that they are the ones who sets the agenda regarding many things. (...) Then we eventually lose our identity. And if a person loses his or her identity, then they get into problems. And maybe we as a nation [get problems] if we don't have our own identity. (...) I find that a bit scary.'*

(B2)

This interviewee states that she finds multicultural society 'enriching'. However, she is afraid that an increased multicultural society will 'eliminate the Norwegian cultural heritage' and then 'we eventually lose our identity'. One example she mentions is The Salvation Army who lost its state funding because it refused to have a homosexual in a leading position. She claims that Muslim mosques have not been questioned about their view and practices regarding homosexuals. In her opinion, Norwegians, meaning ethnic Norwegians, are measured by different, more demanding standards than immigrants who get away with much more.

The interviewee states that 'we as Norwegians' are terrified of being called racists and 'we' are afraid of being perceived as discriminatory. According to the interviewee, this leads to increased support of the right-wing Progress Party.<sup>41</sup> In her opinion, immigrants positive contributions would become more visible if the lines were clearer.

When asked about living in a multicultural society, another interviewee recounts her interaction with people with a foreign/non-native background at her work place.

*'I think it is important to keep your own identity and to be allowed to, of course, to practice your faith and religion when you come to a new country. Of course. We would also have asked for that. However, in [name of the work place] you get close to see the difference between the younger and the older generation [of immigrants], and the conflicts which the young people have regarding adjusting and becoming a part of [the Norwegian society], and the difference between some who are very loyal and behave in a manner of solidarity with their parents and grandparents and those who don't. And some get into crime and the differences become too big, and I find that very difficult. Very difficult! And I don't know if we are good enough to handle that. (...) The girls experience the worst consequences, and you want to fight for these girls, but at the same time you have to show respect for those who have a different view based on religious convictions. And then you have the boys who free themselves from the family and many end up as criminals (...). You find yourself in the middle.'*

(B3)

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<sup>41</sup> The Progress Party is a 'rightist and anti-immigration' party which 'has introduced modes of arguing against immigration which have much in common with the rhetoric of rightwing anti-immigration parties all over Europe. In this way it has seriously challenged the impression of overall consensus in Norwegian immigration politics.' (Hagelund, 2003a: 193).

This interviewee has experienced both positive and negative sides with a multicultural society through different jobs. She thinks it is important to see each individual and get to know people as individuals, not just as 'immigrants' or 'refugees'.

She claims that she has always seen each individual and she wants to have a positive attitude. She is brought up to be a good girl and a good Christian and to be positive towards all human beings. However, it is not always easy to handle the differences and sometimes the 'Norwegian part' of her reacts [*'pigger inni meg'*], she says. She mentions episodes she experienced at her workplace when people with a foreign/non-native background never showed up at planned meetings and did not attend voluntary (community) work [*dugnad*]. The interviewee has tried to be tolerant and understanding, but at the same time she felt that this had to go both ways. In the quote above, she also mentions generational conflicts and in the interview she recounts how young girls have been sent away to get married. However, saying negative things about immigrants very easily turns into a political issue concerning immigration, she claims.

### **Thoughts about a multicultural congregation**

*'My dream is to make this church multicultural, and that it shall mirror the diversity of the city. But we have a long way to go (...)'*

(A5)

*'(...) in the world we live in which has become so international and globalized and where everything is getting closer to us, it's decisive that we are a big community, and the citizenship [*medborgerskap*] that we talk about includes not only ethnic Norwegians, but the whole international [*aspect*] (...)'*

(A5)

This interviewee has a dream of making the congregation into a multicultural place. In her view, ideally the Church of Norway should 'mirror the diversity in the city'. However, this is far from reality as of today. The Church of Norway has visions of becoming a multicultural church, she claims. The Church has visions and strategy papers, but not much have been done. According to the interviewee, the work load is huge, and implementation of these plans has not been prioritized.

*'Yes, we have many congregations in our congregation which are immigrant congregations. (...) It provides diversity, and they contribute in a positive way. (...).'*

(B2)

The Pentecostal congregation has many immigrant congregations in their congregation, and the interviewee thinks diversity is positive. There has been some cooperation, but not much. According to this interviewee, the immigrant congregations want to keep for themselves and to keep their own identity and culture. The ethnic Norwegian congregation on the other hand, would like them to become more integrated, she says.

Another interviewee describes the congregation as multicultural. However, each congregation has separate meetings. They have a common Sunday school, but in her view they should do more things together. They could enrich each other and the Norwegians could learn many things, she claims. The main obstacles, in her opinion, are language problems and a strong sense of cultural belonging.

### **An ethnic minority perspective**

#### **Mutual integration and respect**

*'I feel more Norwegian than Pakistani. And it has to be a mutual integration, right. Not just a demand that immigrants should be integrated in the Norwegian society. The Norwegian society must change a little. It also needs to adjust to immigrants (...)*

(C2)

This interviewee emphasizes 'mutual integration', both immigrants and ethnic Norwegians have to adjust and respect each other. Ethnic Norwegians have to accept that immigrants are a part of society. Examples that she mentions are; help immigrant children to compensate for language weakness and adapt for Muslim girls to swim with girls only in order to get physical exercise. In her view, one does not have to make such practical arrangements more complicated than they are.

*'I can learn a lot from you and you can learn a lot from me; about tradition, about food, about culture, about song (...). I have a unique background from my home country and I have also experienced a lot here. (...) It has enriched me, it is a valuable experience. I think that when one lives in a [multicultural]*

*society then one also has to think about tolerance. Yes, everyone does not live the same way, so we have to show tolerance and allow people to be different.'*  
(C3)

This interviewee claims that a multicultural society 'enriches' you, and people from different cultural backgrounds can learn from each other. She also emphasizes the need for tolerance and acceptance of differences. This respondent has been engaged in religious dialogue [*dialogarbeid*] with Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Jews, and she believes in peaceful coexistence of people with different religious beliefs and cultural backgrounds.

Several of the interviewees mention the importance of respecting each other in a multicultural society. One interviewee says:

*'Multicultural societies. People with different traditions, people with different thoughts, who are from different places. They live together in a community. So that's a good thing, right?'*  
(C5)

This interviewee also underlines that there are many Muslims from different nationalities. The religion is the same, but traditions, habits and so on are different.

*'I think it [a multicultural society] is very perfect, and very, very nice! As long as you show understanding for each other and each other's background and religion, then you avoid problems in a society. It creates collaboration. You might have one from Saudi-Arabia or from Iran or from Africa who know other things – and I don't have that knowledge. I'll learn from him or her. And I have knowledge that him or her doesn't have. So we can help each other and cooperate. We are born to help each other and to show empathy and care and to help each other. (...)'*  
(D2)

According to this interviewee, it does not matter whether people are Muslims or Christians. One has to show respect for everyone. Her parents have always taught her to see people first, not what religions they have. She has also learned that it is important to learn about other religions. The interviewee has attended a confirmation and a funeral in a church, and she thinks knowledge about other religions and traditions is decisive in order to understand each other.

*'If I go to church I might learn a lot about Christianity. I can see a person and respect her and I understand her situation, her background, her culture. Her*

*tradition, right. Then I can adjust to that. The Queen [of Norway] came to a mosque yesterday (...). She came and she showed respect, she wore a hijab. That does not mean that she's a Muslim, right. But she shows respect. I can do the same when I go to church. I can sit quietly and listen to the priest. It's a learningful experience for me, I learn something from him. (...)*

(D2)

Mutual respect, tolerance and understanding for each other's culture, traditions and religions are emphasized by several of the interviewees. The quote above illustrates this well by referring to a visit by the Queen of Norway in a mosque in Oslo in 2009, and also the interviewee's visit to a church. The interviewee underlines the need of knowledge of each other's religions in order to understand and respect each other. The key issue is to learn from each other; it is not only ethnic and religious minorities who should learn about majority traditions, culture and religion and thereby integrate (or rather assimilate) into majority society. According to our interviewees, mutual understanding, knowledge-seeking and respect is needed in a multicultural society.

The Muslim women in our study mainly focus on the positive aspects of living in a multicultural society. One interviewee says it is 'exciting' to see how different people practice their religion and to experience different cultures in Norway (D4).

Even though she is generally positive, another interviewee also point at potential conflicts and she says that is not easy to live together with different cultures. In her mosque there are people from different cultures. Sometimes they have conflicts, but usually they help each other and cooperate. In her opinion, the solution is to show respect and understanding, as well as following the rules and doing your tasks in society.

### **Experiences of exclusion**

*'Those who don't know me think about my appearance. They think: 'Oh, there is one [immigrant]'. I often notice that when we are in stores and other places. (...)*

(C4)

This quote shows a more negative side of a multicultural society; experiences of exclusion and discriminatory practices. The interviewee recounts how some ethnic Norwegians in stores do not give good service to customers with an 'immigrant-look'.

According to the interviewee, they think that 'immigrants' spend much time on discussing clothes and shoes. She has experienced that some ethnic Norwegian sales-persons talk more to 'Norwegians' than to 'us'. Another episode is on the subway where she has observed that 'Norwegians' would rather sit next other 'Norwegians'.

### **Summary**

All the women in our study are talk positively about a 'multicultural society'. Several of the interviewees used the word 'enriching' about living in a multicultural society, and they emphasized learning from each other. The interviewees refer to the fact that Norway has become a multicultural society, meaning that people from different cultural backgrounds live together in a society. None of the interviewees speak directly about 'multiculturalism' as a political strategy.

In the context of a multicultural society, both the respondents with an ethnic majority and minority background talked about 'Norwegians', meaning ethnic majority Norwegians and 'immigrants', meaning ethnic minority Norwegians. The divide between 'us' and 'them' is articulated by several of the interviewees. To illustrate this; one of the interviewees with an ethnic minority background talks about 'Norwegians' versus 'us', and one of the interviewees with an ethnic majority background refers to 'us Norwegians' versus 'immigrants'. The term 'Norwegian' seems to be a narrow term, meaning exclusively those with a Norwegian descent. According to Gullestad (2002) 'Norwegian' and 'immigrant' have become contrasting concepts in the Norwegian language. The term 'immigrant' has a neutral definition; however, it also has negative connotations to violence and crime. The discussions about 'immigrants' are constructing Norwegian-ness and whiteness as an undefined normative centre (Gullestad, 2002: 88-93).

Besides emphasizing positive aspects of living in a multicultural society, all the respondents also mentioned challenges. On this point there is a difference between the responses from the ethnic majority interviewees and the ethnic minority interviewees. Some of the women with an ethnic majority background express a fear of losing the Norwegian culture. In this view, other cultures and identities can 'take over' the Norwegian identity and cultural heritage. 'The Norwegian identity and

cultural heritage' is seen as something constant and static, something 'we' need to preserve. In this view it is practically impossible for people with a different ethnic and cultural origin to become part of a 'Norwegian culture' or be considered 'a Norwegian' at all.

Another issue raised by some of the women with an ethnic majority background in our study, was in their view unacceptable treatment of especially ethnic minority girls. One of the interviewees mentions young girls who have been sent away to get married. This concern for women in ethnic minority communities is at the core of the debate about multiculturalism (Okin, 1999). In Norway, 'ethnic minority women and girls have been subjected to increased governmental attention since the late 1990s, and the primary pre-occupation with forced marriages and female genital mutilation' (Langvasbråten, 2008: 44). These issues have received much media attention as well and they are politicised issues. One of the interviewees finds it difficult to say negative things about immigrants because it easily turns into a political issue concerning immigration. The fear of buying into a racist agenda is also voiced by another interviewee. This dilemma and the lack of an appropriate language to talk about these complex issues, is similar to findings in the study of minority and majority women's organizations in Norway. The majority women found it difficult to criticize oppression of women within minority communities, and at the same time not stigmatizing an entire group of people (Halsaa et al., 2008: 192).

The women in our study with an ethnic minority background put much emphasis the mutual integration, respect and tolerance. In this view, integration should not be a one-way effort; it is a process which requires mutual knowledge of each other, dialogue and understanding. Both ethnic majorities and minorities have to adjust and respect each other. Ethnic Norwegians have to accept that immigrants are a part of society.

The negative aspects of living in a multicultural society that some of these women mention are experiences of so-called everyday-racism. These experiences are related to the majority population's prejudice towards 'immigrants'. The term 'immigrant' is equated with a certain look, usually a dark skin-colour. In the debate about immigration 'Norwegians' are considered alike, and 'immigrants' as different

(Gullestad, 2002: 91). Our findings in this study show that this constructed discursive difference on a group-level also has effects in real life; exclusion and discriminatory practices.

## 6 ANALYSIS: GENDER EQUALITY

### 6.1 Introduction

This section of the analysis is about gender equality. To what extent do the respondents embrace or resist an agenda for gender equality? The first part explores how gender equality and women's rights are talked about in the interviews. The second part addresses how gender relations are practiced, and the third part will look into gender relations in the religious communities. The fourth part is about changed gender roles. The last part of this chapter focuses on the interviewees' views on feminism and the women's movement.

### 6.2 How is gender equality and women's rights talked about?

#### **Men and women are created differently, but they have equal value**

*'(...) I think that men and women are created as different, but as equals. We have different viewpoints (...) I think it is God's intention to make us different. However, we should enrich each other. We are meant to complement and enrich each other.'*

(A1)

*'I think without a doubt that men and women have the same value. And I also think that they can perform the same tasks. Unless nature doesn't give them the same opportunities, for instance a man cannot breastfeed. However, in a society I think both [women and men] should function towards the same goal.'*

(D1)

*'(...) Men should be men and women should be women. That is why God created men and women. If everybody should be women and everybody should be men, then, then it would be boring! So therefore; I don't think they should swap roles. It's not healthy and it's not good. Either for oneself or for the children and the family (...)'*

(D3)

The quotes above represent a view of gender equality that is common in almost all the interviews with both Muslim and Christian women in our data material. Men and women have equal value [*likeverd*]. Men and women are seen as different, but equal. The interviewees sometimes emphasize biological differences which are seen as created by God. These differences are perceived as natural and taken-for-

granted. The biological differences they mention are women's ability to give birth and to breastfeed, and that men are physically stronger than women. Some of the interviewees talk about the different roles as mothers and fathers, and we will discuss that in more detail below. Some of the interviewees also say that men's and women's brains are different; 'something about the brain that works differently' and 'thus you can never expect your husband to think the same way that you do, simply because he's created differently' (B2). These differences have to be accepted and recognized in order to understand each other's different point of views, the interviewees claim. They underline men's and women's complementary roles and the need to respect each other despite of these differences.

Biological differences, complementary gender roles and equal value are main findings in the interviews with women from all the different religious communities. However, in addition to the acknowledgement, the recognition, and respect for these differences, most of the interviewees also emphasize that men and women should have the same opportunities, the same roles and positions in society.

*'(...) I think the essential thing is to be seen as who you truly are as a person, who I am as a person, and what it takes to make mine and each person's life rich. Eh.. I think I would emphasize equal value. (...) That should come first and then other things can come as a result of that, hopefully. (...)'*

(A4)

*'I'm more concerned with personal ability [egnethet] regardless of whether it's a woman or a man. It can be very capable male leaders, but it can also be very capable female leaders. Well, some men might like to think about traditional woman tasks, but I'm not that concerned with that, I'm more concerned with personal abilities.'*

(A6)

Several of the interviewees stress the personal aspect; your personality and your personal abilities regardless of your biological sex. One interviewee says it is important to play along with one's personality and to be creative. She quotes St. Irenaeus: 'God's Glory – a human being fully alive' (A2).

Equal value is the main view, and when every person is valued for who they are, regardless of whether it is a man or a woman, then equal opportunities will hopefully come as a result of that.

## Jesus and Mohammed respected women – gender equality in the Bible and the Quran

*'(...) both men and women have the same position [stilling] in society. (...) But before Islam, before Mohammad received revelations, it was shameful to get a daughter. People used to bury their daughters alive. This was forbidden and condemned by the Quran. (...) So women have a central role and women are highly respected within Islam (...).'*

(C5)

*'(...) On religious holidays they talk about 'men and women and their roles in Islam' [in the mosque]. And they are equals [likestilt]. There are no differences. They are equals. 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 didn't. 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.'*

(D2)

*'(...) I think it's evident in the Bible and in what Jesus says – it's very clear – the support of women, to trust one's voice. That you have a place, a position equally worthy with men's voices.'*

(A3)

As these quotes indicate, both the Muslim and the Christian interviewees highlight the positive view of women in the sacred texts of their respective religions. They also stress that the faith image of women has been wrongly interpreted by human beings and that culture/ society/men/religious traditions have oppressed women. Especially the Muslim interviewees emphasize Mohammad's respect for women and that he greatly improved women's position at the time when he lived. Most of the interviewees mention his wives which had important roles in society, especially Khadija and Aisha, and the respect he had for his daughter, Fatima. A view shared by most of our Muslim interviewees is that Islam is for gender equality; the Quran says so and the way Mohammad treated women also supports this. The Muslim interviewees frequently mention female role models from the Quran, for instance Fatima (Mohammad's daughter) and Zaynab (Mohammad's granddaughter). According to the interviewees they were brave and knowledgeable women. They

are also described as strong women who spoke out against injustice, and they think it indicates that Muslim women are not only supposed to be quiet and sweet.

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.

*'Well, he [Mohammad] married many [wives], but that was because it was a time of war. Right? The men were killed, while the women were at home. And that is the reason why it's not that way today; it's not that much war, right. You have one wife and that's enough. BUT, many men think, they don't think about religion, about Islam, they don't think about that – it's just; 'I want to have four wives'. 'I want to have five wives'. When you're not able to treat them just and fair, why should you have that? You are supposed to treat them equally! No difference, not different treatment. One woman is enough. Islam doesn't say that you have to marry four wives. It was back at that time that they did that. Mohammad Sallallahu alayhi wa sallam married many, but that was because their men got killed and the women became widows. He did that so that they should avoid problems, so that others shouldn't bother them. So that other men shouldn't come and abuse them.'*

(D2)

Some of the Muslim women address the issue of polygamy and that Islam allows a man to have four wives. Mohammad had several wives, but according to the interviewees, this was because of war at the time when he lived. They claim that one wife is enough today.

According to the Muslim interviewees, culture is to blame for men's domination and their oppression of women. Some of the interviewees say that this is especially the case in the country-side in their respective countries of origin, and that this is not true for Muslims in Norway. One interviewee also stresses that poverty and illiteracy are barriers for women in the country-side in her country of origin and that it is in the interests of rich landlords to keep women down.

The Christian women also emphasize Jesus' support of women and that God does not treat men and women differently. '(...) He [Jesus] did not push women around or hold them down, he did the opposite. (...)' (B2). Some of the interviewees explicitly say that parts of the Bible have been interpreted very literally, without regard of the time when it was written. One interviewee states that it is important to interpret the

Bible with regards to our own time. She also says that society with support of the Church, has treated men and women differently, but that is not the way God intended.

### **Complementary gender roles - the importance of motherhood**

The Muslim women in our data material explicitly refer to the Quran when they legitimate the ideal of the complementary roles of the man and the woman in the family; the man as the main provider and the woman as the primary care-taker of children. Some of the Christian women on the other hand, talk about their practice of staying at home when the children were small, however, they do not explicitly refer to the Bible or their religion when they talk about this. We will come back to the Christian women when we address how gender relations are practiced, but first we will explore the Muslim women's emphasis on motherhood:

*'A mother is highly respected. A mother has a central place. It is said that paradise is at your mother's feet, right. If you want to go to paradise you do all good things for your mother.'*

(C5)

*'The first that comes to mind is what it says in the Quran. (...) That is the duties you have towards God, which are the same for men and women. I think that men and women are equals in that respect, but still, well, a man is not a woman. A woman is not a man. And the belief that a man and a woman can have different tasks, but yet they have the same value. (...) For instance in Islam, the man is the main provider for family. (...) That doesn't mean that a woman can't work, just that the man has the main responsibility for the family's economy. (...) It is a kind of a recipe that God has given us. (...)'*

(C1)

These quotes illustrate that the role of the mother is highly valued among the Muslim participants in our study and also that the mother and the father have different roles within the family. Respect for one's mother is emphasized in these interviews. The mother has the role as the main care-taker of the children in the family, whereas the father has the main responsibility of the family's economy. However, the interpretation in the second quote above is that these rules are to be treated as guidelines, and they are not written in stone. The woman can be the primary provider in a family and the man and the woman can negotiate who is doing what. However, the family's economy is the man's main responsibility and care of the children is the woman's main responsibility. According to the interviewee, these

responsibilities can be combined. These rules are important when something goes wrong; when for instance the children don't get what they need etc. Then the man is to blame. The interviewee does not think this is discriminating against women; rather the opposite; the man have more limitations; he always have to prioritize his family's economic needs while the woman is not that 'limited' [begrenset].

These different roles in the family are explained by some of the interviewees with reference to men's and women's different qualities.

*'(...) the difference between men and women is basically the physical part. It is different. (...) But it's not only that, it's also because of women's emotions, for instance. The reason why women can't be in a court is because of the feelings they have inside; that is the difference between men and women. And there are many other things that he talked about [A visitor from Iran, a professor from University]. But in every other way they should be treated the same and they should respect each other. And the mother is very important in Islam; to raise children, and when it comes to children and family, that is very important in Islam. Actually, the mother has a huge role. But because of some differences, they [the man and the woman] have some different tasks. Men are somewhat physically stronger and they can do things that they are suited for, while women can do things that they are suited for. But basically a woman can do everything; however, it may not be healthy for her. It's not good for her. Do you know what I mean?'*

(D3)

This quote illustrates how some of the interviewees legitimate men's and women's different roles in the family; women are more emotional and the man is physically stronger. Another interviewee also stresses that God has created men and women differently and that there are things that women cannot do; they cannot go to war (soft hearts, too sensitive). Women cannot be very strict and they are physically weaker than men, even though women are intelligent and very capable and they can endure a lot. Further, this interviewee also claims that the majority of men cannot raise children. In her view, there are exceptions, but they are few and far between. Men do not have the patience to raise children. In her view, these complementary gender roles are not at odds with gender equality. She says that gender equality means to respect each other. It also means that men and women should have equal pay in the labour market. Several of the interviewees, both Christian and Muslims mention equal pay for equal work as an important aspect of gender equality and this

is an issue they do not question. However, you cannot change natural differences; the way we are created when it comes to complementary gender roles in the family.

*'(...) To provide food or clothes and warmth and to get a place to live is easy. But to give care and love – that will be missing, I think [if the father is the sole care-taker]. You can't give both; because the mother's and the father's ... you can't do both roles at the same time. But a mother can play that role. I've seen a mother raise her children all by herself, but if a father should do it ... That is a bit difficult for me to say that it will be 100%. But like I said before, maybe one of several men can do it ... (...)'*

(C2)

These quotes emphasize the importance of the role of the mother and also the extraordinary qualities that a woman has which makes her more capable to take care of children. The interviewees also stress that motherhood is highly valued and they argue that being a housewife and a mother should be recognized as equally important for society as someone in the labour market or in politics. This is connected to the men's and women's equal value in society and in the Quran. A man has to protect the woman and the whole family, provide for them and make money. He has to be good and kind and should help the mother to raise the children. The woman can contribute to the family's economy, but that is not her main responsibility. One interviewee explains this by saying that the woman should not work 'double shifts'. She can contribute if she wants to and if she has the energy. According to this interviewee, it is sometimes a discrepancy between the ideal and practice, but that can happen in any family, not only Muslim families.

Some of the Muslim women also argue that a stay-at-home-mum is important for the children. Small children need much attention, time and effort. School children need help with the homework. If the children go to SFO [after school club] and the parents work all day they are all exhausted when they get home. If the mother stays at home when the children are small it is positive for the woman herself, the children and the family as a whole. The interviewees also emphasize that this is a good arrangement for society because the mother will be able to raise her children to be good citizens. One of the interviewees say that this is the ideal in Islam, but in practice the mother does not always have the possibility to stay at home with the children. In her opinion many of the pupils in school have problems, and she even thinks that the situation is

out of control. In her opinion the problems in school will again affect the whole society in a negative way.

The interviewees underline that this view of complementary gender roles and the emphasis on women's role as a mother is not discriminatory of women. The housewife ideal does not mean that men should oppress women. In their view, Islam's view of women is an expression of respect, care and love.

These statements about the importance of motherhood and the connection between complementary gender roles and gender equality [in the meaning of equal value] can be interpreted as a wish to upgrade the value of housework and child-care for small children in the Norwegian society. Women need recognition for their work in the house and what they do as mothers. These women claim that men and women should have the same opportunity to grow as a person, but men and women do not necessarily do the same things. In their view equal value [*likeverd*] also means that a housewife has to be seen as a respected person and an important citizen [*samfunnsborger*].

### **6.3 How are gender relations practiced?**

#### **To work when the children were small**

Some of our Muslim interviewees who talk about the stay-at-home mother as an ideal in Islam, worked outside the home when their own children were small. Some of the Muslim women came to Norway in the 1970s and they recall that their children were in nursery when they were at work. One of the interviewees says that she was very active; she worked and she took part in voluntary activities when the children were small, and her life was very different from what it would have been like if she had stayed in her home-country. *'I was a real Norwegian woman!'* she says (C2).

Another Muslim woman says that she worked when the children were small and they were at nursery. But she also knew other women who were home at the time, but most of these women have entered the labor market now. She claims that things were different back in the 1970s when she came to Norway. Then many ethnic Norwegian women were at home taking care of the children. In her opinion, things

have changed since then. The women who came to Norway in the 1970s now have grown-up children and many of these women have started to learn Norwegian, and they have now entered the labor market. According to this interviewee, the biggest barrier to participation in the labour market is the language.

The Muslim women who came to Norway back in the 1970s talk warmly about the Muslim motherhood ideal. However, they have children who are raised in Norway, and these women also stress the importance of education for both girls and boys. One interviewee argues that education is important for society and for these young boys and girls themselves. They have to be able to support themselves.

The younger Muslim interviewees in our data material who are not mothers themselves maintain that they want to work even if they get families later. One interviewee says that she may take a short break from the labour market while she has young children, but she wants to use her education. According to another of the young Muslim women, most of the women in her mosque go to school and work. She says that in some Muslim countries women are not allowed to obtain an education and they have to stay at home, but in Norway it is not like that. She can go to school and to work, and her father understands. She describes her father as a liberal man and he is not strict which she is very happy about. A third Muslim interviewee recounts that she is not married yet, but when she gets married she wants to decide for herself whether she should work or not. She says that she wants to have a choice and to be in control of her own life.

### **Stay at home mum when the children are small**

Some of the Christian women in our interview material talk about their *practice* of staying at home when the children were small and how they prioritized this family arrangement as a conscious choice or/and as a practical arrangement.

*(...) at our house I think that I can say that we have practiced full gender equality. Both regarding the division of tasks – and the only thing is that my husband earned so much more than me, but that is due to other things. So I, I was the one who stayed at home when the eldest children were small. But beyond that we have had full gender equality in our house. But that has got to do with respect (...), to be respected for who you are. But – it does not necessarily mean that everyone should do the same things. But well, that is a*

*very huge discussion about equal pay and all that. But – yes, respect, in my opinion that should be considered equally important. (...)*

(B3)

This quote illustrates a view of gender equality which is in line with the equal value perspective and complementary roles in the family. The interviewee says that she stayed at home with the children when they were small due to practical reasons because the husband earned much more money. However, they have shared the tasks at home, and most importantly, they have always respected each other.

*'I was at home with the children the first eight years, I think. Then I started to work a little bit. I didn't work full time until the youngest one was thirteen, I think. So that, but that was practical. I had a husband who worked shifts, right, and it was a practical thing also. But it was more usual back then and at the time we lived in a small place [a small place in Norway]. It was more common to stay at home then and everybody stayed home with their kids. (...) It is completely different now. (...) I live next door to a nursery and I feel sorry for those who drag their children there at 7 a.m. in the morning. (...) I think that many could have chosen differently if they would lower their standards because that is what we did. We couldn't afford it, but well, I cooked all the food, sewed clothes, we couldn't afford expensive vacations and things like that. So I still think that it is a matter of priority. If you want to. I think that families would benefit from that. A little less work, either if it's the mum or the dad or both. (...)*

(B4)

This Christian woman talk about her practice of staying at home when the children were small, and how her family prioritized this arrangement as a conscious choice. It was also a practical arrangement since her husband worked shifts. Some of the women in our data material are now grandmothers and it was perhaps more usual for the mother to stay at home when they had small children. In her opinion it is a question of prioritizing the family and the children's well-being over material goods. This interviewee does not explicitly mention the mother as the primary care-taker of children. It was practical for their family that she stayed home because her husband had a higher income. However, she suggests that either the mum or the dad can cut back their working hours in order to spend more time with the children.

## **The experience of not fitting into ‘the nuclear family ideal’**

Some of the Christian interviewees have experienced to deviate from the ideal of the nuclear family:

*‘In my life I feel incredibly free! And very well respected as a single woman. However, at the same time I’ve noticed that there are limitations [‘ting som butter’], for instance among typical family people I get the feeling that they sort of look at me differently, especially in Christian circles. And – that’s probably the reason why I don’t socialize a lot with family people then. (...) I have the opportunity to choose my friends and they are mostly single, or couples without children. So in a way I avoid that perhaps. But sometimes I meet those attitudes [‘støter jeg på det’].’*

(A1)

This quote illustrates a strong family focus within the Christian community that this interviewee belongs to. She says that she feels respected as a single woman; however she avoids gatherings with ‘family people’ because she feels that they look at her differently because she deviates from ‘the nuclear family ideal’.

## **6.4 Gender relations in the religious communities**

Questions concerning gender equality within the religious communities brought up different issues, for instance regarding the institutional opportunities for women within the four religious groups in our data material. Therefore, we write about each religious community separately in this section in order to highlight the differences.

### **Congregation A**

*‘(...) We [in my congregation] have a female priest, and she has two male colleagues who are priests, but she is their boss. (...) I feel much respected as a woman there. However, at my work place [a missionary organization] some cannot accept female theologians, but we’ve had a vote and we can live with two different views. (...) So you can be employed and be an ordained female priest, but you might not be able to come and speak everywhere. Our top leader is in favour of ordained female theologians. So it has been a discussion, but it is five-six years back. Now we can live with two different views. I feel free to maintain my view.’*

(A1)

*‘Nowadays my experience is that the debate about homosexuals has taken over from the issue female priests. It [the issue of female priests] is very quiet; it’s not a big issue. (...) The debate about homosexuals is sort of the burning*

*issue. (...) [the issue of female priests] becomes so innocent in comparison. (...) Women, right now, nobody is debating that.'*

(A1)

*'When I think about how it was when I was a child, they [men and women] were more separated. 'Women did this and men did that'. Now I think that it is more 'evened out', that the differences aren't that big. (...)'*

(A3)

The interviewees from congregation A all talk about gender equality in the congregation. They say that there is a consciousness about gender equality and this is also true for the practice. Women are encouraged to speak and to sit in front, and there is a consciousness about the equal visibility of women and men in the congregation. They all feel that women's voices are being heard. Some of the interviewees contrast this congregation to other congregations that they have been part of earlier, or places where they work with a Christian profile, and they emphasize that they all prefer women's role in their current congregation.

They also talk about the general debate about female ordained priests in the Church of Norway [*Den norske kirke*] and they claim that this issue has quieted down. The burning issue nowadays is the debate about homosexuals. Female bishops and other female leaders within the church have lead the way. One interviewee says that she is grateful of what they have done and she admires them. They paid a price and met a lot of resistance. There is an increasing number of women who study theology and become priests. However, one interviewee points out that there were few women on a course for leaders in the church and the course had a weak gender perspective.

Another interviewee says that men are often at the top of the hierarchy in the Norwegian Church, as board leaders and so on, and there are more women at the grassroots level; Sunday school teachers, leaders of the children's choir, pianists, and everywhere else. In the congregation there are many active women. There is no ongoing discussion about gender perspectives, but in practice it is the women who run things. The interviewees claim that it is the women who take responsibility in the congregation. The women are the driving force and the men just 'enjoy the coffee and cakes' (A1).

## Congregation B

*'(...) Traditionally the pastor has been a man and also the leaders of the congregation. And then we have this, in all Pentecostal congregations we have a board of leaders, or a board of Elders [eldsteråd] as it is called. I don't know why they call themselves that because there are many young people there too, but anyway that is the name. And traditionally, until a few years ago, and now there is some movement in some places, but originally it consisted of men only. But there is a huge change about to happen. Now we are about to elect women as well. Here in our congregation. And I know of other congregations which have had women before and I know of some Pentecostal congregations which have had female pastors in the last 10-15 years, that is a leading female pastor. (...)'*

(B2)

*'There was no way a woman could be on the platform when I was a child. No. Back then a woman's place was further down with a hat on her head - and subordinate and things like that. But - it has changed tremendously. Now a woman can speak - and now a woman can even enter the Board of Elders [eldsterådet]. So - a lot of things have happened.'*

(B4)

The interviewees from congregation B all emphasize the huge change which has happened regarding women's role in the congregation since their childhood. They all also mention a more recent change in their congregation; namely that women now can be elected as a member of the board of Elders. They claim that the Pentecostal movement has been a fundamentalist movement, but is not as fundamentalist today as it was before.

The interviewees are all positive about these changes towards more gender-inclusive practices. One interviewee says that women are better at the 'social bit'. On average men are more rational than women, and women are more focused on people and relations. Women on the board of Elders will mean that the congregation will become better at that part as well. This view is in line with the notion of gender equality which we discussed earlier in this chapter; men and women as different, but with equal value. Men and women have different strengths and weaknesses, but they can supplement each other. In line with this view, the congregation will be strengthened by having both women and men present in the leader group because women can contribute with some qualities that men allegedly lack.

One of the interviewees maintains that the congregation is still very male-dominated, even though there have been some changes. The man who is the main pastor [*hovedpastor*] used to be against women on the board called Elders [*eldsteråd*]. One of the interviewees has worked closely with this pastor and has been entrusted with many leadership tasks in the congregation; however, she has never been on the board of Elders, but her husband has been a board member. Soon there will be a new election of members to the board and women from then on can be elected. Another interviewee says that the Board of Elders [*eldsterådet*] is still male-dominated and she thinks that women should be equally represented there.

According to the interviewees, there are mixed opinions about women entering the board of Elders. Many in the Pentecostal movement are positive and agree with this change, while many do not. One of the interviewees says that she has not been on the barricades and fought for women's right in the congregation, but she has taken the opportunities that have come along. Some of the women in the congregation have talked together about these things, but only informally. There has not been much debate in the congregation about women on the Board of Elders. Things are usually governed from the top and the Board of Elders proposes things and then the congregation later accepts or not.

Another interviewee says that the Pentecostal congregation can be a restricted community and it can feel 'narrow'. Historically this was a revival movement, and according to the interviewee, the members felt persecuted from the overall society. According to the interviewee, this historical experience has led to the kind of restricted community. When she was young she had the impression that other Christians outside the congregation did not really believe. She also had the feeling that everybody watched what she was doing; she had to keep 'inside' and to be loyal to the congregation. It was not acceptable to disagree with the preacher and she says that the Pentecostal movement has been a very preacher-centered and male dominated movement.

At the same time, the interviewees also have many stories about strong women within the Pentecostal movement, for instance female missionaries who travelled alone to distant places and did many things there that they were not allowed to do in

the movement in Norway at the time. There are also stories of women who stood up and spoke in front of everybody including men, and who took their hats off even if women were supposed to cover their hair at the time.

The interviewees also talk about the opportunities that they have had to take on leadership tasks within the congregation and to have responsibility. One interviewee says that she has always felt respected in the congregation. She has organized Sunday school, camps, and meetings for children. She has been entrusted with important tasks in the congregation and has been taken seriously. She was a pastor for the children. However, she did not have that title at the time, but she was the first woman with those leadership tasks and was a part of the pastor team. Later on, women in that position have been called 'pastors'.

Several interviewees emphasize that their congregation is a part of society and not totally isolated. The society has changed and this has put pressure on the congregation. Women have become more conscious and made more demands. Earlier rules and regulations for women are not originally from the Bible. They are made by people, not by religion, one interviewee argues. Another interviewee however, says that according to the Bible, women should be quiet in the congregation [*tie i forsamlingen*], but that there are different interpretations. Young people today have more to say and there has been a change in the congregation. A third interviewee supports this view; what the Bible says in the New Testament (Paul) about men has been interpreted very literally. In her opinion, one has to interpret the Bible with regards to our own time. God does not treat men and women differently. There are no tasks just for men – or just for women, she claims. Even if that is the way it has been in society, and the church has supported that.

According to the interviewees, life in the congregation is different for the young generation today. One woman claims that the young people now do not accept that life in general, and gender roles as a part of that, are so different within the congregation compared to society at large. So things are changing, however, it takes more time for a congregation to change its structure. This interviewee also says that men and women are treated the same in the congregation. Maybe it was

different in the older generation, she continues, but things are going in 'the right direction' (B2).

One interviewee has seen many girls over the years who have leadership potential and who have been given different tasks in various congregations. They have been strong girls, but she has observed a tendency that many of them have 'met the wall'. These young women have gone out strong on God's behalf and have not received the support that they need, she claims (B3). Now things are about to consolidate, she says, and young girls today receive more support.

### **Mosque C**

*'(...) If you have learned Islam the right way, then you're an Imam yourself. Right? I cannot stand in front of the men and tell them how to follow Islam. But a woman can write in the newspaper and so on and men can learn from that, right. But a woman cannot be an Imam (...)'*

(C2)

*'(...) one floor is for women. But we have computers so when you look at the screen, men and women see the same things. There are screens on each floor. So we have gender equality, it's not different treatment. It's not oppression. Because in [our mosque] we have well-educated people and the Imam is very, very good. He's not very conservative and doesn't say 'don't come to me'. We are very open with each other. We have dialogue and knowledge and very many good teachers. (...)'*

(C4)

The women from mosque C emphasize that women are not discriminated against even if they are not allowed to become Imams and they have a separate floor in the mosque. One interviewee says that women are scholars on equal terms with men within Islam. She argues that Aisha, one of Mohammad's wives, worked and that about 1/3 of all the knowledge in Islam has become through her. Women cannot be Imams, but according to the interviewee, that is because of their special role as mothers; they give birth, they breastfeed their children, and the children are very attached to their mother. Therefore it is not possible for her to spend that much time in the mosque. Women cannot be Imams, but that is not really a barrier, she claims. To be an Imam does not give that much status.

Another interviewee says that the Imam's job is to lead the prayer. A woman however, cannot pray during their menstrual period, whereas men have to pray all the time. A woman can be a teacher in the mosque and according to one of the interviewees, the female teachers who teach about the Quran are respected on equal terms with the parents. They have a high status and they have helped her to understand the Quran. She admires them and looks up to them.

Men and women are separated in the mosque and they stay on different floors. They organize different programs for men and women, but they have some joint programs as well.

In the mosque men are in front and women in the back because men have a duty to go there whereas women don't have that duty, but they can go. This interviewee argues that the separation in the mosque is positive. One reason why the men sit in front and women in the back is that women do not have to feel that the men are staring at them. She says that would make women feel uncomfortable. Another positive aspect is that she thinks the two sexes have to have some boundaries, and you avoid rumors and people saying: 'that's your boyfriend' and so on (C4).

All the interviewees from mosque C underline that they are lucky in their mosque because the Imam is 'not very conservative' (C4) and he understands what the society demands. He says: 'don't pressure the children to wear a hijab or not to wear trousers' (C2). The women's organizations and the men's organizations in the mosque work on equal terms, they are equally active and they have joint meetings and discuss issues.

According to the interviewees, there are many discussions about gender equality in the mosque and they will soon have a lecture on 'gender equality in Islam'. They address the misinterpretation concerning oppression of women within Islam, and especially one *sura* about women, a special chapter in the Quran which has been misinterpreted.

The interviewees are concerned with women's rights within Islam. One interviewee says that women need to get to know their rights, both within Islam and within the

Norwegian society. The women's organization in the mosque has seminars about these things. Women can have problems at home, with their children, and they discuss these issues. They also help women who are abused to seek help in other places. But she emphasizes that this can happen to all women, not only to Muslim women.

According to the interviewees, women are not obligated to go to the mosque, but they go because they want to meet and because they want to learn and discuss their religion. Other issues for debate are what the media says about Islam and what to teach the new generation. Some of the interviewees are very concerned that the young generation should learn the true Islam. They should read the Quran in their own language in order to get the right image of Islam, not just the image that one gets from the media because then you think Islam is a 'stupid' religion (C2).

One interviewee emphasizes that the new generation of young men has started to respect women, and another says that there is more consciousness now about women's possibilities concerning higher education and careers (C3).

### **Mosque D**

*'(...) Mostly it is for women who are housewives. So, in a way, the mosque is sort of a social meeting place them.'*

(D4)

*'There is not a discussion [about men's and women's roles]. BUT sometimes when there are religious holidays and things like that, they talk about 'what is women's role and what is men's role in Islam'. And they are both equal. There is no difference between them. Okay, so men are stronger than women, but that doesn't mean that men and women should be treated differently. (...) Many Muslims do not understand that; they look more down on women than they do on men. And men are supposed to have the power. That's completely wrong. Because Mohammad himself didn't do that. He didn't. I've read that he had several wives, but he treated them as equals. Right? He was not mean to them or anything like that. But today; some men say; "we have the power", but those men don't have the knowledge, to put it that way. As long as you have the knowledge and the experiences then you avoid problems in life and in the world!'*

(D2)

The first quote illustrates one important aspect of going to the mosque; namely the social aspect of being part of a religious community. According to this interviewee, the mosque is a social meeting place for women, and she especially mentions housewives who attend. Some of these women are lonely and isolated and they can come to the mosque and meet others and talk about their everyday lives. The interviewee vividly explains how the women's section is quite loud and it can be difficult to hear the speech. Therefore women who want to hear the speech can go to the men's section of the mosque. When a woman enters that room, the men will make room for her. The interviewee says that her main objective for going to the mosque is to obtain knowledge and to be reminded of things in Islam. So this aspect is more important to her, than the social part of it, and she is pleased with the arrangement where she can go to the men's section in order to hear the speeches. So we see that the sex segregation is not an absolute thing; here the mosque has rather opened up for a practical solution in order to meet different needs among the women.

Another interviewee recounts how they have special women's days in the mosque where they celebrate Fatima's (Mohammad's daughter) and Zaynab's (Mohammad's granddaughter) birthdays. Then they have parties and enjoy good food, they talk and so on.

The second quote illustrates again the common view among our Muslim respondents; that Islam is originally a religion that favors gender equality, but historically and also today people (men) misunderstand due to a lack of knowledge. One interviewee says that a man in the mosque had claimed that men have more power because they are stronger and that is fair. In her opinion, however, that was not fair, and she also referred to rules and laws in Norway about men and women and gender equality. She also says that there has been a change in the religious community. Women have become aware of their rights. In the old days only men could get a divorce, now both men and women can obtain a divorce. Women can also study and work outside the home.

## 6.5 Gender roles are changing

The Muslim interviewees in our data material frequently mention the Quran and ‘true’ Islam when they talk about men’s and women’s roles in society and changed gender roles. This is in contrast to the Christian women talk about a change from their childhood to the present day. They talk about a societal change, but also a personal change for some of them in the view of women’s and men’s roles in marriage and in society at large. Some of the interviewees refer to the religious communities they grew up in, but they rarely refer to the Bible or Christianity when they talk about gender roles.

### Muslim women – ‘culture’ vs. ‘religion’

Int.: *‘Are gender relations in your religious community changing?’*

C1: *‘(...) In a way it is a change because the younger generation is more concerned with... well, I don’t know, without generalising too much, the older generation has perhaps not been that good at talking about things. But, well, that [gender relations] has kind of been a part of the culture, and perhaps they haven’t been that good at separating culture and religion. (...) The younger generation wants to make a distinction between ‘this is culture’ and ‘this is religion’. Because it is way too mixed, and then you get misunderstandings (...).’*

*‘Personally, I think the culture is very mixed with Islam, and unfortunately it’s very hard to separate the two. Regarding Islam, we’ve been told in these programs – and I’ve also read something and know something from before – that a woman’s only duty is to satisfy the man [sexually] within a marriage. That’s the only thing. And to raise children and breastfeed – but that’s voluntary. To cook, that’s not something you have to do, if you consider the view in Islam. (...) A man’s duty is to provide for the family. And of course to satisfy her sexually. (...).’*

(D1)

The Muslim women in our data material clearly separate ‘religion’ and ‘culture’, like these quotes illustrate. Especially the younger Muslim interviewees emphasize generational differences; the older generation has been more concerned with maintaining the ‘old’ and ‘cultural’ gender norms, where a woman should get married at a young age, have children right away, obey her husband, always look nice for him, do all the cooking, the cleaning, and take care of the children.

One of the young Muslim women says that the 'old' gender roles that the parents believe in are being challenged by the gender roles in society at large. The younger generation can choose what they think is best.

*'(...) In principle, as a Muslim you have to put religion first, before traditions and culture. When religion says that it is forbidden to force your daughter to get married, then it's not allowed. The marriage is not valid if you force your children to get married. But that simply goes straight over their heads. (...) Even if it is several Imams who say that it's forbidden, it's just bla, bla, bla. They 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 conscious in the choices that they make. In what they choose to believe in. And that they try to filter out what's good and what's not good; what's faith and what's religion. (...).'*

(D4)

*'(...) The ideal for women in Norway in general is to have a career. That does not contradict the ideal for women – if you can call it that – in the Muslim religion. What matters is how you do things. For instance, you can have a career and still practice [your religion].'*

(C1)

This quote illustrates the view of Islam as supportive of women's rights to have a career. The Muslim ideal of the housewife and the emphasis on the role as a mother is not the whole picture. The quote above shows that the Muslim women find support in their religion if they want to have a career. Several of the Muslim interviewees think that it is certainly possible to combine the ideal of the good mother and a career. Family should come first, and they want to live up to the 'traditional' women's role as nurturing and caring. However, studying and work is also something they want to pursue in their own lives. One interviewee says that Norwegian women's role is more career oriented; if you don't have a career you're a failure. In her opinion, it is fine to have a career, but not if it comes before your family and if your job makes you exhausted and burned out. Then it is not worth it.

The young Muslim interviewees are mostly positive regarding women's rights in the future and they look to Islam for support of their views. They also say that there have been changes in the way young Muslim women and men are raised in Norway. One interviewee says that her family is not very culture-oriented. She has experienced earlier that people (other Muslims from the mosque) have gossiped if

someone has been seen out late at night and so on. This is bad for both boys and girls, but even worse for girls. However, in her opinion, it is more relaxed now. She has met people from the mosque late at night without them spreading rumors about her afterwards, but it depends more on the cultural norms which the different nationalities have.

However, some of the young Muslim women do not necessarily share the positive view about the present and the future. One interviewee says that young women in her ethnic community are expected to get married early and to have children right away. Then the woman is not getting an education and it is difficult to enter the labor market later. The husband starts to work and provide for the family and the wife stays at home and takes care of the family. They get caught in a 'circle' of traditional gender roles (D1). The interviewee does not see any huge change in gender roles from the 'old' to the 'young' generation. In her opinion, the expectations about an early marriage are there to prevent pre-marital sex. Young women (and men) from her cultural background are not supposed to have any kind of sexual relationships before they get married. Norms for young women's behavior are related to norms which regulate women's sexuality.

Some of the older Muslim women also address the issue of women's rights and 'culture' versus 'religion':

*'(...) That's why it is so much trouble in the families also, that women are very integrated. They have learned a lot about Islam. They demand their rights. But the men have not learned very much. They can't give rights. They are afraid of giving rights. They might think that the women will fly away if they get freedom, so maybe the women get wings and fly away. But that's not true because we also know – if we know about Islam – we know our boundaries [grenser]. We know how far we can fly or how high we can fly. And – the men are a bit afraid of that. Islam does not say that a woman is a slave and that she should cook for her husband or only take care of the house for her family. Islam does not say that. It is the men who have put the entire burden on women; that she should work and cook at the same time.'*

(C2)

In her opinion many Muslim men in Norway have learned religion from their parents or from local Imams in their country of origin. These men have the wrong image of

Islam; they confuse their cultural traditions with Islam. Muslim men in Norway still lack respect for women.

Another Muslim interviewee also says that some Muslim men oppress women. However, this is not solely a problem due to their religion or the culture. In her opinion, some Christian men also look down on women and it does not matter if you are a Muslim, a Christian or anything else. Her view points at more structural factors of male-domination.

### **The experience of having a Muslim family life in Norway**

*'(...) in a Muslim family the parents live together with either their daughter or their son so they won't live alone. Because they need that. Because they have raised their children so that they, when they grow up, they should do something for their parents. That is what Islam says; that you shall raise good children (...) because they shall take care of you later. That is what Islam says, right. But it is not exactly like that in Norway, to put it bluntly (...)'*

(D2)

Some of the Muslim interviewees compare the typical Muslim family with strong family ties to a secular Norwegian or Western family structure characterized by weaker family ties. The interviewees underline that they do not want to generalize and that all families are different, but they have a general impression of difference in family life. One interviewee says that she sees how Norwegian families also care about each other, but her impression is that Muslim families are more together. She says that Norwegian families get more divorces, and both men and women have sex with many people before they get married. For Muslims however, it is a sin to get a divorce and also to have sex before marriage. It is only legitimate to get a divorce if the man is mean to his wife and drinks alcohol and take illegal drugs etc. In her opinion, Norwegians are lonely because the families are more divided. The grandparents live alone and children go and live by themselves when they are 18. The interviewee emphasizes that Muslim families are not perfect and neither are Norwegian or Christian families, but in her view Muslim families stick more together. According to Islam, the parents raise their children and when they become older the children take care of them. She feels sorry for Norwegians who are left more alone.

Another interviewee says that there are many rules regarding family relations and it is very important to keep in touch. She also mentions the importance of respecting your parents, your sisters and brothers, and all older people. When she goes to the mosque she is reminded of the importance of family. Her family is not in Norway, but she calls them on the phone.

*'(...) for instance in our culture it's like this; family lives together all the time until they [the children] get married or they are going to study and move to another city or another place to study, right. But here in Norway I've seen 16-17 year olds and they say that they decide and no one can decide for them and they don't have much respect for their parents. At least that's my impression.'*

(D3)

*'(...) And the other thing is that they [Norwegian youth] start very early with – (...) sex, and cohabitation and with... When you are in nursery or the children are in first grade or second grade and they talk about girlfriends and boyfriends and that - that is very strange to us! In the thoughts of a small child – why, why does she or he talk about boyfriends and girlfriends? And then they say; 'yes, here comes your girlfriend/boyfriend!' They kiss! They talk about things like that. But that's not just because of Norwegian culture, maybe it's because of TV, it's the way the world is. (...) The day will come when a girl or a boy gets married, they get to know a boy or a girl, and – that's much nicer, much better. (...).'*

(D3)

A third Muslim interviewee calls attention to the difficulties of raising children in Norway because she is used to a different culture of raising children. In her opinion Norwegian children have too much freedom and they need more boundaries. In her country of origin child-raising is too strict and includes a too strong focus on discipline. Her solution is to find a middle ground, but that can be difficult. In the culture of her country of origin the children live at home until they get married while in Norwegian culture some 16-17 year olds make their own decisions and they do not respect their parents. Norwegian youth also start having sex at an early age. In her view it would be better if they got married and then got to know each other. They are not mature enough when they are young. These issues lead to conflict between cultures. She especially mentions problems for parents who have daughters. They are afraid of sexual abuse and so on. Some parents with an immigrant background experience that their daughters start to come home late at night and do not listen to them. Some parents feel that they lose their children and they regret having moved

to Norway. The interviewee says that there are some things in the Norwegian culture that she cannot accept while there are other things she can accept. She tells her children to pick and choose the good things from Norwegian culture.

In the statements above there seems to be an image of two very different 'families'. A Muslim family on the one hand and a Norwegian/Christian/Western secular on the other. The Muslim family is viewed as more caring of its family members and each family member is more dependent on the others, whereas Norwegian family members are viewed as more self-centered and egoistic. The Norwegian ideal of being independent (living alone at the age of 18 and so on) is viewed as something negative and as an indication of lack of family solidarity and lack of empathy.

'A middle ground' between 'strict rules' and 'no boundaries' is seen as favorable regarding youth. The interviewee refers to different 'cultures' and how it is possible to 'pick and choose' the best from these cultures. However, when the interviewee talks about sex before marriage that is something she regards as unacceptable in the Norwegian culture. It seems like this is especially important for girls.

### **Christians – change in society and a personal change**

#### **To experience a changed view on men and women's roles**

*'[the ideal women's role] in my religious tradition has changed somewhat. When I recall my childhood, I grew up with an image of women as good mothers, housewives, and just being very motherly in every way. And I was raised to follow that example. However, I haven't done that. So I've sort of found my way, as a single woman. (...) An ideal woman... I guess the women are a majority in my congregation and in most congregations in Norway. We do a lot of the work. We organize most of the activities. We are good organizers. We still look after 'scatterbrained' [vimsete] men. Well, they're not necessarily scatterbrained, but we still. (...) In a way we might have taken over the congregation, transferred our motherly caretaking from family to congregation. Perhaps that's it?'*

(A1)

*'My fellow sisters are great, well-educated, they are aware of what's going on in society, they show human compassion. They want to achieve their true potentials and at the same time be able to care for others. They are independent, very independent, and at the same very humble. (...) We don't raise our voices unless we are sure that we have something to contribute. But at the same time we do make ourselves heard, after all we are the majority.'*

(A1)

*'(...) I have gone a long way, not only was I against female priests, but I also thought that a woman should be subordinate to a man in marriage. I was even married for a few years under that conviction. (...) It is challenging to figure this out. Because I, I do think that we are created as women and men, But what that means in our time – I don't have any clear-cut definitions. (...)'*

(A5)

These quotes illustrate a story of changed gender roles in our data material – from the ideal of the woman as a mother and care-taker at home and the subordinate woman, to the well-educated, independent, yet humble woman of today. These Christian women talk about a change from their childhood to the present day. They talk about a societal change, but also a personal change for some of them in the view of women's and men's roles in marriage and in society at large. Some of the interviewees refer to the religious communities they grew up in, but they rarely refer to the Bible or Christianity when they talk about gender roles. This is in contrast to the Muslim interviewees who frequently mention the Quran and 'true' Islam when they talk about men's and women's roles in society.

The story of change is not simply a successful linear story. One of the quotes above describes change as 'challenging'. The interviewee says that she has become more conscious of a gender perspective, and she has changed her views of the subordinate woman. She still thinks that God created men and women and that there is a God-willed difference, however, she finds it hard to explain what that entails.

## **Summary**

Biological differences, complementary gender roles and equal value are main findings in the interviews with women from all the different religious communities. However, in addition to the acknowledgement, the recognition, and respect for these differences, most of the interviewees also emphasize that men and women should have the same opportunities, the same roles and positions in society.

Both the Muslim and the Christian interviewees highlight the positive view of women in the sacred texts of their respective religions. They also stress that the image of

women has been wrongly interpreted by human beings and that culture/society/men/religious traditions have oppressed women. Especially the Muslim interviewees emphasize the Prophet Mohammad's respect for women and that he greatly improved women's position at the time when he lived.

The Muslim women in our data material explicitly refer to the Quran when they legitimate the *ideal* of the complementary roles of the man and the woman in the family; the man as the main provider and the woman as the main care-taker of children. Some of the Christian women on the other hand, talk about their *practice* of staying at home when the children were small, however, they do not explicitly refer to the Bible or their religion when they talk about this.

The interviewees from congregation A emphasize the gender equality in the Church of Norway. The debate about female ordained priests has quieted down, and the burning issue today is the debate about homosexuals.

The interviewees from congregation B all emphasize the huge change which has happened regarding women's role in the congregation since their childhood. They all also mention a more recent change in their congregation; namely that women now can be elected as a member of the board of Elders. They claim that the Pentecostal movement has been a fundamentalist and male-dominated movement, but that this has changed. The interviewees also have stories about strong women within the Pentecostal movement, for instance female missionaries who travelled alone to distant places and did many things there that they were not allowed to do in the movement in Norway at the time. They also talk about the opportunities that they have had to take on leadership tasks within the congregation and to have responsibility.

The women from mosque C emphasize that women are not discriminated against even if they are not allowed to become Imams and they have a separate floor in the mosque. Women cannot be Imams, but that is not really a barrier, they claim. A woman can be a teacher in the mosque and the female teachers who teach about the Quran are highly regarded.

The interviewees from mosque D describe how women who want to hear the Imam's speech can go to the men's section of the mosque. So we see that the sex segregation is not an absolute thing; here the mosque has rather opened up for a practical solution in order to meet different needs among the women.

The Muslim interviewees in our data material frequently mention the Quran and 'true' Islam when they talk about men's and women's roles in society and changed gender roles. This is in contrast to how the Christian women talk about a change from their childhood to the present day. They talk about a societal change, but also a personal change for some of them in the view of women's and men's roles in marriage and in society at large. Some of the interviewees refer to the religious communities they grew up in, but they rarely refer to the Bible or Christianity when they talk about gender roles.

## 6.6 Views on feminism and the women's movement

Here we will focus on the ways in which religious women are influenced by women's movements. How do the research respondents talk about feminism and the women's movement?

## 6.7 How is feminism and the women's movement talked about?

### 'The women's movement is very important'

*'I've actually thought a lot about that [the influence of the women's movement], and I'm forever grateful! (...) If it weren't for the battle they've fought, I wouldn't be sitting here today. Many times I think that I'm too 'sleepy' [sovende]. (...) Through the years I haven't been dependent on a man in order to make my life work, even if that was what I was brought up to believe. And all the opportunities that have been laid out in front of me; education, to be able to live wherever I want, to live alone, and to move here. (...). It's the women's movement which has gone in front and opened up for all of this. (...).'*

(A1)

*'[The women's movement] is very important. I don't think women in the whole world would have been able to get as far as they are today without the women's movement. There are many, many people in the world who try to devalue women. I don't know where they take that from, but it has been different cultures. The developing countries are the worst. (...).'*

(D1)

The quotes illustrate a common understanding among the interviewees in our data material; they have a positive view of the women's movement. All the women from different religious communities describe the women's movement as 'important'. In the first quote above the interviewee says that she is 'grateful' to the women's movement for all opportunities she has had in her life. The second quote refers to women all over the world, and the interviewee points to different cultures in many countries who try to devalue women.

According to the interviewees, the women's movement has had a decisive role regarding an increased consciousness about women's rights, not just in Norway, but on a global scale. Women have been made aware of their rights; they are becoming stronger and demand mutual respect. The interviewees emphasize equal pay, gender equality and rights as human beings.

## **6.8 The women's movement and religious communities**

### **Congregation A**

*'(...) I don't associate the women's movement with Christian communities. (...) However, I'm a part of society as a whole, right?'* (A1)

*'(...) I think the women's movement has made society as a whole and also Christian women ask: 'why do we make coffee, serve cake and smile and look cute, while the men are deciding everything for us?' I think it made women asking questions. (...)'* (A1)

The first quote above exemplifies a common answer to the question about the possible influence of the women's movement in the interviewees' lives, both on a personal level and also with regards to their religious communities. Very few of the interviewees associate the women's movement with their religious community, however, they all underline that a religious community is not isolated from the rest of society. '(...) the religious tradition is not 'a closed room' in a society' (A3), as one interviewee puts it.

The interviewees who belong to the Church of Norway [*Den norske kirke*] exemplify this by the fact that women now can become priests. One interviewee says that the women's movement has had an enormous impact, and that women can perform the same tasks as men in the church is a result of the women's movement's effort and consciousness-raising. She also emphasizes that women within the church are at the same time also women in society at large and that the church is not isolated from society. The interviewee problematises a view of the church as simply a mirror of society and she argues that the church can be an important counter-culture. However, the women's movement and all kinds of political activity in society will also influence the church in one way or another.

Another interviewee who belongs to the Church of Norway says that there are strong women inside the church as well, but what happens outside the church has helped and in that respect the women's movement has had an impact.

In their personal lives, the women's movement has had an indirect impact, these women claim. One interviewee says that she has become more conscious about her life as a woman and also about her position as a female leader in the church. She has become more conscious of a gender perspective during the last years when she has been a leader in the congregation. She did not identify with 'women's rights women' while she was younger, but now she applauds them. In her own life she has profited from their work.

### **Congregation B**

*'There have of course been strong female leaders [in the Pentecostal movement, pinsebevegelsen] from early on who have been able to get ahead. But whether they've been feminists, I can't really say. (...) But I know a woman who's 95 years old who actually started as an Evangelist. She stood up at a conference (...) and took off her hat and said: 'You should try to stand there for 45 minutes and preach with a hat and feel how warm it is and how horrible it is. So – I choose not to wear a hat'. So of course she became some kind of feminist or advocate for many who came after her. (...) And also the female missionaries who had the courage to go alone into the bush and be alone and out there they've blossomed – and performed all the religious services that they weren't allowed to do in the church here in Norway. Yes. So they've been advocates as well.'*

(B1)

*'(...) I don't relate particularly to the women's movement because I've never had any problems in regard to being seen. I've had a husband who's seen me, who's pushed me forward and allowed me to do different things. I've been the leader of the children's work here [in the congregation], and he was the one in the background cleaning up. (...) But I see that it [the women's movement] has influenced society, and probably churches and congregations as well. Concerning female priests and everything. (...).'*

(B1)

The interviewees from the Pentecostal congregation acknowledge the influence of the women's movement, but they also point to strong, female individuals within the Pentecostal movement who have challenged the male-dominated movement. As we have seen earlier in this chapter, some of the interviewees have described the Pentecostal movement as fundamentalist and male-dominated. One interviewee says that the congregation has been through a process where they have accepted that men and women are equals, and she thinks that the women's movement has had an impact on the congregation. However, the women's movement has not affected her personally. She has made her choices based on the full picture in the family, and in her opinion society had been better if more people and society as a whole considered the full picture more, not just me, me, me. Of course the men have to be willing to think about the whole picture too. Men and women have to be equals [*likeverdige*], but you have to be generous [*raus*] and flexible and do more at home for some time, and then more at work later.

As we see in the second quote above, this interviewee has personally never experienced any different treatment due to her gender within the congregation.

Some of the women from the Pentecostal congregation question the definition of 'the women's movement'. They associate more closely with organizations like Jesuswomen *Jesuskvinner* or 'Aglow' which are organizations for Christian women. These organizations stress women's qualities. They do not call themselves feminist.

### **Mosque C**

*'It [the women's movement] has been important. (...) Women work more now than they used to. In general, women have advanced in society. Maybe it wasn't like that earlier. And that's important! (...) But I also find it interesting to look at Islamic history, in comparison, to look at the women's movement and women's right to vote and so on. But then I think that all those rights are*

*actually there originally [in Islam]. There hasn't been a women's movement in Islam, you might say. One hasn't demanded those rights. But in my opinion they ARE there. Women do have the right to vote and so on. (...) Maybe these rights have disappeared, maybe they have been misused, but in a way they ARE there. For instance when you talk about women and education, Muslim women and education, some might question that. But then I think about the Prophet's wife who was a business woman. (...) Nobody questioned her right to have an education. (...) So I feel that those rights have been gone and then suddenly they are coming back. Maybe in connection with the women's movement? That maybe those rights in the religion haven't been made visible or people don't know about them or ... well, I don't know.'*

(C1)

*'My religion has originally given women many rights. It says so in the Quran. But it's a male-dominated society, right.'*

(C2)

Like the Christian interviewees, the Sunni Muslim women in our data material also underline the important role of the women's movement in advancing women's right. But in contrast to the Christian interviewees, they put more emphasis on the basic rights for women within their religion. The women's movement has contributed to women's position in society today, but they argue that women already are well respected within Islam. Women's rights however, have been somewhat lost over the years, and men have not followed the Quran the way they were meant to do. In their view, the women's movement has in a way contributed to rediscover women's rights.

The women who belong to the Sunni Muslim mosque bring in a wider international context, and refer to women's movements in other parts of the world which are not that free compared to the situation of the women's movement in Norway. The women's movement in Norway has every chance to demand their rights and women in Norway have a strong position in society. Several of the interviewees express a hope for women in the rest of the world as well, especially in Muslim countries; a hope that they will start to understand religion in the right way and that their rights will be acknowledged.

The interviewees also argue that the women's movement has had an influence in their lives and on their mosque. They describe the mosque as 'not conservative' and say that they arrange seminars about women's rights and about femaleness in Norway. They also stress that there is a new generation of Muslims in Norway

where both girl and boys respect each other when they get married and they share responsibility equally. Women are not being beaten by their husbands or by men in the family, and if that happens they know where to turn to for help. The women's organization in the mosque will participate in demonstrations for women's rights, and they have demonstrated for women's right to wear the hijab.

### **Mosque D**

Int.: *'What about your own personal life and faith - has the women's movement influenced you in any way?'*

D1: *'(...) Well. Not directly, but indirectly I think so. I think it is the teachings of Islam which have influenced the way I think. (...)'*

The women from the Shia mosque also suggest that the women's movement has had an indirect effect on their lives. One interviewee says that she has been influenced by the women's movement due to her growing up in the Western society. 'My daily life would probably have been different if it wasn't for the women's movement', she claims (D4). She also points to the situation in her country of origin, where the leaders recently have reinterpreted parts of the Quran in a more women friendly way and have given women more rights. She does not know if that is because of the women's movement, but in her opinion it has affected society which in turn has influenced the leaders.

### **'Has gone too far'**

*'I think that it [the women's movement] has been important, but at a certain point it has gone too far. Because (...) in some ways I think that the man is lagging behind. We've been too concerned with our own liberation. And then it's no balance. I don't think that's good for anyone in the long run.'*

(B2)

*'I think it [the women's movement] has been very important. But sometimes I think that women have lost something – about being women, to be women. You kind of become a 'woman-man' [kvinnemenn]'*

(A3)

As we have seen above, the interviewees generally have a positive view of the women's movement, and they consider it to be an important factor in improving women's rights. The women's movement has indirectly influenced their personal lives and also the situation for women within their religious communities. However,

as we see in the quotes above, several of the interviewees think that the women's movement has 'gone too far' (B2).

The first quote addresses women's fight for liberation and the view expressed here is that women's liberation has been achieved, and that men have been forgotten. The interviewee exemplifies her point by referring to how a father is the weak party after a divorce. The second quote also indicates that the women's movement has gone too far by pointing at women who has lost their 'woman-ness' in the fight for equal rights. Women are almost becoming men, she argues. The interviewee elaborates this point by referring to 'hard' women; women without tenderness and compassion (A3). Another interviewee seconds this view by saying that:

*'It's nice that people care about other people's rights and so on, but it gets a bit silly when you try to be a man. I don't want to generalize, but bra burning and things like that are kind of silly. But in some cases it's legitimate.'*

(D4)

The interviewees seem to have an ambivalent attitude towards the women's movement; on the one hand they have a positive view and express gratitude for what the women's movement's has achieved concerning women's rights, equal pay, and gender equality. The women do not personally identify with the women's movement and they do not associate their religious communities with the women's movement, but they are all indirectly influenced by it. On the other hand, they disapprove of the women's movement in some respects, and claim that it has 'gone too far' or is 'a bit extreme'. However, extreme might sometimes be necessary in order to make issues visible, one interviewee argues. One example of the 'extreme' women's movement is the radical Feminist group Ottar. But they also mention issues which they label 'extreme', such as lesbian adoption, kindergartens at any cost and women in the labour market at any cost. Other issues they mention as negative are free abortion and the new Marriage Act [*den nye ekteskapsloven*].<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Amendments in The Marriage Act were enacted by the Norwegian Parliament (Stortinget) 17. June 2008. The amendments came into force on 1 January 2009. The amendments give lesbians and gay men the right to enter marriage on the same basis as heterosexuals. See <http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/bld/Topics/homosexuality/a-marriage-act-for-all--entering-into-fo.html?id=509376&epslanguage=en-GB>.

On the other hand, one interviewee points out that the fight for women's rights has opened these issues up for debate. Today it is fairly acceptable to choose different solutions for instance concerning child care.

The interviewees differentiate between the general fight for women's rights (equal rights with men) and the more extreme part of the women's movement which they associate more closely with feminism:

*'(...) in the public debate it [feminism] is often used about the extreme. That is feminism as those who are on the barricades and who have the most extreme opinions. But for me feminism would be more focused on women's need to have equal rights as men. The more general fights for women's rights.'*

(A6)

We will address different views on strands of feminism in the next section.

### **Feminism: 'too narrow'**

*'(...) I don't have any good associations with that word [feminism]. I find it too narrow.'*

(A2)

*'(...) Gender equality has in a way been important for me. I think that citizen [medborger] is a word that includes more and is much richer. (...) It is liberation for all. I'm not particularly engaged in feministic theology [feministisk teologi]. I rather prefer liberation theology [frigjøringsteologi].'*

(A2)

*'(...) Without generalizing, I guess I feel that some call themselves feminists without knowing exactly what they are doing. (...) That maybe they pity other women too much! But STOP! That's how I feel then. It's kind of: "Listen up, things have happened and we're here to fix this mess". I think that's kind of weird. (...) For instance feminists who want to 'save' ... there has been a tendency that they want to 'save' women wearing a hijab. I think that's completely wrong! But like I said, one defines feminism in regard to where you are. If you don't understand that a woman wearing a hijab can be a feminist, for that matter, then you have misunderstood things. That's how I feel.'*

(C1)

The first quote above explicitly says that feminism is too narrow, and the second quote elaborates this statement. Feminism is viewed as narrow in the sense that it only means liberation for women, and possibly only some women? The interviewee finds the word 'citizen' [medborger] and the term 'citizenship' [medborgerskap] more inclusive.

The third quote also addresses feminism as narrow and exclusive. The interviewee finds feminists to be patronizing and prejudiced against Muslim women. They assume that a Muslim woman wearing a hijab is oppressed. This view is in line with the criticism of white, middle-class feminists. Several of the Muslim interviewees perceive feminists as someone who believe that there is only one right way of being a woman and that they do not respect women who are different.

### **‘A feminist – I?’**

The impression of feminism as narrow and exclusive also points to a perception of feminism as ‘one thing’; the interviewees rarely talk about different feminisms. When the interviewees were asked whether they would call themselves feminists, most of them would not, but the answers opened up for more diverse views of feminism:

*Int: ‘What does the word feminism mean to you? What do you think about or what do you associate with that word?’*

*D1: ‘(...) Justice, maybe? Gender equality (...)’*

*Int: ‘Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?’*

*D1: ‘(...) I’ve seen people that are more feminists than I am. (...) I haven’t spoken out and demanded... (...) But I have influenced myself to think in feminist ways. But I’ve seen others who have demanded it, and I can’t compare with them ... (...) ‘Feminist light’ (laughter).’*

*‘I never use that word [feminist] to describe myself, no. I associate ‘feminist’ with someone who fight for women’s rights in all areas, and I don’t feel that I fight for women’s rights in all areas. (...)’*

(A1)

These quotes emphasize a view of feminists as activists who actively demand women’s rights in all areas of life. Compared to these women, the interviewees quoted here say that they cannot call themselves feminists. They feel that they are too passive. However, they sympathize with demands for justice and gender equality, and one of the women quoted here says that she can call herself ‘feminist light’.

Several of the interviewees find it difficult to call themselves feminists because the term has negative connotations:

*'It feels strange to state that 'I'm a feminist'. But at the same time, I don't find it hard to identify with any of the standpoints. So it's more the categorization, that I would possibly be a bit careful with, in other settings as well. To become a spokesperson for just one point of view. (...) In this profession I'm very concerned with acknowledging both sides of an issue, to see the nuances. So it would be difficult for me to be put in the same category as someone with extreme statements. Because then some other group would be overlooked.'*

(A6)

This quote illustrates a view of the label 'feminist' which considered having a negative connotation to the extreme forms of feminism. This view of feminism as one-sided is in line with the view of feminism as narrow and exclusive.

Another interviewee also addresses the negative label which has been put on feminism. She argues that feminism can be both positive and negative. She is opposed to the kind of feminism which is against men and in favour of free abortion, but she is positive to a feminism that demands that women should be heard and have the same rights as men. If the last meaning of feminism is feminism, then she can call herself a feminist. However, she does not participate in feminist marches and she finds 'feminism' to be a difficult category.

### **Feminists against men**

*'I mostly think about being feminine, like a lady. Feminist, that makes me think more about a manly woman almost. No, I don't know. But I do understand that there has been a struggle. But me personally, I've always felt that I've been seen. (...) I've been able to be the person I am, to do what I've wanted to do. (...)'*

(B1)

Several of the interviewees have the impression that feminists are women who are behaving almost like men and that they have lost some feminine qualities in the struggle for equal rights. There is also an image of the feminist movement being against men and feminists who want to make two different teams; one with women and one with men. This view is in line with the statements seen earlier about feminism which 'has gone too far' and is 'extreme'. Both the Christian and the

Muslim women in our data material distance themselves from the kind of feminists who 'wanted to figure out how to get power over men'.

### **Christian and Muslim feminism**

*'(...) I would call myself a feminist in the meaning that I want women to have a voice, not to be inferior or subordinate, but equals and be able to occupy an equal space in the center as men. (...) The Liberation movement [based on Liberation theology] focuses on the poor, while I think about women as marginalized and in this center – periphery perspective.'*

(A5)

*'I haven't decided whether I'm a feminist or not. (...) I haven't really thought about it. Maybe because I haven't had a reason to do so. Or maybe because I don't feel that there are rights that I don't have. (...) Now I don't see the need to call myself a feminist. Who knows? Maybe in a few years I will?'*

(C1)

One of the Muslim women says: *'I support women's rights, but I feel that I'm a feminist within certain boundaries [innenfor visse rammer]'* (C3). In her view some feminists do not have any boundaries. She calls these feminists 'extremists' because they see only one right way of being a woman. The interviewee wants to be respected for who she is; she has her own boundaries in addition to Islam's boundaries which regulate how she should behave. She would never dress in an inappropriate way that can attract men and she has certain duties towards her children and wants to stay home with them.

### **Summary**

Our findings indicate that the women's movement and feminism are regarded in different ways by religious women in Norway. The interviewees seem to have an ambivalent attitude towards the women's movement; on the one hand they have a positive view and express gratitude for what the women's movement's has achieved concerning women's rights, equal pay, and gender equality. The women do not personally identify with the women's movement and they do not associate their religious communities with the women's movement, but they are all indirectly influenced by it. On the other hand, they disapprove of the women's movement in some respects, and claim that it has 'gone too far' or is 'a bit extreme'.

Most of the interviewed women acknowledge a positive impact from the women's movement on women's rights and opportunities, especially in relation to equal pay, gender equality and women's rights in general.

All the women from different religious communities describe the women's movement as 'important'. According to the interviewees, the women's movement has had a decisive role regarding an increased consciousness about women's rights, not just in Norway, but on a global scale. Women have been made aware of their rights; they are becoming stronger and demand mutual respect. The interviewees emphasize equal pay, gender equality and rights as human beings.

However, very few of the interviewees associate the women's movement with their religious community, but they all underline that a religious community is not isolated from the rest of society. In their personal lives, the women's movement has had an indirect impact. The women's movement has indirectly influenced their personal lives and also the situation for women within their religious communities.

The Muslim women in our study, like the Christian interviewees, underline the important role of the women's movement in advancing women's right. But in contrast to the Christian interviewees, they put more emphasis on the basic rights for women within their religion. The women's movement has contributed to women's position in society today, but they argue that women already are well respected within Islam. Women's rights however, have been somewhat lost over the years, and men have not followed the Quran the way they were meant to do. In their view, the women's movement has in a way contributed to rediscover women's rights.

The Muslim interviewees bring in a wider international context, and refer to women's movements in other parts of the world which are not that free compared to the situation of the women's movement in Norway. The women's movement in Norway has every chance to demand their rights and women in Norway have a strong position in society. Several of the interviewees express a hope for women in the rest of the world as well, especially in Muslim countries; a hope that they will start to understand religion in the right way and that their rights will be acknowledged.

Several of the interviewees think that the women's movement has 'gone too far' and 'is too extreme'. One example of the 'extreme' women's movement is the radical Feminist group Ottar. But they also mention issues which they label 'extreme', such as lesbian adoption, kindergartens at any cost and women in the labour market at any cost. Other issues they mention as negative are free abortion and the new Marriage Act [*den nye ekteskapsloven*].

The interviewees address feminism as narrow and exclusive. Feminism is viewed as narrow in the sense that it only means liberation for women, and possibly only some women. Some of the interviewees find the word 'citizen' [*medborger*] and the term 'citizenship' [*medborgerskap*] more inclusive. Some of the Muslim women in our study find feminists to be patronizing and prejudiced against Muslim women. They assume that a Muslim woman wearing a hijab is oppressed. This view is in line with the criticism of white, middle-class feminists. Several of the Muslim interviewees perceive feminists as someone who believe that there is only one right way of being a woman and that they do not respect women who are different.

The impression of feminism as narrow and exclusive also points to a perception of feminism as 'one thing'; the interviewees rarely talk about different feminisms.

Few of the interviewed women identify with the word 'feminism'. This is related to impression many of these religious women have of the feminist movement as wanting women to either 'become like men', to 'take over from men', or of it allegedly supporting a notion of female supremacy and superiority.

The term 'feminism' has negative connotation to the extreme forms of feminism. This view of feminism as one-sided is in line with the view of feminism as narrow and exclusive. However, the religious women in our study sympathize with demands for justice and gender equality, and some of them have a more positive view of feminism (like one of the women who says that she can call herself 'feminist light').

## 7 CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

### 7.1 Conclusions

In this study we have asked whether and how women within Christian and Muslim faith traditions use their religious identities and practices to define and mark their identities as women and as citizens, and how religious organizations they participate in provide opportunities and/or constraints for their citizenship practice.

We conclude from this study that religion is a flexible resource that individuals can use to support their own identities, beliefs and practice, and as such it may have empowering effects. Religious identity and belonging to a religious community is of crucial importance in our interviewees' lives. Practicing religion is to behave responsible, decent and to contribute to the well-being of others. Thus, we notice an impressive degree of participation in civil society through voluntary work for the congregation/community. This study confirms the important role of religion as social glue and sites of inclusion and participation (Kommunal- og regionaldepartementet, 2003). Based on these findings, we find the notion of religious citizenship to be meaningful.

Our respondents describe and clearly appreciate the impact of women's movements and support major items of the movement, but they do not identify with 'feminism'. They wholeheartedly support the ideal of gender equality, but in terms of complementary gender roles (and often with a focus on the family rather than the individual). Thus, they represent an important challenge to the hegemonic or prevailing ideal of gender equality as sameness. The supportive approach to gender equality and women's rights among majority as well as minority religious women is both a result of and conducive to the Norwegian opportunity structure.

#### **Religion, identity and meaning**

During our analyses of the rich responses from the interviewees, we have been struck by the numerous similarities across faith systems, congregations and mosques. The women in our study maintain that religion play a *fundamental*, basic

or pervasive role in their lives. Their talk about the meaning of religion fully indicated the depth and extent of meaning that faith may have. This suggests that our interviewees all have a 'personal' rather than 'formal' relation to their religion.

The general impression is that none of the respondents have a naturalized (silent, unquestioned) religious identity. Although quite a few of them are 'born into' their faith community, they display an earnest reflective attitude to their faith. They tend to see their faith as a defining/constitutive part of their lives, and almost none have left their religious community. But they have wondered, and doubted, and searched for information, deeper understanding etc. This means that they have a firm religious identity. They know where they belong and where they stand, so to speak.

Their religious identity is, most clearly in the reflections of the Muslim women, firmly and in complex ways intertwined with their ethnic identity and geographical belonging. Thus, they display a 'plural integrated identity' (Østberg, 2003). It may be a mixture of 'I am' in terms of decent or country of origin plus a more circumstantial subjective ethnic identification that may include several places. There is a lot of 'identity work' (Anderson, 2000) going on.

A characteristic uniting our respondents is their focus on the *entirety* or the *totality* of life; the entirety of faith and practice, of knowledge/thinking and doing. The justification or explanation of this urge to *practice faith* differed somewhat, however. The Muslim women often referred to prescriptions, while the Christian women hardly ever mentioned prescriptions.

Another – less surprising – similarity across the faith groups was the respondents' focus on the religious practices of *reading* the sacred writings, and to *praying*. Although the actual habit of saying the prayers differed considerably, the practicing of reading and praying permeated the lives of our respondents.

Also, they all engage - more or less - with the normative foundation of the religion. The interviewees confirm notions of what religion *does*, or the basic functions of religious faith irrespective of religion. The respondents display more differences when it comes to religious content, or what religion *is* (Woodhead, 2007). Here we

see distinctions between the four groups although the borders are blurred. In our material we find that all the interviewees demonstrate a clear (conscious and articulated) stand on ethical issues such as showing respect, caring for others, speaking the truth and being honest. Their stands are based on a substantial reflexive relation to faith issues, across the Christianity-Islam divide.

Another relevant issue is related to Leirvik's (2002) claim of an ongoing work of negotiations and interpretations within Christianity and Islam. Where do the interviewees situate themselves with respect to contemporary faith practice and the classical traditions? Negotiations are clearly taking place not only among the Muslim women, but also among the Christian women. This is in line with Roald (2005) and Børresen (2007). We have noticed traces of shifting interplays between traditional belief practices and renewed interpretations of the faith foundations among our interviewees of all faith communities.

There was a general view of religion/religious practices and interpretations as changing – often intertwined with reflections on social or cultural change. Change is associated with various issues, but in line with Jacobsen's (2009) findings, gender, generation and geography are among the most outstanding features with respect to change. Claims of change are underpinned differently, however: Christian women often refer to women's access to new religious positions, while Muslim women often mention the new emphasis on the female dress code, irrespective of their preference for or against wearing the hijab. Old and young women across the faith groups maintain that there are less restrictions on the younger generation compared to the older. Generally, there are strong indications in support of a/the hypothesis of increasing reflexivity and detraditionalisation (Jacobsen, 2002; Østberg, 2003). We also noticed that geographical/national belonging tends to be a point of reference when the respondents are asked about potential changes in gender norms: Some women with an ethnic minority background refer to change in the sense of more strict prescriptions as a consequence of living in diaspora, but others maintain that there is relatively more freedom for women in their faith group in Norway compared to their country of family origin. Some of the (Christian) interviewees also talked about change referring to more ecumenical attitudes and practices.

Another aspect of similarity across religion is the reference to being *different* because of their religiosity. Although this experience of being 'different' was often described in positive terms across faith groups, such as being a person worthy of trust, we noticed a definite difference between respondents within a majority faith group and respondents in a minority position. The negative aspects of being 'different' were an issue for some women belonging to the minority within Christianity and to almost all Muslim women. They not only said that religion situates you, but also elaborated on how much they had to explain and defend their faith, in particular Muslims after 11 September 2001.

There was a striking inclination among the Muslim women to reflect on what they perceived as similarities among practicing religious persons across faith groups, like decency and ethics. This discourse of religious similarities was absent among the Christian interviewees. In one case, a Christian respondent underlined what she perceived to be fundamental differences between Islam and Christianity. However, she was then referring to the faiths' foundations, or more precisely to how she saw the understanding of Jesus to be 'fundamentally different' within the two religions.

The interviewees are involved in a number of social activities, such as doing voluntary work for the congregation/community, and gave the impression of a high level of participation in civil society. Women from the Christian communities seem to be more entrenched in faith related congregational activities than Muslim women.

### **Citizenship**

In this study we have discussed the term 'citizenship', both in general and in terms of religion. The interviewees especially emphasize the collective aspect; to be a citizen with others, to be part of a community, and to belong to a community. Moreover, they mention the ability one has to influence, to take responsibility for others, and to help each other, both in the local community and in the society at large.

'Religious citizenship' was a new term for our respondents; however, they all thought it made sense to include religion in a citizenship terminology. The term 'religious citizenship' addresses the interviewees' sense of belonging to a religious community in particular, and they expressed what that meant to them feeling at home in a

religious community, and also to be part of a world-wide religious community. To be 'a good citizen' and 'a good Christian' or 'a good Muslim' is basically the same for our interviewees; these aspects are intertwined. Being 'a good Christian' or 'a good Muslim' include showing love and care, respect and tolerance for each other.

We have explored how religious identity, participation and practice are linked to citizenship, and whether religion is represented to be a resource or a barrier (or both) to citizenship as practice. The interviewees from all four religious groups talk about religion as a resource in quite similar ways. However, when they talk about barriers there are more differences between the Christian and the Muslim respondents. The minority position as being part of an 'ethnic minority' and also the Norwegian society's view of Muslims in general, are issues which are articulated. The Muslim women focus more on how the Norwegian society treats Muslims, whereas the Christian women focus both on how the secular society treats religious people and on internal restrictions in their own religious communities. The Muslim women in our data material, both Sunni and Shia Muslims, were all generally concerned with the stereotypical image of the oppressed Muslim woman (Leirvik, 2002; Roald, 2005).

### **Views on living in a multicultural society**

All the women in our study talk positively about a 'multicultural society'. The interviewees refer to the fact that Norway has become a multicultural society, meaning that people from different cultural backgrounds live together in a society. None of the interviewees speak directly about 'multiculturalism' (Brochmann, 2002b: 27; Parekh, 2006: 6) as a political strategy.

In the context of a multicultural society, both the respondents with an ethnic majority and minority background talked about 'Norwegians', meaning ethnic majority Norwegians, and 'immigrants', meaning ethnic minority Norwegians. The divide between 'us' and 'them' is articulated by several of the interviewees. The term 'Norwegian' seems to be a narrow term, meaning exclusively those of Norwegian descent. According to Gullestad (2002) 'Norwegian' and 'immigrant' have become contrasting concepts in the Norwegian language. The term 'immigrant' has a neutral definition; however, it also has negative connotations to violence and crime. The

discussions about 'immigrants' are constructing Norwegian-ness and whiteness as an undefined normative centre (Gullestad, 2002: 88-93).

Besides emphasizing positive aspects of living in a multicultural society, all the respondents also mentioned challenges. On this point there is a difference between the responses from the ethnic majority interviewees and the ethnic minority interviewees. Some of the women with an ethnic majority background express a fear of losing the Norwegian culture. In this view, other cultures and identities can 'take over' the Norwegian identity and cultural heritage. 'The Norwegian identity and cultural heritage' is seen as something constant and static, something 'we' need to preserve. In this view it is practically impossible for people with a different ethnic and cultural origin to become part of a 'Norwegian culture' or be considered 'a Norwegian' at all.

Another issue raised by some of the women with an ethnic majority background in our study, was the, in their view, unacceptable treatment of especially ethnic minority girls. This concern for women in ethnic minority communities is at the core of the debate about multiculturalism (Okin, 1999). The ethnic majority women in our study find it difficult to say negative things about immigrants because it easily turns into a political issue concerning immigration, and they express a fear of buying into a racist agenda. This dilemma and the lack of an appropriate language to talk about these complex issues, is similar to findings in the study of minority and majority women's organizations in Norway (Halsaa et al., 2008: 192).

The women in our study with an ethnic minority background emphasize mutual integration, respect and tolerance. In their view, integration should not be a one-way effort; it is a process which requires mutual knowledge of each other, dialogue and understanding. Both ethnic majorities and minorities have to adjust to and respect each other.

The negative aspects of living in a multicultural society that some of these ethnic minority women mention, are experiences of so-called everyday-racism (Gunaratnam, 2003). These experiences are related to the majority population's prejudice towards 'immigrants'. Our findings in this study show that this constructed

discursive difference on a group-level also has effects in real life in terms of exclusion and discriminatory practices.

### **Gender equality**

In this study we asked about the notion of gender equality in terms of how the women themselves understood the term. References to explanations based on biological differences, and ideals of complementary gender roles and equal value, are main findings in the interviews with women from all the different religious communities. However, in addition to the acknowledgement, the recognition, and respect for these differences, most of the interviewees also emphasize that men and women should have the same opportunities and access to, the same roles and positions in society.

Both the Muslim and the Christian interviewees highlight the positive view of women in the sacred texts of their respective religions. They also stress that the image of women has been wrongly interpreted by human beings and that culture/society/men/religious traditions have oppressed women. Especially the Muslim interviewees emphasize the Prophet Mohammad's respect for women and that he greatly improved women's position at the time when he lived. These findings in our study is in line with views of religious feminists who have started a process of reinterpreting their religious faith to reconcile it with their feminist beliefs. Such reinterpretations have taken place across a variety of religious belief, including Christianity and Islam (e.g. Daly, 1994; Mernissi, 1991; Wadud, 1999; Cochran, 2005; Roald, 2005, Børresen, 2007; Leirvik, 2002). The notion of religion as a flexible resource conveys the idea that religion is not so much a set of eternally fixed rules and beliefs as a malleable resource that can be adapted to various social circumstances (see Chapter 2).

The Muslim women in our data material explicitly refer to the Quran when they legitimate the *ideal* of the complementary roles of the man and the woman in the family; the man as the main provider and the woman as the main care-taker of children. Some of the Christian women on the other hand, talk about their *practice* of staying at home when the children were small, however, they do not explicitly refer to the Bible or their religion when they talk about this.

The interviewees from congregation A emphasize the gender equality in the Church of Norway. The debate about female ordained priests has quieted down, and the burning issue today is the debate about homosexuals.

The interviewees from congregation B all emphasize the huge change which has happened regarding women's role in the congregation since their childhood. They all also mention a more recent change in their congregation; namely that women now can be elected as members of the board of Elders. They claim that the Pentecostal movement has been a fundamentalist and male-dominated movement, but that this has changed.

The women from mosque C emphasize that women are not discriminated against even if they are not allowed to become Imams and they have a separate floor in the mosque. Women cannot be Imams, but that is not really a barrier, they claim. A woman can be a teacher in the mosque and the female teachers who teach about the Quran are highly regarded.

The interviewees from mosque D describe how women who want to hear the Imam's speech can go to the men's section of the mosque. So we see that the sex segregation is not an absolute thing; here the mosque has rather opened up for a practical solution in order to meet different needs among the women.

In this study we noticed different frames of reference or different horizons of time between Muslim and Christian women. The Muslim interviewees in our data material frequently mention the Quran and 'true' Islam when they talk about men's and women's roles in society and changed gender roles. This is in contrast to how the Christian women talk about a change from their childhood to the present day. They talk about a societal change, but also a personal change for some of them in the view of women's and men's roles in marriage and in society at large. Some of the interviewees refer to the religious communities they grew up in, but they rarely refer to the Bible or Christianity when they talk about gender roles.

### **Views on the women's movement and feminism**

All of the interviewed women acknowledge a positive impact from the women's movement on women's rights and opportunities, especially in relation to equal pay, gender equality and women's rights in general. However, several of the interviewees think that the women's movement has 'gone too far' and 'is too extreme'.

Few of the interviewed women identify with the word 'feminism'. This is related to the impression many of these religious women have of the feminist movement as wanting women to either 'become like men', to 'take over from men', or of it allegedly supporting a notion of female supremacy and superiority. However, the religious women in our study sympathize with demands for justice and gender equality, and some of them have a more positive view of feminism (like one of the women who says that she can call herself 'feminist light').

The Muslim women in our study, like the Christian interviewees, underline the important role of the women's movement in advancing women's right. But in contrast to the Christian interviewees, they put more emphasis on the basic rights for women within their religion. The women's movement has contributed to women's position in society today, but they argue that women already are well respected within Islam. Women's rights however, have been somewhat lost over the years, and men have not followed the Quran the way they were meant to do. In their view, the women's movement has in a way contributed to a rediscovering of women's rights.

The Muslim interviewees bring in a wider international context, and refer to women's movements in other parts of the world which are not that free compared to the situation of the women's movement in Norway.

Some of the Muslim women in our study find feminists to be patronizing and prejudiced against Muslim women. Feminists seem to assume that a Muslim woman wearing a hijab is oppressed. This view is in line with criticism of Western feminists who take it upon themselves to speak on behalf of oppressed Muslim women, assuming that veiling automatically means a lack of agency or even traditionalism

(Abu-Lughod, 2002). Several of the Muslim interviewees perceive feminists as someone who believes that there is only one right way of being a woman and that they do not respect women who are different. The impression of feminism as narrow and exclusive also points to a perception of feminism across the four groups as 'one thing'; the interviewees rarely talk about different feminisms.

There are several important lessons to be drawn from our preliminary findings; among them the fact that many religious women support major items on the women's movement agenda, such as equal rights and opportunities for women and men. However, many religious women do not identify with the concept of 'feminism', and many view the women's movement as too radical. Feminist women's movement organizations therefore seem to have a challenging task ahead in communicating their agenda to religious women who do not feel that their concerns regarding women's rights and equality are served well by feminist organizations. Our findings suggest that there is currently an untapped potential to create alliances between religious and secular women in the advocacy of equal rights and opportunities. This is in line with Nussbaum (1999) who argues that religion can 'contribute to the struggle for justice', including the struggle for gender equality, and that religious feminists are thus potential allies of secular feminists (ibid.: 107).

## **7.2 Good practice and policy recommendations**

For faith groups and women's movement organizations, our good practice recommendations are:

- For faith groups to develop equal opportunities for women to take on roles that are currently preserved for men.
- For women's movement organizations to engage in dialogue with religious women in order to increase understanding and create policy alliances on gender equality issues between women of faith and secular women.

**For governmental institutions at various levels, our policy recommendations are:**

- Local Authorities should ensure that all public buildings, or any plots of land/buildings for which planning permission is sought, for the purpose of a Mosque, are inspected to secure that they include a designated space where women can participate in collective worship.
- All governmental institutions should insist on equal representation of women and men when faith groups are invited to hearings, committees, religious dialogue, etc.
- Public funding should require compliance with gender equality legislation.
- Equal access to public funding for majority and minority faith groups.
- Motivate and fund dialogue and cooperation between women's groups across religious beliefs and secular beliefs.
- No public ban on the use of headscarf (hijab) in public spaces.
- No public ban on the use of headscarf/ hijab or any other religious clothing worn by women in public space.
- Governments to address the contradiction between freedom of religion and women's rights in national and international contexts.
- Promote religious tolerance and thus support community cohesion.
- Address challenges arising from the ideal of complementary gender roles. To what extent does such an ideal collide with the notion that women's economic independence is 'the bottom line' of gender equality?

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**APPENDIX A**  
**WP4 STRAND 2: 'GENDER, RELIGION AND**  
**CITIZENSHIP' TOPIC GUIDE**

## APPENDIX A WP4 STRAND 2: 'GENDER, RELIGION AND CITIZENSHIP' TOPIC GUIDE

### 1 Introduction / Introduksjon

Introduce yourself and the project; share information letter, FEMCIT leaflet, and go through consent form and permission to record.

*Introduser deg selv og prosjektet, del ut informasjons brev, FEMCIT brosjyre og gå gjennom godkjenningen av intervjuet og bruk av opptaksutstyr.*

### 2 Citizenship in the religious arena / Medborgerskap på det religiøse feltet

How would you describe who you are – what is your identity?

*Hvordan vil du beskrive hvem du er – hva vil du si er din identitet?*

How important is religion to your identity? And in your everyday life?

*Hvor viktig er religion for din identitet? Og i ditt hverdagsliv?*

What motivated you to take part in this organization (a particular issue or experience), and when did you become involved?

*Hva motiverte deg til å bli aktiv i organisasjonen (var det en bestemt sak eller erfaring), og når ble du med?*

Do you have any specific roles in the organization for women (from which we recruited you as a research participant)?

*Har du en bestemt rolle i organisasjonen for kvinner( som vi har rekruttert deg som informant fra)?*

Can you tell me about the types of activities you are involved in/participate in within your religious community? (attention: are any of these activities for women only, or are they gender-mixed)

*Kan du fortelle meg om hva slags aktiviteter er du involvert i/deltar på i ditt religiøse fellesskap?( Merk: Er det noen av disse aktivitetene som kun er for kvinner, eller er de for begge kjønn?)*

Are there any women in your religious tradition that you admire (historical or contemporary figures)? Why do you admire them?

*Er det noen kvinner i din religiøse tradisjon som du beundrer (historiske eller samtidige skikkelser)? Hvorfor beundrer du dem?*

Are there any men in your religious tradition that you admire (historical or contemporary figures)? Why do you admire them?

*Er det noen menn i din religiøse tradisjon som du beundrer (historiske eller samtidige skikkelser)? Hvorfor beundrer du dem?*

Are there any discussions within your religious community or organization about the roles and positions that women and men can take on - both within the religious community itself and outside it (in public life)?

*Er det noen diskusjoner i ditt religiøse fellesskap eller organisasjon om roller og posisjoner som kvinner og menn kan ha – både i det religiøse fellesskapet og utenfor (i det offentlige liv)?*

At this point in time, do you feel that gender relations within your religious community are under pressure or changing, or are they more or less stable?

*På dette tidspunktet føler du at kjønnsrelasjonene innefor ditt religiøse fellesskap er under press eller forandring, eller er de mer eller mindre stabile?*

### **3 Gendered citizenship/Kjønnnet medborgerskap**

You are a member of an organization for women within your religious tradition. Are there any special issues that are important to you as a woman within the context of your religion?

*Du er medlem av en organisasjon for kvinner innenfor i din religiøse tradisjon. Er det noen spesielle tema/problemer som er viktig for deg som kvinne innenfor konteksten av din religion?*

In your view, is there an ideal role for a woman within your religious tradition today, or, does your religion influence your view of women's roles?

*Fra ditt ståsted, fines det et kvinneideal innenfor din religiøse tradisjon i dag, eller, mener du at din religion påvirker ditt syn på kvinnerollen?*

In your view, is there an ideal role for a man within your religious tradition today, or, does your religion influence your view of men's roles?

*Fra ditt ståsted, fines det et mannsideal innenfor din religiøse tradisjon i dag, eller, mener du at din religion påvirker ditt syn på mannsrollen?*

How do you view the relationship between the ideal role for women prescribed by your own religious tradition, and the roles that women have in today's society? Is there any conflict between the two, or not?

*Hvordan ser du på relasjonen mellom idealrollen for kvinner beskrevet av din religiøse tradisjon, og den rollen som kvinner har i dag i samfunnet? Er det noen konflikt mellom de to, eller ikke?*

'Gender equality' can mean different things to different people. Some people may say that gender equality means that women and men have the same status and

rights and can do exactly the same things, while others may say that women and men have equal value but should concentrate on doing different things and complement each other. How do such understandings of gender equality relate to your own understanding of the relationship between women and men?

*“Likestilling” kan ha forskjellig betydning for forskjellige folk. Noen mener at likestilling betyr at kvinner og men skal ha den samme statusen og rettighetene og kan gjøre nøyaktig de samme tingene, mens andre vil si at kvinner og menn har samme verdi, men burde konsentrere seg om å gjøre forskjellige ting og komplementerer (utfyller) hverandre. Hvordan relaterer disse ulike forståelsene av likestilling seg til din forståelse av forholdet mellom menn?*

The women’s movement has for a long time supported the development of women’s rights in different spheres of society. What is your understanding of the importance of the women’s movement in general?

*Kvinnebevegelsen har i lang tid arbeidet for en utvikling av kvinners rettigheter på ulike samfunnsområder. Hva er din forståelse av viktigheten av kvinnebevegelsen generelt?*

Has the women’s movement had any effects on your religious tradition, as you see it? What about your own personal life and beliefs – have you been influenced by the women’s movement?

*Har kvinnebevegelsen hatt noen effekt på din religiøse tradisjon, slik du ser det? Og hva med ditt eget personlige liv og tro –har du blitt påvirket av kvinnebevegelsen?*

What does the word ‘feminism’ mean to you? Is feminism in your understanding of the word something that you identify yourself with at all, if so, how?

*Hva betyr ordet “feminisme” for deg? Er feminisme i din forståelse av ordet noe som du kan identifisere deg med i det hele tatt, hvis det er tilfelle, på hvilken måte?*

#### **4 Towards full citizenship / Mot et fullverdig medborgerskap**

When I say the word ‘citizenship’, what do you think about? What does citizenship mean to you?

*Når jeg sier “medborgerskap”, hva tenker du på da? Hva betyr medborgerskap for deg?*

What do you think makes a good citizen? (and, conversely, a bad citizen?)

*Hva gjør en til en god medborger (eller motsatt, til en dårlig medborger?)*

Have you or anyone close to you experienced any *barriers or limitations* in terms of participation in society due to your religious faith? Have you experienced any *advantages* in terms of participation due to your religious faith? (further explanation: In this country, your own religious tradition can be considered *the majority religion/a minority religion*. In other words, you are a member of a *majority/minority* religion in

this country. Have you, in these respects, experienced any barriers/limitations or advantages?)

*Har du eller noen nær deg opplevd noen form for hindringer eller begrensninger når det kommer til å delta i samfunnet på grunn av din religiøse overbevisning? Har du opplevd noen fordeler når det kommer til deltakelse på grunn av din religiøse tro? (Videre forklaring: I dette landet, kan din religiøse tro bli forstått som majoritets religion/minoritets religion. Med andre ord, du er medlem av en majoritets religion/minoritets religion i dette landet. Har du med hensyn til dette, opplevd begrensninger/hindringer eller fordeler?)*

To what extent do you feel included or excluded in society, considering your own religious faith and belief?

*I hvilken utstrekning føler du deg inkludert eller ekskludert i samfunnet, med hensyn til din religiøse tro og overbevisning?*

Are there other parts of your background or your identity that affect the way you feel about inclusion or exclusion? (e.g. ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, age...)

*Er det noe i din bakgrunn eller identitet som du mener påvirker om du føler deg ekskludert eller inkludert? ( F.eks, etnisitet, nasjonalitet, kjønn, seksualitet, alder osv)*

What does multiculturalism mean to you, or the fact that people from different cultural backgrounds are living together in society? Is multiculturalism important to you in your religiously based work?

*Hva betyr multikulturalisme for deg, eller det faktum at folk med ulik kulturell bakgrunn lever sammen i dette samfunnet? Er multikulturalisme viktig for deg i ditt religiøse arbeid?*

In our research project, FEMCIT, we are trying to develop a multi-dimensional understanding of citizenship. We are thinking that a notion of full citizenship would imply that both women and men can participate in many different arenas – be it on the political arena, the social and economic arenas, on private arenas such as the family, and in the religious arena. Do you think it makes sense to talk about citizenship in the religious arena? Why/why not?

*I vårt forskningsprosjekt, FEMCIT, forsøker vi å utvikle et flerdimensjonal forståelse av medborgerskap. Vi ser for oss at et begrep om et fullverdig medborgerskap må bety at både kvinner og menn kan delta i mange ulike arenaer – både den politiske arena, sosiale og økonomiske arenaer, private arenaer som i familien, og på den religiøse arena. Syns du at det gir mening å snakke om et medborgerskap på den religiøse arenaen? Hvorfor/hvorfor ikke?*

## **5 Additional aspects of citizenship related to civil society and work / Andre aspekter av medborgerskaps relater til det sivile samfunn og arbeid.**

Do you do any voluntary work outside the church/mosque/ congregation/NGO? (how often, how long, what is your motivation?)

*Gjør du noe annet frivillig arbeid utenfor kirken/moskeen/menigheten/frivillige organisasjonen? (hvor ofte, hvor lenge og hva er motivasjonen din?)*

Do you participate in any other community groups? Campaigns, protests, petitions?(how often, how long, what is your motivation?)

*Deltar du andre organiserte fellesskap? Kampanjer, protester eller underskriftskampanjer? (hvor ofte, hvor lenge og hva er motivasjonen din?)*

Did you vote in the last political election? Do you intend to vote in the next election?

*Stemte du ved forrige valg? Har du planer om å stemme ved neste valg?*

You participate in all the activities you have described to me during the interview. Would you say it matters to you whether or not these activities can contribute to bringing about change in society?

*Du deltar i alle de aktivitetene som du har beskrevet til meg under intervjuet. Vil du si at det betyr noe for deg eller ikke betyr noe for deg om disse aktivitetene fører til forandring i samfunnet?*

Do you have a job in addition to your participation in the religious organization/institution? What kind of job, and is it part-time or full-time? How do you like your job situation? If not working, how do you like your situation?

*Har du en jobb i tillegg til din deltakelse i den religiøse organisasjonen/institusjonen? Hva slags type arbeid, er det fulltid eller deltid? Hva syns du om arbeidssituasjonen din? Hvis du ikke arbeider, hvordan liker du den situasjonen?*

Do you care for children? How do you organise childcare?

*Har du omsorg for barn? Hvordan organiserer du omsorgen for barna?*

## **6 Ending/Avslutning**

If not already discussed, obtain details related to age, ethnicity, how long in this country (if not from birth).

*Hvis du ikke allerede har snakket om det, få tak i detaljene i forhold til alder, etnisitet, hvor lenge hun har bodd i landet.*

Thank you for your time. Reiterate anonymity. Say you will share results of the study; obtain contact information for future correspondence (including thank you letter/note and project findings).

*Takk for at du tok deg tid. Gjenta anonymiteten. Si at du vil dele resultatene av studien; få tak i kontaktinformasjon for videre korrespondanse (som inkluderer et takkebrev og funnene i prosjektet).*

Ask if they would recommend anyone they know to be interviewed by you. Ask if they are willing to give you contact details of such persons.

*Spør om de kan anbefale noen andre som du kan intervju.*

*Spør om de er villige til å gi kontaktinformasjon til slike personer.*