

Varieties of beliefs and practices among young Muslims in Norway

A discourse analytical approach



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Varieties of beliefs and practices among
young Muslims in Norway: a discourse
analytical approach

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Articles

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Article III

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Summary

Research on young Muslims in Norway has tended to focus more on those who are active in Muslim organisations than those who construct their beliefs and practices mainly apart from such settings and communities. The aim of this study is to increase our knowledge regarding the religiosity of young Muslims who are situated in highly secular and religiously pluralistic social contexts outside of their family. The approach is discourse analytical, and the research aim is to investigate what discourses that are reproduced, combined, transformed, and contested in a sample of young Muslims' articulation of their beliefs and practices. Interviews with fifteen (Sunni) Muslims aged 20-32 are analysed. The findings are presented and discussed in three articles and in the extended abstract. An overarching finding is a great variation in the discursive repertoires, and thereby in ways to 'be a Muslim', and that this variation is connected to belonging and identification with different environments outside the young Muslims' family of origin.

The first article taps into discussions regarding the extent and forms of religious individualisation among young Muslims in Western Europe. In line with the discourse analytical framework, individualisation is conceptualised as a liberal moral discourse becoming authoritative in the shaping of peoples' beliefs and practices. The article investigates how this discourse is negotiated in relation to the Islamic orthodox discourse which revolves around ideas of submission and obedience to a normative framework. It finds a variety of ways to negotiate and combine the two discourses, and thereby highly different religious identities, depending on which discursive premises and logics that are dominant in the individual Muslim's repertoire. It is argued that the variation is connected to the young Muslims different degrees of identification with and situatedness in dominantly 'Muslim' social environments on the one hand, and highly secular-pluralistic environments on the other.

The second article looks at how the Islamic orthodox and the liberal moral discourse intersect in different ways with a 'therapeutic' religious discourse. While this vocabulary and outlook is found to be highly dominant in the material, there are also examples of how the 'individualistic ethos' of the therapeutic discourse is limited by, or adjusted to, an alternative Islamic orthodox conceptualisation of self-realisation. The study also finds a different religious vocabulary among some of the interviewees which centers more on social transformation and activism rather than personal transformation and wellbeing.

The third article looks at a sub-sample of the interviewees who distinguish themselves by constructing their religious identity explicitly in opposition to the Islamic orthodoxy and whose interpretations of Islamic concepts and practices are highly 'subjectivist' in that they are dominantly grounded in their own reasoning and experiences. It is argued that the commonalities in these young Muslims' interpretations of Islam point to a convergence between the discourse of contemporary spirituality and non-orthodox Islamic discourses such as 'progressive Islam' and Sufism. Finally, it is argued that this convergence represents an alternative Muslim identity to the more secular or revivalist variants among young Muslims in Europe.

Sammendrag

Forskning på unge muslimer i Norge har i stor grad fokusert på de som er aktive i student- og ungdomsorganisasjoner og mindre grad på de som i større grad former sin tro og praksis på utsiden av slike felleskap. Målet med denne studien er å øke vår kunnskap om religiøsitet blant unge muslimer som føler sterk tilhørighet til sekulære og pluralistiske sosiale kontekster. Studiens tilnærming er diskursanalytisk, og temaet er hvilke diskurser som blir reproduisert, kombinert, transformert og utfordret i et utvalg av unge muslimers formuleringer av sin tro og praksis. Kvalitative intervjuer med et utvalg (Sunni)muslimer i alderen 20-32 år analyseres. De ulike diskursene som kombineres og forhandles i deres beskrivelser og fortellinger presenteres og diskuteres i tre artikler som analyseres videre i 'kappen'. Et samlet hovedfunn er *stor variasjon* i sammensetning av diskursive repertoarer, og dermed i måter å uttrykke sin identitet som 'Muslim' på, og dernest at denne variasjonen er nært knyttet til sosialisering og tilhørighet i ulike grupper av jevnaldrende.

Den første artikkelen tar utgangspunkt i en diskusjon om omfanget av og formene for religiøs individualisering blant unge muslimer. I tråd med det diskursanalytiske rammeverket, blir individualisering forstått som at en liberal moralsk diskurs blir autoritativ i konstruksjonen av religiøs identitet. Artikkelen undersøker hvordan denne liberale moralske diskursen forhandles sammen med den islamske ortodokse diskursen som involverer normer som underkastelse og lydighet til et normativt rammeverk basert på guddommelig vilje.

Undersøkelsen finner en rekke måter å forhandle og kombinere de to diskursene på som igjen reflekteres i ulike religiøse identiteter, avhengig av hvilke diskursive premisser og strukturer

som er dominerende i den enkeltes repertoar. Basert på de unge muslimenes narrativer og refleksjoner knyttet til eksklusivisme versus pluralisme argumenteres det for at variasjonen henger sammen med ulik grad av identifikasjon med og deltakelse i henholdsvis 'muslimske' sosiale miljøer på den ene siden og sekulær-pluralistiske miljøer på den andre.

Den andre artikkelen ser på hvordan de to overnevnte diskursene, den islamsk-ortodokse og den liberale moralske diskursen, komplimenteres av andre diskurser som strukturer formidlingen av tro og praksis på bestemte måter, og i dette tilfelle i en 'terapeutisk' retning. I hvilken grad og hvordan den terapeutiske religiøse diskursen gjenspeiles i de unge muslimenes formulering av sin tro og praksis, undersøkes og diskuteres. Et hovedfunn er at den terapeutiske diskursen gjenspeiles i betydelig grad, men at det individualistiske premisset som denne diskursen bygger på ofte justeres basert på en alternativ, islamsk-ortodoks forståelse av selvrealisering. Studien finner også blant noen av de unge muslimene, spesielt mennene, at en religiøs diskurs som sentrer omkring sosial transformasjon og aktivisme er mer dominerende enn den terapeutiske.

Den tredje artikkelen ser på et mindre utvalg av de femten deltakerne i studien som skiller seg ut ved at de konstruerer sin religiøse identitet eksplisitt i motsetning til den islamske ortodoksien, og hvis forståelse og tolkning av islamske begreper og praksiser er preget av subjektivisme på den måten at de legitimerer sine tolkninger i hovedsak med egen tenkning og opplevelser. Et sentralt argument er at fellestrekkene i de unge muslimenes 'alternative' formuleringer av Islamsk tro og praksis peker mot en interdiskursiv sammenbinding av liberale islamske diskurser med repertoarer fra en 'nyåndelig' diskurs. Denne 'spirituelle' varianten av islam hevdes videre å representere et alternativ til de mer sekulære eller vekkelsesorienterte variantene av islam blant unge muslimer i Europa.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction

Back in 2013 when I was doing my master's thesis, I attended a lecture with the Muslim professor Tariq Ramadan at the University of Oslo. The room was filled by students who greeted his 'as-salaamu alaikum' with 'wa-alaikum as-salaam' (peace be upon you) and listened attentively to what he had to say about being a European, or in this case Norwegian, Muslim. While I was listening to the lecture and observing the young people around me, I made, for the first time in my life, an attempt of placing myself in the shoes of young Muslims who, unlike their parents, are born and raised in a secular and liberal society such as Norway. I gathered that they would be striving to 'find' an identity between what I back then imagined to be two highly different cultures and worldviews: those of their parents and those they were encountering at school and in society at large. I pondered on, not only how I would relate to the religious beliefs and practices of my parents, but also to the negative portrayals of my religion in the media, and I felt a strong sense of curiosity which has accompanied me ever since, about what was going on in the minds and lives of young Muslims in my neighborhood; in Norway; in Europe.

I also remember that I felt like I was witnessing an historical moment, thinking to myself that 'Islam', which I back then depicted as a rather fixed entity, was subject to change right in front of me, both through what the professor himself was saying, but even more in the minds and lives of those listening. For when before had 'Islam' been part of the lives and identities of young people embedded in such a liberal, secular, *and* religiously pluralistic society and culture? Or when before had the religion's tenets been discussed among students enrolled in an educational system that to such a degree encourages self-reflection, including critical scrutiny of all one's assumptions about the world? How would Islam be interpreted and practiced in the years to come in such a context?

I soon discovered, off course, that I was not the first to have asked those questions, and I encountered the research field of Islam in Europe, as well as the sub-field that focuses specifically on the younger generations of Muslims who are born and/or raised in the West. Some years later, by handing in this thesis, I have myself become part of that field, and, as I shall argue in the following, contribute to moving it forward.

1.2. Aims and research questions

Research on Muslim minorities in Europe has, according to the authors of the anthology *Everyday Islam in Europe* (2013) tended to focus on ‘hypervisible’ beliefs and practices at the expense of the more subtle and private (Dessing et al. 2013, 2). Studies of young Muslims in Europe have often taken youth or student organisations as their outset and have as such represented predominantly the segment of young Muslims who are devout, vocal, and active (ibid; see also Otterbeck 2011; 2013). The study at hand aims to contribute to counterbalancing this skewedness by focusing on Muslim individuals who are situated outside of, or on the outskirts of, institutionalised and organised Islam, and who therefore, for the most part, practice their religion beyond the radar of public attention. More precisely, the aim of the study is to increase our understanding of the ways in which Islam is (re)constructed among young Muslims who have been socialised in a liberal, secular, and increasingly pluralistic context such as Norway, and who are ‘non-organised’ in the sense that they are not presently active in a Muslim organisation. An assumption which guided the research design was that young Muslims who are not regularly involved in institutionalised Islamic settings would be less likely to conform to an ‘orthodox’ Islamic framework¹ and therefore also articulate a broader spectrum of ways to understand and practice Islam than what has been previously described in Norwegian studies which have focused mainly on ‘organised’ young Muslims. Despite political scientist Olivier Roy’s claim that Islamic dogma has remained largely unchanged among the ‘new’ Muslims in the West (Roy 2004, 30; 2013), I am interested in what shapes and forms ‘Islam’ takes in those cases where such alterings *do* take place, as described for instance in Nadia Jeldtoft’s (2011; 2012) study of ‘non-organised’ Muslim minorities in Germany and Denmark.

The initial aim of the study was to investigate characteristics of young (non-organised) Muslims’ beliefs and practices, and how these were negotiated in relation to the orthodox Islamic tradition, including the extent to which they were ‘individualised’ in line with the general descriptions of contemporary religiosity in the West (e.g. Bellah 1985; Davie 1994; Wuthnow 1998; Hervieu-Léger 2000; 2006; Heelas and Woodhead 2005). I was influenced by theories on how and why religion changes in late modern society, and particularly by sociologists of religion Paul Heela’s and Linda Woodheads’ (2005) thesis of a

¹ Following Talal Asad (1986), I understand the orthodoxy within the Islamic discursive tradition as those knowledges and practices that are dominant in the sense of being supported and legitimised by powerful actors and institutions within the discursive field that constitutes ‘Islam’.

‘subjectivisation of the sacred’. Somewhere along the way, however, and especially through the encounter with the work of the Belgian anthropologist Nadia Fadil (2008; 2015), and later with the anthology edited by Véronique Altglas and Matthew Wood called *Bringing back the social into the sociology of Religion: critical approaches* (2018), I began to develop a more critical stance towards the initial theoretical framework and decided to adopt a discourse analytical approach. I discovered that theories of individualisation often imply that modern individuals are becoming ‘emancipated’ from social structures and forces of power working on them from the ‘outside’, to instead being ‘free’ to form their beliefs and practices from a position of agency (Fadil 2008, 371). I became acquainted with the work of Michel Foucault (1982) on subject formation and power, as well as critical discourse analyst Norman Fairclough (1992) and began to adopt the view that people are always subject to structures of power, even if these are ‘soft’ (Callero 2003). This means that even highly ‘individualistic’ beliefs and practices, in the sense that they diverge from religious orthodoxies, are created through subjection to *other* discourses such as the liberal ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault). Taking these insights into account, I began working with the following research questions:

(1) What discourses are reproduced, combined, and contested in articulations of beliefs and practices among young Muslims in Norway? (2) How are different discourses negotiated in relation to each other? (3) How do the young Muslims’ articulations of their beliefs and practices relate to the socio-cultural context(s) in which they are embedded?

Taking a discourse analytical approach was not only based on theoretical insights, but also on the initial analysis of the empirical material in which I discovered a struggle among the Young Muslims between the desire to remain within the framework they regard as orthodox Islam, and simultaneously to live by the fundamental premises of the liberal moral discourse. The inspiration from discourse theory led me to conceptualise this as a struggle in their discursive repertoire² between discourses that are built on certain conflicting premises (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 110), I had also noted what I defined as a ‘therapeutic’ religious vocabulary among many of the interviewees and became interested in how this was connected to socio-cultural context in which they are embedded. I also noted references to Sufism³ as

² By ‘discursive repertoire’ I refer to the building blocks of discourses such as the premises, vocabularies and rhetorical structures/logics which constitute them (Potter and Wetherell 1988).

³ Although Sufism is a broad and multifaceted category, a discursive tradition in and of itself (see e.g., Sedgwick 2017; Milani 2012), the interview participants invariably referred to it as *one* coherent tradition or branch within the Islamic tradition, which is why I also do so in the following.

well as articulations that evoked associations to the discursive language of ‘progressive Islam’ (Duderjja 2010; 2017) and started to work with the thesis that young Muslims in Norway are informed by multiple discourses on selfhood, morality, religion and the transcendent when they articulate their beliefs and practices from the position of being ‘Muslim’.

Following the initial stage of analysis (see method chapter), I decided on three topics which I wanted to investigate further, and regarding which I believed my analyses of the material would make a contribution to the field of Islam and Muslims in Europe. The first theme connects to the topic of religious individualisation and focuses on the young Muslims’ discourses on moral authority. The research questions explored were: *(1) What discourses on moral authority are reproduced in young Muslims’ legitimisations of their beliefs and practices? (2) How are different discourses negotiated in relation to each other? (3) How are the discursive configurations related to the social context(s) in which the young Muslims are embedded?*

The second topic concerns the characteristics of the articulated beliefs and practices as themselves. As mentioned, I had noted a ‘therapeutic’ religious vocabulary among the interviewees which I recognised from literature on contemporary religion and wanted to investigate further. I worked with the following research question: *To what extent do beliefs, values and views on practice among young Muslims in Norway align with the ‘therapeutic’ ethos and outlook, and if so, how are these ideas and ideals negotiated in relation to ‘Islam’ as an intersecting discursive framework?*

Finally, the third topic concerns a tendency I regard as a convergence between a liberal Islamic discourse and the language of contemporary ‘spirituality’ (e.g. Heelas and Woodhead 2005). I identified this convergence as characteristic of *some* of the interviewees’ articulations of their beliefs and practices. This analysis took place before I adopted the discourse analytical framework and therefore has a less explicit discourse-oriented research question: *What commonalities can be found among highly ‘subjectivised’ interpretations of Islam among young Muslims in Norway, and how does their approach differ from other main trajectories among young Muslims in Europe?*

Together, the three articles answer the overarching research questions of what discourses that are reproduced, combined, and contested in the young Muslims’ articulations of their beliefs and practices; how these are negotiated in relation to each other; and how they are connected to the socio-cultural context in which the young Muslims are embedded.

1.3. The structure of the thesis

The thesis is article based and consists of two parts: the articles and the extended abstract. Each of the three articles analyses and discusses different aspects of the empirical material, while the extended abstract elaborates on the aims and research questions of the study as well as its theoretical, methodological, and empirical foundations and contributions. The discussion of the latter, furthers and compliments the discussions found in the three articles by taking an overarching perspective that holds all the findings together and relate them to each other and to the theoretical framework in a final analysis.

The extended abstract is organised into six chapters. The first chapter provides an outline of the study, clarifies the aims and the research questions, and introduces some key concepts. The second chapter provides the contextual framework, first in terms of the study's situatedness in the Norwegian context, and secondly, in terms of its situatedness in the research field of Islam and Muslims in Europe. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical perspectives and concepts that are used to interpret and discuss the empirical material. Chapter 4 contains reflections on methodology, including ethical considerations. Chapter 5 summarises the three articles and provide the ground for Chapter 6, which integrates and discusses the findings presented in the articles. From this discussion, the main contributions of the study are delineated, and possible directions for further research suggested.

1.4. Research design

The study is situated within the discipline of sociology of religion, while building on and making use of research and theorisation also from anthropology and religious studies, something which is common in research field of Islam in Europe. Furthermore, the study has a qualitative design, and the data material is produced by means of semi-structured interviews which centre on the participants' religious trajectory from past to present, before it delves into their beliefs and practices today. These accounts are analysed based on the assumption that they provide knowledge also regarding how the young Muslims construct and articulate their beliefs and practices also outside of the interview setting (see method chapter).

Through the analysis, the interviewees' articulations are categorised thematically and investigated through the lens of central theories within the sociology of religion combined

with a framework of discourse analysis. In combining social theories and discourse analysis, I draw on Norman Fairclough's (1992; 2001) critical discourse analysis (see chapter 1.6.1. and 3.6.).

How do the three articles relate to one another and to the overarching research question? The first article presents an overview of the variety of discursive configurations found in the material regarding moral authority. It provides a foundation for the remaining two articles in that it describes positions that are fundamental and determining of the shapes and forms that the young Muslims' beliefs and practices take which are further explored in these articles. Moreover, while the first article focuses on how discourses are used rhetorically to legitimise beliefs and practices, the other two study constructions of the transcendent itself (the divine, the afterlife, the purpose of life etc.). Finally, while the first and second article discuss tendencies across the material as a whole, the third zooms in on those among the interviewees who position themselves explicitly in opposition to the Islamic orthodoxy and formulate alternative (heterodox) interpretations of Islam.

1.5. The contribution of the study

The study contributes with knowledge regarding beliefs and practices among young Muslims in Norway through studying their own articulation of these from a discourse analytical perspective. It adds to a growing body of literature on religiosity among the post-migration generation of Muslims who are born and/or raised in Western Europe or Northern America. More specifically, it contributes to this research field by focusing on young Muslims who are 'non-organised', in the sense of not being (presently) active in a Muslim youth or student organisation, a category of young Muslims in Europe which has been less discussed in the literature than those who are 'devout and active' (Dessing et al. 2013, 2). Although some studies in recent years have focused specifically on 'non-organised' Muslims, also in the Nordic context (e.g. Jeldtoft 2011; 2012; Kühle 2011; Silvestri 2011; Otterbeck 2011; 2013), they are still few, and none have been conducted in Norway. There are also room for analyses, I argue, which move beyond the thesis of individualisation and look closer at the vocabularies used to express the 'individualised' beliefs and practices, and how these are structured by social conditions (Altglass and Wood 2018), including dominant discourses in the culture. The study also reflects on the possibility of *changes* taking place in how 'Islam' is envisioned and articulated among young Muslims who grow up in liberal and secular-pluralistic societies,

such as Norway, through new configurations of discourses. The study also contributes with insights that are useful to the study of contemporary religion in general, both with regard to how we might combine social theories and discourse analysis in the study of religious beliefs and practices, and with regard to tendencies that are manifest across religious traditions and cultural contexts.

Finally, as has been pointed out by Natal Dessing (2013, 49), there has been a tendency in the study of religion in recent years, including in the research on Islam, to focus on what people *do*, rather than on interiority and peoples' discourses on the more intimate aspects of belief in transcendent powers (see also Orsi 2005). The study at hand addresses this by placing beliefs, or rather, the discursive vocabularies through which beliefs are articulated, concerning the divine and transcendent, in the foreground.

Although the findings are not generalisable to the whole segment of young 'non-organised' Muslims in Norway, they do point to some patterns, and suggest ways of conceptualising these, which can be investigated further in future research. On a more popular level, the findings may be of interest to Muslim communities, people working with questions related to Muslim minorities in Norway and elsewhere in Europe, and to those who work with representing (young) Muslims in media, school materials, and so on.

1.6. Key concepts

1.6.1. Discourse analysis

A discourse can be viewed as particular way of representing the world, or aspects of it; a fixation of meaning within a particular domain (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 134). The concept is poststructuralist in that it rests on the premise that the structures by which individuals create their world (through language), are never fixed, but rather continuously constituted through discursive practices which either reproduce or transforms those structures (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 139). Discourses determine the conditions of possibility of what can be thought and said (in a social group at a certain period of time) from identifiable positions of power. Therefore, analyses of discourse should always pay attention not only to

an analysis of what is being said or done, but also of who says or does it, and from which position and background this is said or done (Johnston and von Stuckrad 2021, 3). In other words, we should make explanatory connections between the vocabularies used in a text (for example an interview) and the dominant discourses in a particular social context, and consider the ways that power relations are sustained, disrupted, or transformed through the discursive practice in question. This attention to power is the critical element of discourse analysis (Fairclough 1992, 87-88). We might for example want to demonstrate the negative consequences of particular fixations of meaning and open up for new ways of understanding the world (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 178).

In discourse analysis, we study discourses, or representations of an aspect of the world, either at the individual level, among members of a group, or in society – and draw explanatory connections between these different levels (Fairclough 1992, 56, 72). Within the discursive field that constitutes ‘Islam’, for example, the vocabularies used to articulate one’s view of ‘Allah’, or ‘the paradise’, are relatively fixed within the orthodox discourse, while they are fixed in a differently way within the discourse of progressive Islam (e.g. Duderjja 2017). ‘Islam’ can as such be understood as a field of competing discourses which all have the aim of fixating the meaning regarding more or less the same signs and concepts. Within this broad and multifaceted domain or field, some discourses are more ‘fixed’ than others, and some have more power behind them through being institutionalised and supported by the authority of tradition (Asad 1986; see 1.6.3). Moreover, the various Islamic discourses are involved in power-dynamics connected to other fields of discourses, both locally and globally. In Norway, for example, Islamic discourses compete with other discourses which seeks to fixate meaning regarding morality and the transcendent. At one level then, this is a study of competing discourses regarding what Islam *is* (and not) among young Muslims in Norway, and on another, the findings invite reflections regarding the broader field of competing discourses regarding selfhood, morality and the transcendent in general. In the wake of an intensified process of globalisation (Beyer 2012), the amount of discourses competing in this domain, like in any other, has increased, something which creates the possibility of complex interdiscursivity (Fairclough 2001, 203-18).

In line with Fairclough (1992), I position myself around the middle of a social constructivist spectrum (see Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 20) in that I view the young Muslims as both subjects of discourse *and* producers of discourse. This means that, although the young Muslims’ subjectivities are shaped by the structures of discourses which circulate

in their social world, they can also alter the relatively fixed patterns of those discourses, for example by importing vocabularies from other discourses and combine vocabularies in new ways (Fairclough 1992; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 73). I also follow Fairclough in viewing the relationship between the non-discursive and discursive aspects of social reality as dialectic. Language use influences social reality, and the other way around, and what sets discourse apart from other practices is simply its linguistic form. According to Fairclough, the relation between language use and social reality are mediated through discursive practices – that is, the production, distribution, and consumption of text (Fairclough 1992, 71-72, 76).

1.6.2. The self and identity

In line with the perspective of social constructivism, I do not regard the self as having a stable essence, but as made up of multiple, discursively constituted identities, and ‘continually formed, negotiated and reshaped in social interaction’ (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 111). Following social psychologist Hubert Hermans (2001; 2018), the founder of *Dialogical Self Theory* (DST), I also regard it as a central feature of the self that it is ‘dialogical’, which means that it metaphorically can be conceived of as a mini-society in which a multitude of *I*-positions (or ‘subject positions’) co-exist and interact with each another (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010, 1–20). The subject fluctuates among different, sometimes even opposing positions, which are involved in relationships of dominance and power connected to dynamics in the external context. The self is then continuously constructed through an internalisation of social dialogues (discourses) which position the subject in categories such as ‘liberal’, ‘Muslim’, ‘devout’, ‘rebellious’ etc.). According to DST, the positions interacting with each other in the self can also be external others such as ‘my conservative brother’, or ‘Norwegians’ (they can also be either actual or imaginary) (Hermans 2018, 53, 65). This means that I myself as interviewer will play a part in the young Muslims’ self-formation at that particular time (see also method chapter). Furthermore, DST holds that all positions in the self can be ‘voiced’, or performed linguistically, and that they may have different stories to tell from each of their respective positions (ref). As such, with this conceptualisation of the complexity and multiplicity involved in the shaping of a ‘self’, DST is a helpful analytical tool to study identity-formation in late modern, multicultural societies (Buitelaar et al. 2013; Buitelaar 2013; Zock 2011; 2013; Wijsen 2016; 2021). In such contexts, Herman argues, the

increased necessity of dialogue *between* individuals also goes for dialogue *within* an individual (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010, 1).

As religious studies scholar Frank Wijzen (2021) has noted, the language of DST can easily be integrated with that of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Fairclough (1992) acknowledges for example the multitude of ‘subject positions’ that the subject may take depending on what discourses that are available to them, and that these different positions are in dialogue with each other – both in society, in groups, and at the individual level (Fairclough 1992, 25, 56). Neither of the theories maintain a clear line between the subject and the social, and they both hold that external conflicts and power-relations are mirrored in the ‘selves’ of individuals. Both theories also speak relevantly to the fact that identities in late modern pluralistic societies increasingly are constructed across a large variety of discourses, and that the negotiation between different positions thereby becomes more complex. They also both maintain that the self can be ‘polyphonic’ (Bhaktin) in the sense that different positions in someone’s repertoire might have different perspectives on reality, which in turn explains the emergence of contradictory statements, or tensions, in peoples’ discursive practice (ref both). Finally, both CDA and DST speak of ‘positions’ as effects both of self-positioning and *being positioned* (Hermans 2018, 47). DST might, however, as Wijzen (2021, 104) argues, contribute fruitfully to discourse analytical approaches with its conception of how external others are part of and ‘speak’ in the self. On the other side, DST could benefit from taking into account the challenge from discourse analysis to reconsider the notion of a pre-linguistic nature of the self’s *I*-positioning, given the considerable evidence that supports the theory that the language people are taught to speak from their childhood onwards structures the way they think and act. I will also add that DST, as applied for instance by Hetty Zock (2013) in her study of ‘religious voices in self-narratives’, may contribute with a useful theorisation of how new positions in someone’s self-repertoire are created through dialogue between formerly held positions, and the role that tension and conflict between positions play in this process (6.6.).

Finally, since the concept of a ‘true self’, or authenticity, is present in the vocabulary of most of the young Muslims participating in this study, I shall provide a short account of how I understand the articulation of an experience of a coherent self in light of DST. According to Zock (2011), individuals may experience themselves as simultaneously made up by multiple identities and as a singular, coherent whole – as the same person speaking about aspects of themselves, both in the present and over time (Zock 2011, 175). According to

Hermans (2001, 354), the coming together of positions, such as ‘Muslim’, ‘Pakistani’, ‘Norwegian’, ‘woman’, ‘liberal’ may be experienced, in a formed coalition, as one’s true self. A person is then seeing themselves and the world from a ‘meta-position’ by which they observe and reflect on other positions (this corresponds to Anthony Giddens’s (1991) notion of a ‘reflexive self’). The experience of coherence and continuity which results from taking such a position is what Zock (2011) calls an ‘existential sense of self’. Although this position also changes over time, since it is connected to the dynamic constellation of I-positions in a changing social context, the experience in the present is one of unity, coherence and of ‘being close to oneself and others’ (Hermans 2001, 354; Zock 2011, 174).

This outline of a theory of the self is foundational to the analysis, mainly as an understanding of the self in relation to the social world, including its relation to discourse, which underpins the interpretations and discussion, but also more specifically as a theoretical frame by which to conceptualise some of the dynamics involved in the young Muslims’ formations of their religious identity.

1.6.3. The Islamic (discursive) tradition

In line with the research perspective outlined above, I approach the religion ‘Islam’ as a discursively constructed entity. It is a concept, a symbol, which encompasses a whole range of different discourses throughout history and in the present, but which also has a distinguishable coherence which anthropologist Talal Asad (1986) has argued can be captured in the concept of tradition. In line with Asad (and the many scholars inspired by his approach), I view Islam as ‘the discursive production and organization of “truths” and “essentials” that includes and relates itself to a set of foundational texts (the Koran and the Hadith) and the comments made thereon’ (ibid, 15). Understood as a discursive tradition, Islam is a ‘historically extended, socially embodied argumentation over time’ (Grewal 2016, 49). It has a timeless, universal and stable ‘essence’, but this coherence is fragile, dynamic, and has temporal qualities to it (ibid). This conceptualisation is loose enough to capture both the floating character of what Islam is for different people at different times, *and* the idea of something that is broadly shared and *relatively* fixed (cf. Nome 2016, 15).

Furthermore, Asad underlines that some actors, institutions, and bodies of knowledge within the Islamic discursive tradition have more power than others to ‘regulate, uphold, require or adjust correct practice, and to condemn, exclude undermine or replace incorrect

ones' (Asad 1986, 15). In line with this, I view the legitimated opinions and contestations over correct practices that are dominant in the sense of have such power behind them, as well as the actors and institutions producing them, as belonging to the Islamic 'orthodoxy'. While the concept of orthodoxy often is associated with 'correct doctrine', I rather view it rather as an analytical distinction which points to the most dominant (in terms of legitimating power behind it) discourses on correct Muslim belief and practice in the global web of Islamic discourses. It should be noted here that there are also different degrees of fixity within the orthodox discourse (Nome 2016, 16), and that even the most fixed layers of orthodoxy ultimately are open to change, even if they have reached a certain level of stability and have become so dominant that their representations are viewed as 'given' (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 24). Not even doctrines or prescriptions that are authorised as the unalterable core of Islam by institutions with hundreds of years of legitimacy behind them, are immune to change. Nonetheless, some 'truth and essentials' (cf. Asad 1986) are more broadly considered unchangeable than others by Muslims worldwide, such as the obligatory status of the five pillars, the detailed faith⁴⁴, and some prohibitions regarding which there historically has been a clear consensus among the *ulama*. In this thesis, I refer to those (relatively) fixed representations as the Islamic orthodoxy, or as the Islamic orthodox discourse. This also correspond to what is viewed as the Islamic orthodoxy among the young Muslims in this study, although they do not always adhere to its propositions.

The macro-contestations between different position in the Islamic discursive field, are, as we shall see, mirrored in the micro-level discourses on what Islam is among the young Muslims in this study. It may be argued, however, that the dynamics within Islam as a field of discourses have changed somewhat since Asad (1986) outlined his theory of Islam as a discursive tradition (Dessing et al. 2013, 3). Ordinary Muslims, and especially those who are born and raised in the West, now have increased opportunities to decide for themselves what constitutes correct belief and practice, or to 'condemn, exclude, undermine, or replace' that which they do not see fitting. What happens in this context to interpretations that previously have been considered part of the orthodoxy by the majority of Muslims worldwide is one of the questions explored in this study.

⁴⁴ The detailed faith (*iman al-Mufasssal*) usually includes the belief in Allah, his angels, his books, his prophets, the day of resurrection and judgment, and in 'destiny' (Otterbeck 2013, 116).

1.6.4. Religion and spirituality

What counts as religion, and what religion *is*, changes with time and place and is constantly subject to negotiations and re-negotiations (Beckford 2003). There is no ‘objective’ understanding of religion, only discursive constructions which are entangled in power-related discourse strands – some with roots all the way back to antiquity (Johnston and von Stuckrad 2021, 3). As a working definition, however, I study religion as ‘belief in a reality which transcends what we can grasp with our senses or reason, and the practices and institutions connected to such belief’ (cf. Repstad 2020, 13, my translation). I do not, however, approach this phenomenon directly in this study, but rather through the study of discourse, that is, how people put their beliefs and religious practices into words (in a specific context). This includes not only descriptive and argumentative statements, but also of narrations of religious experiences by which the participants’ beliefs and religious practices are articulated more indirectly.

The term ‘spirituality’ is used in the study of religion to capture more or less the same phenomena as religion, only when the beliefs and practices are detached from institutional, dogmatic frameworks (see e.g. Woodhead 2010). Heelas and Woodhead (2005), whose work on contemporary religion and spirituality has been important to this study, take as their outset a distinction between what they call ‘subjective-life spirituality’, referring to adherence to the subjective inner life as source of significance and authority, and ‘life-as religion’, which refers to adherence to institutionalised religious frameworks, as two different approaches to ‘the sacred’ (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 6-7). Based on this, I shall later outline some features of ‘contemporary spirituality’ as a distinguishable discourse regarding the transcendent which is mirrored in some of the young Muslims’ articulations of Islam. I separate this discourse from a ‘liberal’ religious vocabulary, which I understand as more of a selective ‘pick-and-choose’ engagement with religious frameworks, distinct from the spirituality-discourse which position itself in opposition to institutionalised dogma and reconceptualise the transcendent in specific ways (see also 3.6.).

Whereas the distinction between ‘religion’ and ‘spirituality’ can be a helpful analytical tool, there is also something problematic in viewing the two categories as mutually exclusive. For one thing, formalised religious frameworks may include many references to the ‘spiritual dimension’ of practices, something which usually refers to the experience of engagement with divine or transcendent presence. This experience is also placed at the very centre of the

mystical branches of the major religions (Farstad 2017, 72). On the other hand, people who identify as ‘spiritual, but not religious’ may sometimes include elements from formalised religious traditions in their repertoire (see e.g. Furseth 2006; Henriksen and Botvar 2010). Nonetheless, as discourses concerning the transcendent, and practices related to these, religion and spirituality can be distinguished as different for the purpose of analysis, as long as we pay attention to how an emphasis on their differences may obscure the ways in which they also overlap and complement each other (see also Heelas 2007, 15).

1.6.5. ‘Non-organised’ Muslims

As already mentioned, Dessing and colleagues (2013) have argued that the research field’s focus on ‘hypervisible’ expressions of Islam in Europe has contributed to a skewed picture in which ‘silent’ and non-active Muslims are much less represented than those who are vocal and active (see also Jeldtoft and Nielsen 2012). By focusing on institutionalised forms of Islam, we run the risk of reifying Muslims as being ‘all about Islam’, as Jeldtoft (2011; 2012) argues. Similarly, Jonas Otterbeck (2011, 61) encourages researchers to consider those who are not devoting their lives to Islam in order to ‘not manufacture a lie in line with the stereotype about Muslims – that they are always obsessed with Islam’. Through their own studies, both researchers have demonstrated that seeking out ‘non-organised’ Muslims as a methodological approach may engender new insights regarding the variety of ways to be ‘Muslim’ in Europe today.

This taken into consideration, it should be said that the distinction between ‘organised’ and ‘non-organised’ can be rather difficult to apply on the Muslim landscape, something which the present study confirms (see chapter 6.6.). As religious studies scholar Safet Bectovic (2011, 1125) reminds us, the Muslim way of organising is often ‘flexible, spontaneous and practical’, and can be based on ethnicity rather than religion. Looking at membership in congregations will therefore say little to nothing about the degree of participation or salience of religious practice, he argues. Moreover, research shows that the category of non-organised Muslims encompasses a large variety of highly different attitudes and identities ‘ranging from non-organized Jihadi-Salafis, to New Age Muslims, and including in-between a large group of those who feel only a vague sense of belonging to Islam’ (Jeldtoft and Nielsen 2012, 4). The picture is in other words much more complex than

the findings in for example Jeldtoft's study (2011; 2012) indicate, namely that 'organised' Muslims in Europe are devout and orthodox while those who are 'non-organised' are liberal and pragmatic. It can in other words be difficult to say something *general* about so-called non-organised Muslims in Europe. If we, however, focus specifically on *young* Muslims, the distinction between organised and non-organised is perhaps more fruitful than if applied on migrant generation, since research on young Muslims who are active in youth- or student organisations shows that this usually involves being highly devout and committed to Islam (see e.g. Peek, 2005; Kibria, 2008; Jacobsen 2006; 2011; Bendixsen 2013; de Koning 2013). As we shall discuss later, there are relationships of power in such environments which contributes to the reproduction of normative discourses on what counts as 'correct' Islam (Jacobsen 2011, 374).

Based on the narratives and reflections of the young Muslims represented in this study, I shall argue that the organised/non-organised distinction does not capture the many 'loose' ways in which young Muslims interact with organised and institutional Islam. The accounts of the interviewees, who all identify as not active in a particular mosque or Muslim organisation, include examples of connections to organised environments such as social ties due to former engagement, occasional participation, interactions with forms of 'organised' Islam online – all of which contribute to a blurring of both categories (see 6.6.). However, I maintain that as a methodological distinction and approach, it can be fruitful in enabling us to include young Muslims who are usually not represented when the outset for a study is and organised community or setting.

Chapter 2: Situating the study

2.1. Religion and culture in Norway

Norway is, like the other Nordic countries, highly secular in comparison to the rest of the world. According to a national survey from 2020, only three out of ten Norwegians 'believe in God'.⁵ On the other side, the number of people who identify as 'non-religious' increases steadily each year (Urstad 2017). However, a survey with additional alternatives to 'I believe

⁵ «Stadig færre tror på Gud», Vårt Land (accessed 17.11.2020).

in God’, shows that many Norwegians identify themselves as somewhere ‘in-between’: they are ‘not sure’, ‘believe in a higher power’, ‘believe sometimes’, or ‘are doubtful yet believe’⁶. Furthermore, formal membership in the Lutheran Church of Norway still amounts to almost seventy percent of the population.⁷ This may, however, be explained with the fact that membership in the church, for many Norwegians, is synonymous with ‘respect for tradition’ and attendance to the main rites of passages (Botvar 2010). Furthermore, both the number of church members and those attending the ceremonies are steadily decreasing each year.⁸

On the societal level, there has historically been a close relationship between state and church in Norway, and the formal separation of the church was not formalised until 2017. Although the Evangelical-Lutheran Church still has a special basis in the Constitution and remains the ‘folk church of Norway’⁹, the church is now independent and its remaining ties to the state mainly symbolic. All religious and life stance communities in Norway are also supported (per member) by the state on the same level as the church¹⁰. The societal secularisation is also visible in the school curriculum. The subject of Christianity, Religion, Life Stance and Ethics (KRLE) has gradually removed most of its former attachment to the church and Protestant Christianity, and now says that ‘Christianity, other world religions, and life stances are to be presented in an objective, critical and pluralistic manner’ [my translation].¹¹

The majority view in the Norwegian population, according to surveys, is that religion should be confined to the private sphere (ref). There have, however, been an occasional resurgence of religious symbols and practices in the public sphere such as after the terror attacks of 22 July 2011 (Kalvig 2014). Moreover, as a liberal democracy, the Norwegian society is characterised by a strong degree of individualism, also in the area of religion. This means among other things that many Norwegians are sceptical to the proselytising of religious views, and that parents usually are more concerned with allowing their children ‘free choice’

⁶ Religionsundersøkelsen 2018 [Survey on religion in Norway 2018]

⁷ Statistics Norway <https://www.ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/religion-og-livssyn/statistikk/den-norske-kirke> (accessed 17.11.2020)

⁸ Statistics Norway <https://www.ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/religion-og-livssyn/statistikk/den-norske-kirke> (accessed 17.11.2020)

⁹ The Norwegian constitution, paragraph 16 <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/dokumenter/-16---stotte-til-tros--og-livssynsamfunn--grunnloven--16-og-emk/id2509013/> (accessed 17.11.2020)

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ <https://www.udir.no/lk20/rle01-03> (accessed 7.10.2021)

than with transmitting their own religion or worldview (Repstad 2020, 44, 55). According to sociologist of religion Inger Furseth (2006), there has over the course of a few generations in Norway been a shift from ‘a quest for truth’ (within religious traditions) to the ideal of ‘being oneself’ in the domain of religion and the sacred. This tendency of individualisation is not least evident among the younger generations in Norway (Høeg 2017).

With globalisation and increased migration, the religious scene in Norway has, like in the other Northern European countries, become increasingly pluralistic, and this diversity has altered and energised public discussions concerning the role of religion in society. What religion is, and where its boundaries should be, is hence no longer negotiated through debates about Church-State relations, but mainly through debates on how to deal with religious pluralism and the expressions of minority religions. The principles of religious freedom and equal treatment are fundamental in the Norwegian society, however, concerns with state funding of religious activities that do not conform to liberal values and sensibilities have been heavily debated. The same has the place of religious symbols in the public sphere, which has centred mainly – but not only – around the wearing of headscarf (hijab) for Muslim women in official positions. The Norwegian law in this area is mildly restrictive compared to other European countries; it allows the Muslim headscarf and other religious symbols for teachers in schools and those working in other official offices and in the army, but not in the police.

As many countries in Western Europe, Norway too has in recent years seen the growth of right wing and anti-Muslim discourses which pronounce concerns with national security and the preservation of ‘Norwegian values’. The terror attacks on 22 July 2011 was an extreme action legitimated by such concerns; the same was the more recent attack on the Al-Noor Islamic Centre Mosque in Bærum (Bøe 2020). Notwithstanding, according to some surveys, the overarching tendency among the population is towards a more positive attitude towards immigrants and religious minorities (Hellevik and Hellevik 2017). The prejudices against Muslims are however measured to be higher than towards any other group, with surveys showing that one out of three are still ‘somewhat, or very, negative towards Muslims’ (Hoffman and Moe 2017; Brekke and Fladmoe 2020).

2.2. Muslims in Norway

Calculations based on immigration statistics and number of registered members in Muslim communities can give some indications of the size of the Muslim population in Norway, but these numbers are highly uncertain¹². 175,507 were registered as members of Muslim faith-communities in 2020 (Statistics Norway). Taking into account the number of immigrants from Muslim countries, the number of people who self-identify as Muslim are estimated to be somewhere between 175,507 and 270,000, which amounts to approximately 3,27–5,07 percent of the population (Bøe 2020, 510-11). A vast majority are Sunni Muslims, whereas the population of people with Shia Muslim background were estimated to be around 40,000 in 2015 (Bøe and Flakerud 2017, 182).

Most Muslims in Norway are either migrants (including labour migrants, asylum seekers and refugees) or descendants of migrants. Although migration to Norway from Muslim countries started comparatively late, it followed a pattern similar to the ‘Muslim migration cycle’ described for other West European countries. In the 1970s, male migrant workers (for the main part) started to arrive from Pakistan, Morocco, and Turkey. The labour migration to Norway from these three countries largely took the form of ‘chain migration’ in which pioneer migrant workers were joined by compatriots from the same areas as well as by spouses and children (Vogt 2008; Jacobsen 2011; Bøe 2020). After the ban on labour migration introduced in 1975, the Muslim population was added to mainly by means of family reunification and refugee movements from such countries as Bosnia, Kosovo, Iran, Iraq, Somalia, Afghanistan, and more recently, Syria. There are also smaller groups of Muslims from other countries in the Middle East, North Africa, Asia, and Africa, as well as a modest number of converts. Those with background from Somalia and Pakistan were highest in number in 2018 (Elgvin and Tronstad 2018). Oslo has attracted a larger number of Muslim immigrants than other parts of the country, with figures from 2016 estimating around 13 per cent of the city’s population to be immigrants from Muslim countries or their descendants.¹³

Around 150 mosques have been established in Norway since the first one in 1974 (for an extensive overview of the expansion of Sunni Islam in Norway, see Vogt 2008; for Shia Islam see Bøe and Flakerud 2017). There are also two Muslim umbrella organisations in

¹² The most common way of estimating the number of Muslims in Norway is to look at immigration statistics in relation to the percentage of Muslims in a given country of emigration. These statistics do not provide any information about how many of these people consider themselves to be Muslims or the diverse ways of being Muslim that such identifications encompass.

¹³ Statistics Norway <https://www.ssb.no/befolkning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/4-prosent-muslimmer-i-norge--329115> (accessed 17.11.2020).

Norway, the Islamic Council of Norway (Islamsk Råd Norge, IRN) and Muslim Network for Dialogue (MDN), as well as a number of Muslim youth and student organisations which gather young people from different ethnic, linguistic, and doctrinal backgrounds.

The research shows that immigrants from Muslim countries and their descendants are more religious than the rest of the population, but there is also great variation within the group. For example, those who identify as Muslims with background from Balkan or Iran tend to score low on scales that measure religiosity, while those from Turkey, Somalia, and Pakistan tend to score high (Elgvin and Tronstad 2013). Although the media often present a more polarised picture (Lundby 2018), research has shown that the overarching values and attitudes in the Muslim population largely correspond to those of the majority population in areas such as democracy, the law, and human rights (Ishaq 2017). Despite a general support of the principle of gender equality in the Muslim population in Norway (Ishaq 2017), and even more so in the second- and third generation (Friberg 2016), there are conservative gender roles and restrictive practices in mosques and many of the Muslim organizations. There are also no female imams in Norway, but the number of women represented in the mosque councils are increasing each year (Repstad 2020, 109).

The children of Muslim migrants are considerably more religious than other Norwegians in the same age-group (Friberg 2016). However, the research also indicates that the younger generations of Muslims are becoming more individualistic and private in their practice compared to that of their parents. The study behind the book *Tro og ekstremisme – unge Muslimske stemmer* [Faith and extremism – young Muslim voices] (Sandberg et al. 2018), in which 90 young Muslims were interviewed, shows for example that many have a relatively relaxed attitude to the obligatory rituals, and that the young Muslims are more occupied with being ‘good’ than they are of following detailed prescriptions. At the same time, belief in God and the main Islamic tenets and pillars remain salient (Sandberg et al. 2018). Regarding beliefs concerning the afterlife, religious studies scholar Levi Geir Eidhamar (2017) has interviewed 30 young Muslims on the topic and describes how many of the young Muslims found the Islamic doctrine of hell difficult to unite with the notion of a loving God, but also had difficulties with dismissing it altogether (Eidhamar 2017, 234).

The anti-Muslim sentiments which exist in the majority population naturally affects the situation for Muslims in the country, and many in the younger generation are occupied with challenging and counter negative stereotypes (Jacobsen 2011; Sandberg et al. 2018). On the other hand, young Muslims with a prominent religious identity have in recent years

become more visible in the public sphere and have given voice to a proud and confident Muslim identity which seem to be emerging in the younger generation despite the negative climate surrounding their religion (Sandberg et al. 2018). The Muslim character *Sana* from the world-famous Norwegian tv-show *Skam* (2015–2017) is an adjacent example of how Muslim religiosity also are portrayed more positively in the popular culture.

2.3. Research context: Young Muslims in Europe

Scholarship on Muslim minorities in the West turned its gaze towards the younger generation who were born and raised in the West in the late 1990s. Vertovec and Rogers' edited *Muslim European Youth* (1998) was particularly important in that it challenged the simplistic understanding (from migration studies) that Islam, viewed as a rather fixed tradition, was 'transplanted' from a 'home country' to a 'host country', and then either reproduced or abandoned by the second generation. With case studies from various European countries and concepts such as hybridity, multiplicity, and cultural creativity, the anthology showed that young Muslims were creating hybrid and complex identities and established new models of religious and cultural expressions. Jacobson's (1998) study of British-Pakistani youth was on the other hand important in showing how there were also restrictions placed on young Muslims' identity formations which would sometimes limit the extent of creativity and opposition to ethnic and religious traditions.

The research on Muslims in Europe post 9/11 has concerned itself heavily with 'revivalist'. The strong identification with Islam among many in the post-migrant generation was seen as a solution to the youths' social situation as marginalised and discriminated against in the European context (e.g. Cesari 2003), and strong religious engagement was seen as the starting point for identity politics by which to oppose and assert specific identities (Cesari 2003; 2004; Peek 2005; Fadil 2006; Tietze 2006; Scott 2007; cf. Bendixsen 2013). This line of research also considers Islam's status as a minority religion within secular European countries to be the main reason behind transformations of Muslim practices and the youths' relationship to Islam. The French sociologist Jocelyne Cesari (2003, 260) argues for example that the normative Islamic tradition 'transforms and dissolves due to the encounter with the "Western" paradigms of secularisation, individualisation, and privatisation'. This line of argumentation was however criticised by for instance Amir-Moazami and Salvatore (2003)

who build on the notion of Islam as a discursive tradition (Asad 1986), for being ‘essentialist’ in that it neglects the traditions of reform that are inherent to the Islamic tradition itself.

Other researchers began around this time to draw attention towards the role of emerging transnational public spheres, and the development of transnational infrastructures of communication, in constructions of global Muslim identities (Eickelman and Anderson 2003; Mandaville 2002; 2007; Roy 2004). In *Globalized Islam: the search for the new Ummah* (2004), Olivier Roy proposes that we look beyond the factors of immigration and ethnic relations to understand the patterns of religious change among the ‘new’ Muslims in the West. He argues that the ‘deterritorialization of Islam’ has led to a strong incentive to objectify the religion, and that we consequently are witnessing a range of new visions of what Islam ‘really is’ when not embedded in the structures of a Muslim society or culture. Both individuals and groups invest in this quest for a cross-cultural, unified Islam, and the answers are distributed on a global arena on which individual Muslims may choose among a host of alternatives instead of adopting local alternatives or reproducing the Islam of their parents (Roy 2004, 21-22).

Despite somewhat different emphasises, the theory of *individualisation* seems to unite the researchers who are working on Islam in Europe when describing and explaining the changes that are taking place (e.g. Mandaville 2002; Cesari 2003; 2004; Klinkhammer 2003; Roy 2004; Peter 2006; Fadil 2008; Jacobsen 2011; Bendixsen 2013). The individualisation thesis refers in its most basic sense to how a fragmentation and dissolvment of traditional authority structures leads to an increased opportunity for the individual to choose for him- or herself in matters of religion (see 3.3.). As already touched upon, this is not *just* connected to the deterritorialisation of Islam due to migration, but also to the rise of new media which makes Islamic knowledge much more accessible to ‘ordinary’ Muslims who can then familiarise themselves with Islamic theology and forms of argumentation, and choose between an increasingly broad spectrum of sources: religious scholars (traditional), online sheikhs, television personalities, websites, fatwa councils, intellectuals without religious training. There is a much greater scope to make conscious choices about which religious authorities to follow (Amir-Moazami and Jouilie 2006; Mandaville 2007; Dessing 2013).

There are, however, different lines of theorisation among the researchers with regard to the relationship between individualisation and different forms of religious practice. While Cesari (in particular, Cesari 2003) has highlighted the way in which Islam becomes more

liberal and confined to the private sphere, Roy (2004) argues that it is precisely the fact that individualised Islam *rarely* brings forth critical discourse and liberalisation that marks the difference to developments in Western Christianity (Roy 2004, 92). He remarks that the fragmentation of Islamic authority structures, and the democratisation of the religious sphere has not led to individualisation in the sense that subjective interpretations are validated. Instead, he points to a striking stability in dogma among Muslims in the West (Roy 2004, 30). This observation resonates well with many of the studies concerned with 'revivalist Islam' and (e.g. Kibria 2008; Karlsson 2008; deKoning 2013; Jouili 2015) in which the religious practice is often 'totalised' in the sense that participants seek to integrate Islam in all aspects of life (Kibria 2008, 2; Cesari 2004, 53). Through local organisations connected to larger transnational networks, young Muslims with different backgrounds come together in the construction of a shared identity as Muslims which is both viewed as more 'purely' Islamic and simultaneously as more adjustable to the Western context than the Islam of the parents (Roy 2004). Anthropologist Maruta Herding (2013) has demonstrated how this movement has produced its own popular culture with specifically Muslim artists and activists (influencers, singers, designers, comedians, rap-artists) as well as fashion which fuses Western popular culture with Islamic symbols and an often proselytising agenda.

In the Norwegian context, the identity-work and religious practice of devout and active young Muslims has been researched through studies on Muslim youth and student organisations such as IslamNet (Bangstad and Linge 2015) Islamic Cultural Centre (ICC) (Synnes 2019), The Muslim Student Society (MMS) and Young Muslims of Norway (NMU) (Jacobsen 2011) and Muslim Society Trondheim (MST) (Eriksen 2010). The young Muslims involved in NMU and MMS in Oslo have been studied by anthropologist Christine Jacobsen (2006; 2011) in an ethnographic study which contributes with important insights regarding the process of individualisation among young Muslims in Norway, which also mirrors findings in studies of organised Muslim youth in other countries (e.g. Fadil 2008; Bendixsen; 2013). Jacobsen describes in her study a more complex dynamic between submission to external authorities and individual autonomy than the original thesis of individualisation captures. She argues that, despite their insistence on personal, reflexive choices, and the wide spectre of authoritative sources they relate to, the young Muslims' individual autonomy is limited by a normativisation of 'true Islam' as a new form of religious authority. Their emphasis on individual choice, she argues, 'points to a particular form of subjectivity which is shaped within contemporary ethics of authenticity and autonomy and simultaneously in relation to a

normative Islamic model of personhood, piety, and conduct' (Jacobsen 2011, 292–94). This dual model of subjectivation is, according to Jacobsen, what lies underneath the stresses and priorities of the young Muslims: 'the focus on consciousness, meaning, faith and conscience, the conceptualisation of religious community as individual adherence, the stress on the correspondence between inner and outer aspects of faith and the concern with a continual disciplining of, and work on, the self' (Jacobsen 2011, 358).

The tendency of individualisation combined with subjection to external authorities, or 'individualisation within and throughout the orthodoxy' (Fadil 2008, 43) appears as a central finding also in other contexts. Fadil (2008) finds in her study of second-generation Maghrebi Muslims in Belgium that the liberal epistemological premises of autonomy and authenticity structure the religious identities of her respondents (e.g., religious performance should be based on inner conviction rather than on external demands directly), and that this discourse is accompanied with one involving submission and disciplining of oneself according to the will of God, as formulated within the orthodox Islamic tradition (Fadil 2008, 172). Similarly, the Norwegian anthropologist Synnøve Bendixsen (2013) describes how young Muslim women, who are members of the largest Muslim youth organisation in Berlin, situate themselves within a normative Islamic framework, while remaining reflexive and creative in a 'neither pre-given nor purely individualized' way (Bendixsen 2013, 215). They remain within the orthodoxy, but choose between scholars and interpretations; assert personal willingness not to accept certain practices in their own life – however without contesting or de-legitimising the norm itself; and emphasise effort while allowing 'weakness' and 'imperfection' (ibid, 193-215).

On the other hand, there are also studies that confirm Cesari's (2003) postulation that the religious practice of Western Muslims is becoming increasingly secularised, liberal, and private. In the already mentioned study by Fadil (2008), for example, not all her respondents stay within the borders of Islamic orthodoxy. For some, the liberal ideal of unrestricted freedom vis-a-vis religious authorities is invoked to challenge the established orthodoxy and apply different measures of what counts as 'correct' Islamic practice than those authorised by institutions as the core of Islamic tradition (Fadil 2008, 172). Furthermore, Jeldtoft (2011; 2012) finds in her study of non-organised Muslim minorities (both young and adults) in Denmark and Germany that they overall subscribe to a liberal, pragmatic, inclusive and loosely defined 'Golden-rule Islam' which frames Islam as mainly, or really, concerning values that are, for the most, 'universal' (Jeldtoft 2012, 255). This Muslim identity, she finds,

is constructed around what is fundamentally good and bad, how to raise your children and how you treat other people. It is also inclusive in the sense that being Muslim does not depend upon specific practices or interpretations (Jeldtoft 2011, 1146).

Finally, there are also those who have argued that much of the literature is too simplistic in its categorisation of young Muslims as either individualised ‘within the orthodoxy’ (‘orthodox’) or disrupt from the orthodoxy (‘liberal’) and that we should attempt to capture relationships to Islamic authorities that are more complex and fluid (Otterbeck, 2013) or are situated ‘in-between’ positions of ‘literalism and ‘liberal reformism’ (Mandaville 2007, 113).

Moreover, while research on Islam in Europe has captured many of the overarching patterns regarding religiosity among young Muslims in Norway and Europe today, the present study addresses a lack of research regarding changes in discursive constructions of the transcendent itself (e.g., the divine, divine purpose, the hereafter). Roy’s (2004) postulation that there is minimal theological innovation among Muslims in the West may have something to it – if one’s is mapping the terrain of Muslim religiosity in the West with a broad pencil – but there *are* studies which point to changes in what counts as ‘Islamic’ beliefs (e.g. Jeldtoft 2011, 1143; Jacobsen 2011, 355–57). I propose that we need to look closer at social environments where such innovations are likely to take place, namely in those where various discourses regarding the transcendent are likely to meet and rub against each other in the lives of young Muslims such as in secular and religiously pluralistic contexts on the outskirts of, or outside of the Muslim communities they are in most cases *also* part of. How is Islam (re)constructed through engagement with multiple, perhaps competing, discourses on selfhood, morality, and transcendence in such environments?

2.4. The social contexts of the participants

The participants in this study are not recruited through Muslim organisations, which means that there is not *one* environment for me to observe and engage with that would have been particularly significant for how their religious identities are shaped, but rather many different social environments for me to be *told about* during the interviews. In the following, I shall try to give a brief overview of some of the many social contexts in which the participants are situated and which might be relevant for understanding the variety in their beliefs and

religious practices. Where it is relevant, I shall include information concerning these contextual factors in the participants' life in the analysis of their (articulated) beliefs and practices.

First, it should be said that the young Muslims who partake in the study are selected to mirror some of the variation that exists among Muslims in Norway in terms of ethno-cultural background. Young Muslims with Pakistani background are most heavily represented with three male and three female interviewees. Furthermore, there are two women with Somali background; one man and one woman with Kosovo-Albanian background; two women with Kurdish-Iraqi background; one man and one woman with Moroccan background; and finally, one woman with Afghani background. This means that the study also includes a large spectrum of cultural variation when it comes to forms of 'Muslim' socialisation in the participants' home environment. To exemplify, the interviewees with Pakistani, Somalian, and Moroccan parents were all sent to Koran school in childhood and early adulthood, while this was not the case for the women of Iraqi descent, nor the two participants with Kosovo-Albanian background. The latter four did also not have the same degree of religious transmittance at home, with parents described as either non-practicing or liberal in their practice. However, to exemplify how this factor does not *necessarily* determine the level and type of religious practice developed later in life, I should mention that the two participants with Kosovo-Albanian origin, who described their religious upbringing in much of the same way, have taken rather different directions later in life: one developed what can be described as a liberal and flexible religious identity, while the other's identity best can be described as devout and orthodox. Possibly more significant in this case, could be how the person with a dominantly orthodox identity (Leyla) grew up surrounded by other Muslims in a multicultural neighbourhood, while the person with a liberal religious identity (Reza) grew up in a secular environment dominated by ethnic Norwegians and non-Muslims. This brings me to the contextual factor which has stood out as particularly significant in this study, which is the young Muslims' different degrees of engagement with secular¹⁴, pluralistic¹⁵, and dominantly 'Muslim' social environments. Whereas some, like Reza, are socialised in highly secular social contexts outside of their family, perhaps as the only, or one among a few other Muslims

¹⁴ With 'secular' as a categorisation of a social context, I refer to a social space in which people are dominantly 'non-religious or have a mainly cultural or symbolic identification with a religious tradition.

¹⁵ With 'pluralistic' as a categorisation of a social context, I refer to the coexistence religions and non-religious life stances in the same social space.

and mainly ‘culturally Christians’ among the ethnic Norwegians, others have grown up surrounded by other Muslims and/or other ethnic and religious minorities. The character and composition of their current social networks also vary in terms of whether these are dominated by other Muslims, non-religious others (‘secular’) or are religiously diverse. Since all of the participants have yet to start a family, the closest group of friends are perhaps the most important others in their daily lives. The participants are also embedded in different social contexts with regard to type of education or work setting. While many are enrolled in academic studies at the university, in as different programs as medicine, law, Middle East-studies and religious studies, a few have completed their education. A few of them are employed in the field of social work.

Last, but not least, the participants have to a varying degree been formerly engaged in organised Muslim settings such as youth or student associations. While some have never set their foot in such environments, others have participated regularly for years, and have stopped attending mainly because they ‘grew out of it’ or became too busy with their work and studies. Some have actively distanced themselves from such milieus, and define their religious identity in opposition to them, while others have remaining ties to organised settings and still participate in them on occasion.

Chapter 3: Theoretical perspectives

3.1. Introduction

In this chapter I outline and discuss the theoretical perspectives which have informed and guided my interrogations and in relation to which the findings are interpreted and discussed in the articles as well as in the final discussion (chapter 6). Initially, the ‘grand theories’ on religion in modernity, such as secularisation and individualisation theories, heavily informed my interrogations, and during the first stage of analysis, the ‘subjectivisation thesis’ as outlined by Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead (2005), became an important lens through which I interpreted the material. In this chapter, I shall begin with a presentation of this theory as I understand it from Heelas’ and Woodhead’s work, and thereafter elaborate on the concepts and theories of individualisation, therapeuticisation, and spiritualisation, which I understand as interrelated aspects of the ‘subjective turn’ that Heelas and Woodhead describe as characteristic of the spiritual-religious domain today (see figure 1). The three tendencies

are interpreted as present in the material and are discussed respectively in the three articles. In the final part, I shall bring in a critical perspective on the theories presented thus far and show how they can be integrated into a discourse analytical framework.

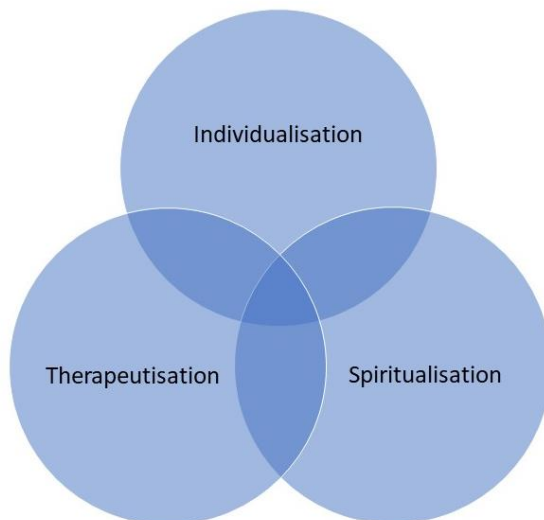


Figure 1 (Aarvik 2021): The subjective turn

3.2. The subjectivisation thesis

In their book *The spiritual revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (2005), Heelas and Woodhead propose that a theory of subjectivisation can explain the changes that are now taking place in the domain of the sacred (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 9-10), such as how we, parallel to the patterns of secularisation, in the sense that ‘religion’ becomes less significant in society and in people’s lives, find a significant increase in people who define themselves as ‘spiritual, but not religious’. The more general cultural process of subjectivisation, they argue, started long before the late modernity, but has increased due to later social developments. Here they draw on the work of philosopher Charles Taylor (1989; 1991) according to whom the subjectivisation of society refers to the many ways in which ‘the massive turn towards the self’ has shaped the culture in a host of ways since the late 1960’s but which has its origins in the 17th century-romanticism (see also Heelas 2008). We might, Taylor suggests, see the subjective turn as a breakthrough of an understanding of the self ‘in which each individual has their own, unique way of realizing their humanity, as opposed to confirming to any model imposed from outside, by society, the previous generation, or

religious or political authority' (Taylor 1991, 29). The ultimate source of truth and morality is in this context understood to be located 'within', and individuals are encouraged to ground their beliefs and convictions in 'subjective experience' rather than in collective tradition or pre-defined moral frameworks. The endeavour of discovering one's 'unique way' and become a self-directed subject is within this moral framework the individual's primary task. The ideal of living one's life *authentically*, that is, in accordance with one's 'true self' goes hand in hand with the ideal of *autonomy* (Taylor 1991, 28-29). The ideal of authenticity is however, as I understand it, more oriented around feelings, in accordance with the *romanticist* notion of individualism than the more rationalist principle of autonomy which basically means being free (from external constraints) to make one's own choices. The norm of authenticity, on the other hand, means that the individual is to search within the realm of his feelings, dispositions and desires, and find ways to articulate and express the (unique) he originality he discovers (Taylor 1991, 26-29). The difference from previous moral frameworks in which 'know thyself' has been a highly esteemed ideal, such as in the grand theistic traditions, is that the demands of self-truth and self-investigation are not regarded as *means* to be moral but have ultimate moral value in themselves (ibid, 64-65).

Heelas and Woodhead are not the first to point out that this sociocultural development, in which 'things centre more and more on the subject in a host of ways' (Taylor 1991, 81) also affects the domain of religion and the sacred (e.g., Luckmann 1970; Bellah 1985; Davie 1994; Wuthnow 1998; Roof 1999; Hervieu-Léger 2000; 2006). When individuals are encouraged, or sometimes forced, to ground their acting, thinking, and shaping of their life in their own subjectivity, it naturally also affects peoples' relationship to religious traditions and their ways of thinking and talking about the transcendent. The cultural turn towards the 'subjective inner life', they argue, means that approaches to the transcendent (or sacred, as they prefer) which place emphasis on the individual's inner life and his or her own choices and experiences will be growing, while those characterised by an orientation to an external, 'objective' sacred reality; a highest source of significance and authority in which being, morality and knowledge are anchored, are in decline. In other words, we should increasingly expect to find 'the sacred' being invoked in the cultivation of one's unique subjective life rather than in processes of conforming to external sources of transcendent meaning (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 3-6). Concordant with the ideals of what they describe as the 'subjective wellbeing culture', they argue that people now expect to have their *therapeutic needs* met when approaching the sacred, and that they are embracing those expressions of religion which

enable them to ‘monitor their progress in life by reference to the authenticity of personal, experientially informed knowledge’ (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 83). These postulations echoes Peter Berger’s (1967) early assessment that psychology would replace cosmology in the process of internal secularisation.

The way I understand the subjectivisation thesis from Heelas’ and Woodhead’s work, it describes several (interrelated) processes (see figure 1). The first is commonly referred to as individualisation and concerns the shift in *locus of authority* in moral-religious matters from external sources, institutions, and actors to the individual (see e.g. Hervieu-Léger 2000; 2006). The second concerns a shift in conceptualisations of the transcendent itself, and in the overarching ethos or moral project involved in having a relationship to the transcendent. This development is one in which the inner life and wellbeing of each person becomes of main locus of interest and concern, and in which the moral-religious project shifts from aiming to fulfil a moral standard derived from an external transcendent source to the aim of realising one’s unique and ‘true’ self. This development is connected to the popularisation and democratisation of psychology (e.g. Hervieu-Léger 2006, 64) and will be explored further under the heading of ‘therapeutisation’ below. While the processes of individualisation and therapeutisation are certainly overlapping and interconnected, they can be distinguished from one another to study and highlight different aspects of the material. Finally, Heelas and Woodhead are ultimately concerned with a shift they describe as ‘spirituality’ taking over for ‘religion’ as the dominant approach to the sacred (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 6-7). When discussing this tendency, which I call ‘spiritualisation’, I draw on Heelas’ and Woodhead’s (2010) later work where they elaborate on the features of contemporary spirituality more generally than in *The spiritual revolution* which is based on findings from Kendal in Britain, and also on other theorisations of contemporary spirituality such as that of Kelly Besecke (2001; 2007).

3.3. Individualisation of religion

Individualisation in the domain of religion refers to a shift in locus of authority in matters of truth and morality, from external to internal sources of legitimisation. In late modern societies where different frameworks of authority compete, individuals turn their gaze inward instead of outwards when seeking answers. The religious sphere becomes heterogenized, and the range of choices and possibilities broadens. Sociologist of religion Daniele Hervieu-Léger

(2000; 2006) describe how individuals in this context increasingly compose their own unique combination of beliefs and practices. She calls it *bricolage* when religious elements, sometimes from different traditions, are fused together with personal preferences, conviction, feelings, and context as the authoritative criteria. The distinct elements of a religious tradition (a doctrine, a ritual, a symbol) can then be ascribed with new meanings that differ from those produced and upheld by religious institutions. The ideal religious person in contemporary Western societies is thus completely self-directed and his religious practice an expression of his deepest feelings and convictions, whereas ways of being religious which demand conformity are dismissed as inauthentic (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 83). The ‘legitimising authority of a tradition’, or particular ‘chain of belief’ (Hervieu-Léger 2000, 82-83) can still be invoked, but is done so in apparently limitless ways depending on individual choice and degree of commitment (ibid, 165-67).

As we have already seen in chapter two, individualisation of religion may however take a different direction than what is described above. As Taylor (2008) points out, individualisation of religion does not have to lead to a self-enclosed form of religiosity – it is indeed possible to end up with a strong devotion to something beyond the self from the outset of an individualistic position. Our relation to the sacred, he reminds us, will ‘continue to be mediated by collective connections, which are obviously still powerful in the modern world’. Many people will find themselves joining extremely powerful religious communities, ‘because that’s where many people’s sense of the spiritual will lead them’ (Taylor 2008, 215–17; see also Hervieu-Léger 2006, 68).

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the thesis of individualisation has been key in discussing changes in Muslim faith and practice following the ‘deterritorialisation of Islam’ (Roy 2004). Here, the emphasis has been on the rupture of traditional structures of authority (see e.g. Mandaville 2007) and the increased agency of Muslim individuals vis-à-vis both the transmitted knowledge from parents and the more formal religious authorities in constructing their Muslim faith and identity. However, we have also seen that the democratisation of the Muslim religious sphere does not necessarily lead to a full transfer of authority to the individual, but equally often to submission to new forms of authorities such as online scholars, or to normative discourses in Muslim youth- or student organisations (Roy 2004; Mandaville 2007; Jacobsen 2011). We have also seen how various studies nuance the theory of individualisation as it relates to Muslim religiosity by pointing to a seemingly paradoxical

combination of individualisation and subjection to the Islamic orthodoxy (Amir-Moazami and Jouili 2006; Fadil 2008; Jacobsen 2011; Bendixsen 2013, Jouili 2015).

3.4. Therapeutisation of religion

A driving force behind the subjective turn is arguably the enormous impact of the dissemination and popularisation of psychology on Western societies and culture. The ‘triumph of the therapeutic’ (Rieff, 1987), refers to how a psychological way of thinking about man in society has evolved during the latter half of the twentieth century, to the point of having become ‘a monotheistic ontology of late modernity (cf. Madsen 2018, 16). Ordinary people now reflect upon themselves and their environment in accordance with psychological models (de Vos 2012) and the therapeutic meaning system has become part of everyday life to such a degree that it is now taken for granted (cf. Illouz 2008). While older moral orders looked to a transcendent being, a covenantal community, natural law, or divine reason to provide the culture’s moral boundaries, a ‘therapeutic ethos’ has established the self as the fundamental touchstone of culture in late modernity (Nolan 1998 in Madsen 2018, 57). According to the Norwegian philosopher Ole Jacob Madsen (2014; 2018), the therapeutic ethos revolves around the notion that successful self-realisation happens through the experience of self-esteem (a conscious feeling of one’s own worth) and self-actualisation (liberation from ‘external’ constraints and fulfilment of the demands of the ‘emotive self’) (Madsen 2018, 23-24).

Various scholars of religion have connected this development to changes in religious beliefs and practices, particularly in North-America (Bellah 1985; Roof 1999; Smith and Denton 2005), but also in Europe (Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Hervieu-Léger 2006; Hovi 2018). The literature on therapeutisation of religion points, as I read it, to how arguments for being religious increasingly refers to ‘therapeutic’ effects and benefits; that the individual’s inner experience and transformation becomes the centre of religious practice; and, that the notion of self-realisation as ‘authentic expression’ is adopted. Adherence to dogma becomes less important or are changed in the direction of beliefs that support the individual’s search for wellbeing and self-actualisation (e.g., Hervieu-Léger 2006, 64–65). For instance, instead of provoking a sense of guilt, many Christian denominations now prefer to speak of health and authenticity, or of illness or pain instead of sin (Hovi 2018, 66), and concerns with the afterlife give way to a more secular worldview in which salvation take the form of self-

fulfillment in the present life (Repstad 2020, 128; Madsen 2018, 57, 72). Beliefs concerning the divine are also affected. Sociologists Christian Smith and Melinda L. Denton (2005) find for example in their study of religiosity among American youth that the most common worldview is best described as a ‘moralistic therapeutic Deism’ in which the main concerns are fulfilment and happiness in the present life. The role of God is that of helper, advice-giver or ‘cosmic therapist’ (Smith and Denton 2005, 162–64). Similar beliefs are described by Irene Trysnes (2017) in a study of active Christian youth in the Norwegian context. Hervieu-Léger (2006, 64-65) calls it ‘theological minimalism’ when the relation with transcendence is reduced to ‘mere emotional and personalised closeness experienced with the divine’. Referring to Taylor (1989) she reminds us, however, that the development by which people have come to think of themselves as endowed with an inner life, and of their presence in the world no longer in a context of the order of things or of divine will, but rather of a search for happiness and wellbeing’ is not simply a product of postmodernism, but a culmination of a long process with roots back in the spiritual movements of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries which invented ‘the friendly God’. Nonetheless, she remarks, the dynamic has undergone a new development with the coming of a ‘psychological modernity’ (Baudrillard) and the ‘highly contemporary reign of concern for the self’ (Hervieu-Léger 2006, 64).

Hervieu-Léger (2006) also reminds us that, especially within organised religious communities, the tendencies described here do not necessarily involve a full shift of authority to the individual, but can instead be accompanied with a strong commitment to ‘shared beliefs’ (Hervieu-Léger 2006, 68). The spirituality within these communities may very well centre on experience and healing, as do many Evangelical Christian strands (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 124; Hovi 2018), but the subjective experiences in focus are then not primarily associated with ‘inner-directed self-expression’ but framed as provided by God and validated (sometimes demanded) by scriptural authority (Heelas 2008, 55). Features of therapeutisation accompanied with commitment to shared beliefs have also been described in studies of contemporary Muslim religiosity. Roy (2004) points for example to how Islamic revivalism goes hand in hand with the modern ‘culture of the self’ and that the ‘return to Islam’ among ‘born-again-Muslims’ often is equated with a sort of worldly salvation: to be at peace, to feel good, to obtain self-esteem and dignity. He observes how Islam is presented in all kinds of contemporary fora as the ‘cure for everything’ – from finding peace and eliminate suffering, to more mundane concerns such as keeping fit. However, he also notes modern psychological conception of the self in these environments is melding with a Koranic moral

conception of successful self-realisation: the starting point of failure and suffering is forgetting and neglecting God and his commands (Roy 2004, 185, 193–94).

In sum, the tendency of therapeutisation represent a change in ways of thinking and talking about the transcendent, including the moral project of the religious person. When the foundation for religious practice becomes the goal of maximise subjective wellbeing, the fulfilment of rituals and moral principles for their own sake becomes less imperative. While religious language also previously has focused on ‘therapeutic’ aspects of beliefs and practices, such as role of the divine in providing comfort and guidance (Carbine 1980), what is new is the extent to which such concerns are now placed in the foreground as their *raison d'être*, as well as the vocabularies that are used to conceptualise them. Again, talk of ‘healing’ effects of Muslim beliefs and practices for the individual is not new to the Islamic tradition (see e.g. Werbner 2003), but the tendency to foreground this aspect in ‘mainstream’ Islam, as well as the adoption of a psychological language, appears more recent.

3.5. From religion to spirituality

As we have seen, Heelas and Woodhead (2005, 3) understand ‘spirituality’ as a mode of belief and practice that differs from ‘religion’ and argue that the former is taking over for the latter as the preferred approach to the sacred in late modern societies. Although such a clear distinction between spirituality and religion as different phenomena can be criticised (see 1.6.4.), the categories do indicate some differences in discursive repertoires, or ways to talk about the transcendent, which is helpful for the subsequent analysis and which I will highlight here. The research on ‘spirituality’ in the sociology of religion is far too comprehensive to cover here, but I shall highlight some main features that are described and discussed across a number of sources.

Heelas and Woodhead study spirituality and religion in the context of the ‘holistic milieu’ and the ‘congregational domain’ in Kendal, Britain, and derive their conclusions from a comparison between these. They do not separate between New Age (Heelas 1996) and holistic, ‘inner-life’ spirituality, but see the latter as a continuation and broadening of the former. Others have however pointed to forms of spirituality which do not necessarily fit the New Age category or the ‘holistic’ profile described in Heelas’ and Woodhead’s work (Botvar 2007; Botvar and Henriksen 2010). According to Woodhead (2010, 37-38), the subjective concern in the holistic milieu is consistently articulated in terms of a ‘holistic’

concern with (a) body, mind and spirit *as a whole* and (b) the self in relation to greater wholes, ranging from intimate others to the *whole* universe, which was why they used the terms ‘subjective-life spirituality’, and ‘holistic spirituality’ as synonyms for ‘spirituality’ (see also Heelas 2008, 34). Moreover, the shift to spirituality is described by Heelas and Woodhead as a shift from sacralisation of an external source of significance and authority to a sacralisation of the self and the inner life (Heelas and Woodhead 2005, 6-7). They describe how this form of spirituality centers around the cultivation of subjective wellbeing (and addressing of ill-being), but underline that this does not exclude practical care for *others* in addition to the self (ibid; see also Heelas 2008, 55). The practices described in their study as part of the ‘holistic milieu’ range from yoga and meditation to reiki-healing and homeopathy (Heelas and Woodhead, 2005, 24). The divine is within this spiritual framework understood as an abstract, impersonal life force that resides within the self – *and* in the universe, not as a personal (theistic) God (ibid). Nor does it concern itself, as does religious traditions, with a shared vision of truth and the good life that is grounded in the past, but sacralises the unique, the subjective, and the authority that comes from the depths of each person’s experience (Heelas 2008, 52).

According to the Norwegian sociologist of religion Pål Kjetil Botvar (2007), there is a broader form of spirituality in the Norwegian context which can be distinguished from the more specific form of (holistic) spirituality described by Heelas and Woodhead. He defines spirituality as an active concern with and search for a ‘deeper and richer’ spiritual life which *largely* (but not only) takes place outside of religious traditions and communities (Botvar 2007, 98). In the Norwegian context, there has been quite a few studies of New Age and the ‘new religiosity’ (e.g. Kalvig 2012; 2015; Gilhus and Mikaelsson 2015; Gilhus et al. 2017), but less research on the broader, more ‘fuzzy’ expressions of spirituality described by Botvar. In another analysis of the religious-spiritual landscape in the Norwegian population conducted by Botvar together with Jan-Olav Henriksen (2010) based on data from a national survey from 2008, they describe a mode of spirituality that differs from both traditional adherence to the Christian tradition *and* from New Age/holistic spirituality, and which according to them can be situated in the ‘middle-ground’ between religion and spirituality. While New agers or holistic believers marks a clear distancing from the official dogma of Christianity (Heelas and Woodhead 2005; Woodhead 2010, 38), the middle-ground believers described by Botvar and Henriksen have a more inclusive relationship to the church and mix a little bit from here and there – both from the Protestant Christian repertoire and from other repertoires in the culture

associated with ‘inner-life spirituality’ (Botvar and Henriksen 2010, 312; see also Furseth 2006). They argue that the Nordic context differ from that of Britain in that it has had a liberal and flexible folk-church-religiosity which has allowed space for experimentation with different forms of religious lives, and that the marking of a clear distinction to other types of religious identities therefore is less important (Botvar and Henriksen 2010, 313).

Another relevant concept here is that of ‘reflexive spirituality’ which was developed in the North-American context and first used by Wade Clarke Roof (1999) to describe an ‘intentional, deliberate, self-directed approach to the cultivation of religious meaning’, which can also be found *within* some religious communities. The concept is developed in a cultural direction by Kelly Besecke (2001; 2007) who underlines that reflexive spirituality is not so much a personal construction of religious meaning, as a way that people talk to each other about transcendent meaning (Besecke 2007, 171). She uses it to refer to a construction of religious meaning which is reflexive in the sense that it builds on the awareness of the *plurality* of religious meaning – a plurality which is not only allowed but *integrated* in the spiritual outlook and language (ibid). Moreover, according to Besecke (2007, 176), this form of spirituality is highly concerned with individual growth and development, but also *cultural project* aimed at producing and disseminating a more ‘sophisticated’ way of talking about transcendent meaning in late modern rationalistic and secular contexts. It critiques both religious and secular literalism, and promotes an open, symbolic consciousness with the use of abstract, metaphorical, ‘universalistic’ language in the interpretation of the sacred. Ideas about the divine and the afterlife are spoken about in abstract terms that are loose enough to capture a variety of interpretations. ‘Reflexive spiritualists’ embrace religious and epistemological pluralism and cultivate interest in, and acceptance of, a variety of religious and secular traditions (Besecke 2007, 181). They embrace scientific knowledge but are critical of its potential to ‘close off’ complimentary meaning-seeking which includes the possibility of ‘transcendent truths’ (ibid, 178, 180). This characterisation of reflexive spirituality sits well with Botvar’s (2007) description of an ongoing quest for a ‘deeper and richer spiritual life’, and my assumption is that reflexive spirituality could also be a valid characterisation of some of those captured in Henriksen and Botvars’ (2010) study of the Norwegian context. It is also a characterisation that fits well with some forms of spirituality described in Muslim contexts, such as in Mark Sedgwick’s description of Western Sufism in which perennialism and universalism are key terms (Sedgwick 2017, 5-7; see also Farstad 2017).

Finally, it should be mentioned here that there are also other forms of spirituality and/or religiosity on the contemporary arena that differ from the subjective inner-life and wellbeing-focus described in Heelas' and Woodhead's (2005) study. Heelas describes for example in his later work a form of spirituality he calls 'the spirituality of theistic humanism' which builds on many of the same (liberal, humanistic) values and premises but differs from the former in that the humanistic values are grounded in a transcendent theistic godhead and that the imperative of *societal* engagement is foregrounded (Heelas 2008, 55–56; see also Clarke 2006 on 'engaged spirituality'). This form of spirituality can also be found *within* religious traditions and communities. Within the Muslim discursive field, it resembles the type of spirituality found among adherents of 'progressive Islam' (Duderija 2017) but an integration of Islamic beliefs and practices and the human rights discourse and activism is also central in more 'mainstream' Muslims communities (see e.g. Karagiannis 2017).

3.6. Towards a discourse analytical approach

In this section, I shall highlight a point of critique towards the theories presented so far and argue for why a discourse analytical approach can be fruitful to combine with the theories described above. In so doing, I am highly indebted to the work of Fairclough (1992; 2001), Fadil (2008), and discourse theorists Marianne Jørgensen and Louise Phillips (2002). I will start by noting that the concept and theory of individualisation can be misleading in that it often seems to build on the assumption that a shift is taking place from the individual being directed by external structures and forces, to believing and behaving in accordance with one's own 'subjectivity'. Altglas and Wood (2018, 2) are among those who have criticised sociologists of religion for using theories of individualisation in ways that neglect the situatedness of 'subjectivity' in social contexts and construct a false antinomy between agency and non-agency, and between subjective and external authority. In line with this, I hold that both an explicit adherence to externally defined 'truths and essentials' and a more individualised religious stance are governed by social structures *and* involve the exercising of agency (Fairclough). Since the individual always is looking at the world from a position of subjectivity, it is rather a question of what kind of discourses and social groups and relationships that this subjectivity is informed by and oriented towards. As shown in section 1.6.1, my research perspective builds on the premise that individuals are always subject to

power in one form or the other. These might be subtle forms of power that are not grounded in or legitimised by a transcendental order, and they might be understood as contingent and historical rather than absolute and necessary, but they are nonetheless structures which people are subjected to. We might for example consider the ways that peoples' sensorium constantly is spoken to and stimulated by social and cultural agents through the omnipresence of visual and audible media as a 'soft' form of power that are working on the subject (cf. Roeland 2009, 52–53). This is where the approach of discourse analysis becomes helpful. From this research perspective, we concern ourselves with the ways in which human behaviour, aspiration and desires are shaped within a 'discursive webs of power' that operate through the medical apparatus, media, educational systems, social relationships etc., and invites subjects to discipline themselves according to specific notions of selfhood and fulfilment (cf. Fadil 2008, 58). Religious individualisation is then not understood as an increased capacity to construct and live one's religiosity 'freely' but acknowledges that even the most individualised forms of religious belief and practice involve subjection to norms and are shaped by available (and dominant) discourses in a given society and culture (e.g. the liberal moral discourse). Or with Fadil's (2008) words, religious individualisation is a particular form of (self-)governance which is concordant with a liberal discursive register where vocabularies like *autonomy* or *authenticity* prevail (Fadil 2008, 254). In an 'individualised' society, she argues, these vocabularies become the preferential discursive mode throughout which religious subjectivities are regulated and shaped (ibid, 107). In line with this, we should also consider that the inhabiting of religious norms in a non-liberal manner can be a way of exercising one's agency. As Saba Mahmood (2005) has argued convincingly, we might benefit from conceptualise agency different from the liberal tradition which has a tendency to universalise the desire for unrestricted freedom through autonomy, and acknowledge that when people choose to subordinate themselves to a 'higher authority' and inhabit religious norm, they are simply adhering to a different set of values, ideas, and vocabularies concerning selfhood and fulfilment than those of the liberal tradition (Mahmood 2005, 15; see also Amir-Moazami and Salvatore 2003, 53; Fadil 2008, 248).

Considering these insights, I argue that a fruitful way to investigate the extent and forms of religious individualisation among young Muslims (in Norway) would be to determine the kind of discursive vocabularies and premises that indicate religious individualisation, as Fadil (2008) has already done, and then look at whether or not these vocabularies are dominant in relation to other (non-liberal, non-individualistic) vocabularies

and premises. Furthermore, the theories of 'therapeutisation' and 'spiritualisation' should be 'translated' to the language of discourse analysis, which in this case simply means that they concern changes in religious *language*, or in ways of conceptualising the transcendent. In chapter one, I outlined what is implied in taking a discursive analytical approach to the study of beliefs and practices, so I will not repeat those definitions here but instead elaborate on *how* I have integrated other social theories with a discourse analytical perspective.

First, I rely on Fairclough's (2001, 21) differentiation between discursive practice and social practice (the background for discursive practice). I consider this an analytical, rather than ontological, distinction between the discursive and the non-discursive, as an ontological distinction would underplay the role of discourse (the representation of social practice in meaning) as a constitutive dimension of any social practice (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 158-63). In other words, I treat discursive practice as analytically distinct from the non-linguistic aspects of social practice, while acknowledging that the relation between language use and social reality is dialectic (Fairclough 1992, 72, 80). This means that the theories outlined so far serve both as a preliminary understanding of the field and provides cues as to what discourses that are likely to be found in the young Muslims' discursive practice. Based on previous research on religious beliefs and practices among young Muslims in Norway and Europe, I knew for example that there was a likelihood of finding a convergence between the orthodox Islamic discourse and the liberal moral discourse in the young Muslims' accounts. In sum, the discourse analytical perspective means that I conceptualise the 'subjective turn' on the religious arena as specific vocabularies and premises (those of the liberal, therapeutic, spiritual discourses) becoming authoritative in the shaping of peoples' beliefs and practices, and that I study how these are negotiated in relation to discourses that are (and have been) dominant in the (intersecting) field of Islamic discourses. As previously underlined, I am not only interested in contemporary discourses on Islam, but also in how these relate to other 'competing' discourses regarding the transcendent.

Chapter 4: Methodological and ethical considerations

4.1. Ontological and epistemological perspectives

The perspective from which I study the young Muslims' articulations of their beliefs and practices is one of moderate social constructivism. This means that I view reality as at least partly constituted by discourse. As articulated by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, 178), this does not mean that the social world is not *real*, as 'the constituted social world provides conditions of possibility for action and produces effects in just as firm a way as the physical world'. Epistemologically, this means that I am not concerned with moving closer to a 'universal truth' as I believe there are no 'objective' criteria by which to determine this, but rather acknowledge that what counts as scientific 'truth' is always relative and dependent on community-specific criteria (Guba and Lincoln 2005). As researchers, we produce knowledge that can be validated by other participants in the scientific discourse of which we are part, and our truth claims are epistemically sound if they are based on evidence which is acceptable to the community, and if the community is open to investigating the claim and its evidence in an openly critical manner' (ibid).

The acknowledgement of the discursive aspect of knowledge-production pertains to how I view both my method for data collection, the process of analysis, and the theories I use. Regarding the latter, I acknowledge that even if there are some (relative) agreements on how to study social reality within the research community of social researchers, this knowledge too is historically, socially, and culturally situated. Hence, while I allow myself to build on knowledge that has crystallised itself as valid within sociological and anthropological discourses over time, I simultaneously remain open to scrutinise and challenge even the most fundamental assumptions within these 'discursive traditions' (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 178). The social constructivist perspective also means that I approach the phenomena under the study, even though they concern the life-worlds of individuals, as a social practice. I view the participants as actively constructing their world through the discourses that are available and dominant in the (continually changing) social context they are situated in. They shape their identities and ascribe meaning to the world through discourses that are socially constructed *for* them, but which they also have the opportunity to change by arranging and combining in new ways (Fariclough 1992; Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 73). Correspondingly, I do not regard the method of interviewing as a search-and-discovery mission concerned with maximising the flow of valid and reliable information that resides inside within the interviewee's mind – with the goal of eliminating possible sources of bias and misunderstanding, but as a social encounter in which knowledge is jointly constructed by the interviewer and the interviewee (Brinkmann 2013, 24–25).

When acknowledging that social research is a discourse like any other representation of the world, we must also scrutinise our own ‘naturalised’ scientific assumptions about the world (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 178). A relevant example of this would be the already mentioned exposition of Saba Mahmood (2005) on how the concepts of agency and non-agency have been discursively constructed in the liberal tradition in a way that does not allow us to capture ‘non-liberal’ forms of agency which do not take the ideal of freedom through autonomy for granted (see 3.6). Finally, and connected to this, we should take responsibility for the constitutive effect that knowledge-production has in the world and be as transparent as possible regarding our epistemic interest and perspectives, and make clear that the particular way we represent the social world we study is just one among other possible representations – thus inviting a further discussion (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 205).

4.2. Data collection

4.2.1. Method: the semi-structured interview

With the aim of studying articulations of beliefs and practices among young Muslims in Norway and how these connect to dominant discourses in the socio-cultural context in which they are situated, a qualitative interview-approach would offer me the opportunity to capture the many nuances, complexities and particularities involved in such practice. The individual, semi-structured ‘life-world interview’, which has the purpose of obtaining detailed descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning (and form) of the described phenomena (Kvale 2007, 8), provided a suitable method. The semi-structured form of interviewing gives the researcher opportunity to delimit the knowledge construction to that which is (more or less) relevant to the research questions and thereby obtain a rich and concentrated set of data, while simultaneously remaining open to following the interviewee where she or he wants to go (Brinkmann 2013, 21, 27-28). The setting of a one-to-one interview, given that the interviewer manages to build trust, also provide the opportunity to explore personal and sensitive topics.

The interviews involve a few different approaches to knowledge-production. The first part of the interview is based on the interviewee being invited to provide an account of his or

her life-story from childhood to the present day, with focus on the aspect of religion. This comes relatively close to the life-story interview, albeit with a particular focus on the *religious* aspect of the narrator's life (Brinkmann 2013, 20). This approach differs from the remaining part of the interview which take the form of a more structured conversation with questions inviting the interviewees to reflect on and make argumentative statements regarding their beliefs and practices today (see interview guide). The two approaches are overlapping in that the participants' life-narratives often move into argumentative statements, while 'storied accounts' also often appeared in the more structured part of the interview. According to Uwe Flick (2007), combining a narrative approach with topic-centred interviewing has the advantage of generating different types of knowledge which complement each other. While the 'narrative-episodic' knowledge is oriented to situations and their context and progress, the 'semantic-conceptual' knowledge is more abstract, generalised, decontextualised and oriented to concepts, definitions, and relations (Flick 2007, 55–57). Flick argues that this can be viewed as a form of 'within-method triangulation' which enhances the quality of research. An example from the present study could be how stories of encounters with the divine would provide knowledge concerning the interviewees' conceptions of 'God' which would complement the articulations produced in answer to questions such as 'How would you describe God?'. Moreover, as narrating is a way of organising human experiences and give them meaning in light of a greater (temporally) whole, aspects of *how* the young Muslims chose to narrate their religious trajectory could also be studied. Do they for example frame their religious trajectory as a gradually widening of perspective, from a distinct Muslim identity towards a more inclusive or pluralistic 'spiritual orientation? Is it a story of a 'return to Islam' – a more serious commitment to the religion in one's everyday life? Or is it rather a story of decline, of religion becoming gradually less important? Life-stories might also reveal something about how the interviewee position him- or herself in relation to other people such as classmates, parents, siblings, religious authorities, or 'other Muslims' in general. Finally, stories also often provide better access to emotions than do argumentative statements and might as such reveal something about the salience and significance of the belief or practice in question. Although I have not analysed the plot and structures within the interviewees' stories systematically as in narrative analysis, attention to these aspects has been part of the analytical repertoire (Kvale 2007, 116).

Although the interviews are a situated social interaction and should be analysed as such, I follow Brinkmann (2013, 39–42) in that they are not *only* that, but also a way of

acquiring knowledge about the young Muslim' discursive practice outside of that setting. While it was my clear impression that the interviewees strove to be sincere and to put their views and experiences into words as accurate as possible, I acknowledge that their answers are 'normatively oriented to and designed for the questions that occasion them' (Talmy 2010, 136). What is held back or shared by the interviewee also depend on factors such as the emotional state of the interviewer and interviewee, the atmosphere, the relational dynamic, etc. However, while we cannot escape the condition that constructions of identity and meaning are always done in relation to an 'audience', which in this case includes me as a researcher, this does not mean that these provide *no* valid knowledge about the individual's experiences and views also outside of that setting (Brinkmann 2013, 39–40). I also argue that who or what I represent to the interviewees is likely to not be that different from voices and perspectives they normally construct their religiosity in dialogue with. Nonetheless, the various ways in which the data could have been affected by positionality as researcher are considered reflexively throughout the whole process of analysis.

In line with the social constructivist perspective, I also acknowledge that what is articulated in the interaction of the interview *does* something to the world (Fairclough 1992, 63). The interviews are not understood as a 'reflection' of the individual's experience but are in themselves part of the young Muslims' self-fashioning process (see also chapter 1.6.2).

4.2.2. Sampling and criteria

The aim of the study was to map what is going on (discursively) in the domain of belief and religious practice among young Muslims who would most likely not be included if the outset of the study was a mosque or another Muslim youth/student organisation. Hence, the participants were recruited through my own (secondary) network such as through suggestions from friends, and acquaintances from voluntary work. A few were recruited at an event related to minority-issues (but not specifically for Muslims), and one through a blog which was also related to such issues. The rest, about half of the fifteen interviewees, were recruited through 'snowball sampling' (Morgan 2008, 800). Since the latter strategy can lead to an over-representation of participants in the same social environment, I did not include more than two people who knew each other.

The criteria for participating, beside not being active in a particular mosque or Muslim organisation, were the following: identifying as a (Sunni) Muslim, being second-generation migrant (or immigrated at a young age) and being in the age group 20–32 (initially 30). A final criterion was, due to the topic of study, that the participants were not only Muslim ‘in the name’, or ‘culturally’, but had a minimum of belief in God and in Islam as embodying truth and divine guidance. Moreover, I employed a strategy of *maximum variety sampling* (Morgan 2008, 799) with the aim of maximising the variety of ethno-cultural backgrounds, age, gender, previous engagement in organised Muslim settings, etc. Both genders are represented, however, only one third of the fifteen interviewees are men, something which resulted in more reflections on articulated beliefs and practices among young Muslim women than men. Finally, although not an initial criterion, all the recruited participants had completed secondary education and were enrolled in or had completed higher education, which means that the findings discussed primarily concerns this particular segment of young Muslims in Norway.

The choice of delimiting the study to encompass only Norwegian-born descendants of migrants from Muslim countries (or who immigrated at a young age) was made in order to narrow down the scope of the study and focus on young Muslims who, despite their different ethno-cultural origins have the common experience of growing up as a religious minority in a secular-pluralistic context. I was interested in negotiation processes around the aspect of religion and spirituality among individuals who are socialised both with Islam as a main frame of reference *and* within in a liberal-secular discursive frame. The inclusion of those who had migrated with their parents before the age of seven was made based on the assumption that they shared this experience with the Norwegian-born participants. The decision to include only Sunni Muslims was based on the aim of delimiting the study to those who related more or less to the same set of Islamic dogma and who did not have an additional experience of being a ‘minority within the minority’ as do Shia and Ahmadiyya Muslims in Norway. Some of the same reasoning applies to the choice of delimiting the city of residence to Oslo (in addition to practical reasons). Although not all the participants grew up in the capital, they share the common experience of being situated in the most diverse and pluralistic city in the country – a factor I assumed would be one of those affecting their beliefs and practices. Finally, the reasoning behind the chosen age span was to focus on young Muslims who have had the opportunity to make some choices and reflect on how they wanted to live their life after secondary education (which ends at the age of 18–19 in Norway) which marks

a point of transition to independent adulthood in Norway, but who have not yet taken on the responsibilities involved in starting a family.

The process of recruiting the participants was not without effort. It was also unstructured in that I tried my luck here and there based on the contact info I received from my network. Some of the recruited participants were initially reluctant to participate due to a weariness of the whole Islam-debate and the ‘never-ending’ focus on that aspect of their identity, and that they therefore were reluctant to participate. Others doubted their own representativeness or ability to contribute anything of value since they were ‘not really that practicing’. Some decided to participate after hearing more about the study’s purpose of ensuring a broader representation of ways to be ‘Muslim’ in Norway, while others politely declined. Another challenge I encountered in the recruitment process was the question of who should qualify as ‘non-organised’. Since I discuss this issue both in chapter one and six, it is sufficient to say here that many of the young Muslims who were recruited, despite identifying as *not* active in a particular mosque or organisation, turned out to have various forms of connections to organised settings which surfaced during the interviews. These include occasional participation, having been formerly active in such settings and still having social links to them, and the following of online scholars which arguably represent a new form of ‘organised’ Islam. Despite being methodologically fruitful (Jeldtoft and Nielsen 2012), the organised/non-organised distinction therefore became less important than anticipated – or at least in a different way (see chapter 6.6.). Although the study concerns only young Muslims who are *not presently active* in a Muslim organisation, I refer to them mostly as ‘young Muslims’ and argue that they in fact represent the majority of young Muslims in Norway who are situated somewhere ‘in-between’ the categories of organised and non-organised.

4.2.3. The interviews

The interviews were conducted between January 2017 and June 2018 in quiet corners of cafés around the city centre. The type of location was chosen to provide an easily accessible, neutral space with a somewhat familiar and relaxed atmosphere. These concerns outweighed the slight possibility that someone in the respective cafés could be able to listen in on the conversation, as well as the potential of noise in the background of recordings. Since we usually were able to find spots where it would be hard to listen in, and which the interviewee approved of, I believe that the locations were suitable for the task. Conducting the interviews

over coffee in a location that would feel relatively familiar and ‘normal’ to the interviewees was thought to ensure that they felt less like ‘an insect under the microscope’ (cf. Sennett 2004) and thus also to elicit more authentic sharing.

All the interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder. On average, they last about 90 minutes. I used an interview-guide to structure with topics I wanted to cover as well as possible questions (see appendix). As mentioned, I started by asking the interviewee to tell me about his or her life with focus on the area of religion. I encouraged them to include people, relationships, events, and episodes that had been important for their religious trajectory. I asked follow-up questions to fill out the picture and probed for further information if they touched upon something of interest. The second phase of the interview aimed at collecting reflections, arguments and descriptions relating to the interviewee’s current beliefs and practices and understanding of Islam. Most of the questions were, despite an underlying aim of covering their relationship to main Islamic tenets and pillars, usually framed in a more open and non-dogmatic manner in the language of universal existential questions. The interview guide was formulated to cover the foundational aspects of an individual’s ‘worldview’ such as what exists/is real (ontology); how do we know what is true (epistemology); what is the good that should we strive for (axiology), what actions should we take (praxeology); where do we come from and where are we going (cosmology) (Taves et al. 2018). I was aware that the interviewees’ answers to these questions *could*, but not necessarily would, be informed by formalised Islamic discourses, and made efforts not to steer them too much in that direction.

Furthermore, I pursued a conversational form more than that of a formal interview based on the idea that it would elicit more open sharing. This also meant that I shared some things about myself if it felt natural and sometimes allowed myself to ponder out loud together with some the more assertive interviewees whom I did not fear steering (they would protest to my assumptions and interpretations if I did not get it right). The ethical dilemmas pertaining to this somewhat informal style of interviewing will be discussed further in chapter 4.4.

All the fifteen recorded interviews were transcribed in totality to a written format. Due to some unforeseen issues, I was forced to employ two research assistants to transcribe most of the recorded interviews. Although this was not ideal since I missed the opportunity to analyse the material while I was transcribing, I believe that I ensured the quality of the transcription by instructing the assistants to not only transcribe every word, but also include

pauses, laughing, body mimic (if striking), and to mark the precise time of the recording if there were any words or sentences they could not distinguish properly, so that I could go back and listen to that part of the record.

4.3. Methods of analysis

4.3.1. Introduction

The analytical process has been a hermeneutical, organic process rather than strictly systematic one (Kvale 2007, 115). In the more systematic stage of analysis (interpretation and categorisation was a constant endeavour throughout the research process), the aim was to narrow down the theoretical and empirical focus, or, in other words, to figure out what I could and would like to say something about, and through what analytical/theoretical lenses. Since the findings were going to be disseminated in three separate articles rather than in a monograph, an additional aim was to distinguish three ‘main’ themes of findings which would be further analysed and discussed in each article.

Concordant with the scientific worldview described in 4.1, the research logic underlying the whole process of analysis is one of abduction. This approach to knowledge production that occupies the middle ground between induction and deduction). In practice, however, the abductive research process is a mix of inductive, abductive, and deductive sub-processes which can be identified in different phases of the research process (Timmermans and Tavory 2012).

4.3.2. Analytical strategies

The initial analytical strategy was theme-centred (e.g., Kvale 2007). I used computer-based coding (Nvivo software) to label different sections and statements in the interviews thematically. After having distinguished salient and recurring themes across the material, I began to view these in light of previous research and theorizing in the field in order to decide what tendencies to explore further. This stage was abductive in that I went back and forth between theory, previous research, and the empirical data. I decided on three main topics which were further explored and discussed in each of the three articles: (1) discourses on moral authority in the young Muslims’ articulations and legitimisations of their beliefs and

practices, (2) the finding of a ‘therapeutic’ religious vocabulary, and (3) the re-configurations of Islamic dogma in the direction of ‘contemporary ‘spirituality’ among some of the interviewees. The next stage was more deductive in the sense that I analysed the data from specific theoretical perspectives and tested different hypotheses, while simultaneously remaining open to the empirical data challenging those theories.

Later in the analytical process, I started to employ a more discourse analytical approach. This meant that I started paying attention to how different discourses I distinguished based on previous literature were combined and negotiated in relation to each other in the participants’ accounts and connected these to the ‘tendencies’ I had already identified as present in the material. The third article, which was published first, does not apply this explicit discourse analytical lens, but still pays attention to the combination and integration of different discourses. As we have seen, Fairclough (1992, 56) says that discourses should be analysed at three levels: the interpersonal, the institutional and the societal, and that they have three constituting effects, namely of subject positions, social relations, and systems of knowledge and belief (ibid, 8, 10, 64). In order to grasp the explanatory connections between these layers of discourse, he argues, we should analyse (1) the way texts are put together (linguistic practice), (2) the social structures and struggles in which they are embedded, and (3) the way that they are mediated through processes of production, distribution and consumption (the discursive practice) (Fairclough 1992, 72, 80). In practice, I started applied this lens to the three themes I had identified as prominent in the material and to investigate them anew with a different conceptual vocabulary, including for example ‘subject positions’, ‘discursive repertoires’ and ‘interdiscursivity’ (Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 158-63). It also meant that I approached the descriptions of the sociocultural tendencies such as that of therapeutisation of religion as a change in *religious discourse*.

4.4. Ethical considerations

4.4.1. Consent and confidentiality

While interviewing and interpreting people involves many moral aspects, the most fundamental requirements are to ensure the subjects’ informed consent to participate in the study and the confidentiality of the subjects (Kvale 2007, 26). Before collecting any data, I notified Norwegian Data Protection Services (NSD) and gained the necessary approval for the

study. This meant that procedures on recruiting participants and obtaining consent, information letter, interview guide, and the data security of the material were scrutinised. I have also consulted the guidelines for research ethics provided by The National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences (NESH) and extensive literature on the subject.

To ensure that participation in the study was voluntary and based on sufficient information, all participants received a written letter with information about the project and the purpose of the interview and signed an information consent statement. The right to withdraw from the project at any time was underlined.

The fact that religious views are labelled as sensitive information by NSD implies that one should be extra careful about ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants. Although the Muslim minority in Oslo is relatively large and widespread, and not transparent in that sense, certain ethnic minorities which are represented in the sample, are smaller in size which means that one could be more easily recognized. To ensure the least possible potential harm to participants (Kvale 2007, 28), anonymity was secured by replacing their names with pseudonyms, by revealing their age only in age spans, and finally, by removing any information from texts which could reveal the identity of the person (such as mentioning of specific organisations or locations). The identity of participants was stored separate from the remaining data for a short period of time before it was deleted. And finally, the two research assistants who helped transcribing the interviews signed a decree of confidentiality.

4.4.2. Ethical dilemmas during the interviews

The quality of the knowledge produced in an interview study depends on the social relationship between interviewer and interviewee, which again rests on the researcher's ability to create a stage where the subject is free and safe to talk about private matters for later public use. This again requires a delicate balance between concerns with producing interesting knowledge and ethical respect for the integrity of the interview subject (Kvale 2007, 8). This tension is well expressed in the following description of the 'craft' of in-depth interviewing by Richard Sennett (2004, 37–38): 'the interviewer cannot be stonily impersonal; he or she has to give something of himself or herself in order to merit an open response (...) The craft consists in calibrating social distance without making the subject feel like an insect under the

microscope.’ Maintaining such a balance is further complicated by the asymmetry involved in the relationship between interviewer and interviewee. The researcher is (mainly) the one who controls the situation and conversation, and the role itself often comes with some authority attached to it. In this case, I also represented the ethnic majority population in Norway while the interviewee was part of an ethnic and religious minority. These factors may have been somewhat evened out by the fact that I am rather young, have a minority religious upbringing myself (a charismatic form of Christianity), and that my personality is not strikingly authoritative. I did, however, make some efforts to underline the egalitarian aspects of the relationship by referring to the mentioned similarities in background, or by indicating that I had pondered on some of the questions myself and found them difficult (if they struggled to formulate an answer). This brings me to another asymmetric aspect of the encounter, namely the fact that there is mainly only one of us who is sharing vulnerable information, something which may lead to the interviewee feeling deprived or ‘used’ after an interview (Kvale 2007, 29–30). In order to prevent such feelings, I allowed myself to share *some* personal information, particularly if the interviewee asked me directly. A striking experience happened on several occasions: right before revealing information about an ‘extraordinary’ experience, such as an experienced encounter with the divine – the interviewee would become hesitant and ask me if I believed in God or had any religious inclinations myself. The fact that I could answer yes to that question (without being insincere), appeared to encourage the interviewee to continue sharing the story in an open manner (perhaps the question was not *if* to tell it, but rather *how*). The sharing of personal information on the side of the researcher does however have its own moral implications to consider – it may enhance openness and intimacy, but also border onto manipulation and lead subjects into sharing information they may later regret (Kvale 2007, 28). I believe, however, that I managed to stay on the safe side of that border by balancing the quest for interesting knowledge with respect for the integrity of interviewees.

4.4.3. Ethics of representation

Within the qualitative scope of research (and in discourse analysis in particular) the researcher’s reflexivity regarding his or her own position of power and perspective becomes highly relevant. As the instrument for knowledge production, the researcher’s values and presuppositions will either consciously or unconsciously influence his or her interpretations (Brinkmann 2013, 108–9). Accordingly, reflexivity regarding all the potential biases which

may have affected the knowledge production has been integral to the process. I have for example reflected on the significance of my own religious background, which made some of the experiences and concepts articulated by the interviewees familiar and relatable to me on a personal level, but which could also steer me in particular directions. Moreover, I have reflected on the possibility of reproducing Eurocentric assumptions with roots in Christian Protestantism, which for example have been said to affect the ways in which Western scholars construct the meaning and importance of ‘belief’ (Day 2011).

With regard to representation, an important principle aiming to protect the integrity of research subjects is to avoid reductionistic descriptions and analyses, or unnecessary ‘othering’ (Jensen 2011). In the case of this study, this was particularly important since the topic touched on such central aspects of the research participant’s identity or sense of self. Relevant to this was how one interviewee expressed a reluctance to participate in the study due to a weariness related to what she referred to as ‘over-exotification’ of her identity as Muslim. She said she would have liked to sometimes be considered simply a normal human being who happen to believe in God, and was afraid, we could say, that I would reproduce this form of ‘othering’. She ended up participating, however, and in a large part, as I understood it, to make sure that experiences of being Muslim on the outskirts of the Muslim community were included in representations of Muslims. This illustrates how choices regarding who to include in one’s study involve an ethical dimension. As discussed earlier, I made the decision to include young Muslims who have been the least represented in media and research previously and who therefore might not recognise themselves in the voices of official representatives of Islam (Bectovic 2011, 1130). The aim was to ensure a more nuanced (in terms of the existing variety) and less biased (in terms of not focusing on vocal and visible young Muslims) picture of what it means to be a young Muslim in Norway today. This is also where the critical aspect of the study comes in: it addresses the discourses that we as researchers, in dialogue with the broader public, reproduce concerning Islam and what it means to be a Muslim and seeks to contribute to those representations being more broadly informed (see also section 1.6.1).

4.4.4. Notes on research quality

A study of good quality produces valid, reliable, and relevant or worthwhile knowledge (Flick 2007). Ensuring this has been the goal behind every choice in designing and conducting this

study. I have attempted at transparency with regard to perspectives, choices and limitations, which are meant to ensure that the reader can trust the claims and arguments not to be unnecessary biased or based on unreliable evidence. To validate findings in the qualitative scope of research is to continually check, investigate, and question one's assumptions and conclusions (Kvale 2007, 123). Hence, I have weighed the evidence, double-checked interpretations during interviews, considered alternative interpretations, played the devil's advocate vis-à-vis my own formulations, accounted for negative evidence, and examined taken-for-granted-meanings. Nevertheless, as discussed in section 4.1., I cannot claim to have represented 'the truth' in any way, but rather some thoroughly defended propositions which must be validated and/or critiqued by other researchers. The extended abstract is a way for the research community to evaluate if the knowledge produced measure up to our collective standards for quality research. Regarding the question of whether the study has been worthwhile the funding, time, and effort spent, I rely for one thing on the indications made by some of the research participants about how the study would be of value to them as far as it led to a more nuanced representation of Muslims in media and school materials. Secondly, the study provides novel, rich and nuanced knowledge about people who many societal and political actors have (often biased) perspectives on and opinions of, some of which can stir up societal conflicts. If we can agree that misrepresentations can lead to negative stereotyping, which in turn can lead to conflicts between groups in society, and that this is something we do not want, the study should be well worth the cost.

Chapter 5: Article summaries

5.1. Article I

Aarvik, S. (forthcoming). Between orthodoxy and subjectivism: discourses on moral authority among young Muslims in Norway. *Journal of Muslims in Europe*.

In the first article of this thesis, I tap into discussions regarding religious individualisation among young Muslims in Europe by exploring the ways in which young Muslims in Norway legitimise their beliefs and practices and how their discourses on moral authority relate to the Islamic orthodox discourse and the liberal moral discourse which are both dominant in different socio-cultural contexts they are involved with. Various way of positioning oneself and combine the two discursive repertoires are identified and illustrated with empirical

examples. I argue that these are not more or less ‘individualised’ positions vis-à-vis the Islamic tradition, but rather varying ways of positioning oneself within different authoritative epistemologies: the liberal, which is grounded on the premise of the supreme autonomy of subjective reasoning and feeling (the weight being on either one of the se modes), and a ‘non-liberal’, which reproduces the discourse of the Islamic orthodox tradition on moral authority and which is grounded on the premise that God’s will (as revealed and interpreted through the Islamic tradition) is superior to the individuals reasoning and feelings – there is an ultimate authority which decides what is good, right and true to which the individual must adjust his or hers will and desires. It is demonstrated how which of these discursive premises, though co-existing, are *dominant* in the young Muslims’ repertoires come to the fore in relation to particular moral dilemmas which are connected to embeddedness in a socially pluralistic context, namely the question of Islam’s exclusivity vis-à-vis other traditions and moral-religious life-stances – and, in close relation to this, the question of non-Muslims’ fate in the afterlife.

The article is placed first in the dissertation because it in some ways provides the ground for the two remaining articles by giving an overview of the variety of positionings with regard to authority in moral-religious matters among the young Muslims, something which to a large extent determines other aspects of their discourses regarding Islam and the transcendent which are examined further in the remaining two articles.

5.2. Article II

Aarvik, S. (2021). ‘Prayer is not for God, it’s for us’: Therapeutisation of Islam among Young Muslims in Norway. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*, 34(1), 29–39.

The second article explores the extent to which the articulated beliefs, values and views on religious practice among the young Muslims align with the therapeutic ethos and outlook. The article reflects on a tendency found in the material which overlaps with a trend discussed in the literature as ‘therapeutisation of religion’. The analysis finds several features that are concordant with the therapeutic discourse: attentiveness and authority given to one’s subjective feelings and apprehension; mental-emotional wellbeing as goal and motivation for practice; the belief in a loving and supportive God rather than a strict judge; and the emphasis on fulfilment in the present life rather than the afterlife. However, the findings also show

limitations to the adoption of a therapeutic outlook and point to where and how the Islamic orthodox tradition represents an intersecting, sometimes conflicting, discourse on self and morality in the young Muslims' articulations. There are also some cases of young Muslims whose vocabularies diverge from this trend in that they are much more concerned with Islam as means for *social* transformation and whose discourses as such align more with human rights and social justice discourses than those more concerned with individual healing and transformation. Finally, it is suggested that the therapeutic religious vocabulary might be more dominant among young Muslim *women* than among men, and that this is something which deserves attention in future research.

5.3. Article III

Aarvik, S. (2021). 'Spiritualized Islam': Reconfigurations of Islamic dogma among young non-organized Muslims in Norway. Published in *Journal of Islam and Christian-Muslim relations*, 32:1, 81-96

The third article zooms in on those interviewees whose discourses on Islam and the transcendent explicitly were constructed as *different* from that of the Islamic orthodox tradition and as such most strikingly were shaped in accordance with the liberal epistemology (subjective reasoning and feelings as determining what is good and true). The article investigates the commonalities of these interviewees articulations of Islam and argues that even though their discursive repertoires are highly individualised vis-à-vis the Islamic orthodox tradition, they have similarities which reflect the prevalence of another discursive vocabulary regarding the transcendent which is dominant in contemporary Western societies, referred to by Heelas and Woodhead as 'inner-life-spirituality' (2005). Furthermore, it is argued that these commonalities point to a convergence between 'religion' and 'spirituality' in that *some* Islamic norms and doctrines from the official, dominant discourse are adhered to, while others are reconfigured in a direction that mirrors the discourses on contemporary spirituality in the way that God or the divine, moral projects and ideas about the afterlife are conceptualised. This convergence is legitimised by emphasising the symbolic and ambiguous character of Islamic knowledge which allows for a plurality of interpretations and an inclusivist attitude towards other religions and worldviews. Aspects of the interviewees' life-stories suggest that this is linked to concerns with inclusion in liberal-secular and religiously pluralistic social settings. Finally, I argue that the tendency of a 'spiritualisation of Islam'

represents a distinct trajectory among young Muslims in Europe and beyond, besides the already well-defined tendencies of secularisation and revitalisation and that it should be more explicitly included in representations of young Muslims in Europe.

Chapter 6: Discussion

6.1. Introduction

This study has identified multiple discourses which are reproduced, negotiated, combined, and contested when young Muslims in Norway articulate their beliefs and practices. The premises, vocabularies and structures of different discourses are combined and integrated in a variety of ways which either tend to reproduce already dominant constructions of Muslim identities or configure them in ways that seem relatively ‘new’ – or perhaps only less represented in literature concerning young Muslims in Europe.

As we have seen, the scholarship on identities and religious practice among second generation Muslims in the West has applied theories of individualisation as a main theoretical lens (e.g. Cesari 2003; 2004; Klinkhammer 2003; Schmidt 2004; Roy 2004; Jacobsen, 2011; Bendixsen 2013; Jouili 2015; Eriksen 2020). The phenomenon as it relates to Muslim religiosity is well-explored and documented, and important nuances to the theory as it relates to *young* Muslims have been added by for example Jacobsen (2011) in Norway, Bendixsen (2013) in Germany, and Fadil (2008) in Belgium, studies that show how young Muslims often construct themselves as religious subjects through a complex combination of individualising strategies and subordination to ‘orthodox’ Islam. Studies of ‘non-organised’ Muslims have on the other hand demonstrated the prevalence of more ‘radically individualised’ *bricolage* (Hervieu-Léger 2000), similar to what is described among other spiritual seekers in the West (Cesari 2003; 2004; Jeldtoft 2011; 2012). The findings in this study reflect both tendencies and add some further nuances to the discussion.

Although this study has departed from the assumption that religious individualisation is a major trend among young Muslims also in the Norwegian context, it has approached the phenomenon and, in line with Fadil (2008), as a process in which the liberal discourse on selfhood and moral authority becomes authoritative in the shaping peoples’ beliefs and

practices. From this perspective, the young Muslims' beliefs and practices are 'individualised' to the extent that they are constructed in accordance with a liberal discourse of autonomy and authenticity. This means for example that the 'individualised' subject position (the 'who I am and as I am') is reproduced as normal and essential while other, non-liberal subject positions are problematised (ibid). In the following, I shall discuss how this discourse is combined with the orthodox discourse of subordination in the young Muslims' articulations, but also look at other discursive vocabularies that intersect with these in their repertoire, such as those I have delineated as the discourses of progressive Islam and Sufism, the therapeutic discourse, the social justice discourse, and the discourse of contemporary spirituality. In the following, I shall summarise when and how these various repertoires appear in my interviewees' accounts and discuss how their main premises, ideas and logics are negotiated in relation to each other.

6.2. Convergences between the Islamic orthodox and the liberal moral discourse

Following the conceptualisation of religious individualisation as the liberal moral discourse becoming authoritative in the shaping of someone's religious identity, I study the extent to which, and how, the young Muslims' articulations of their beliefs and practices draw on a vocabulary centered around autonomy and authenticity which is indeed central to all the interviewees' accounts. They emphasise the importance of individual choice and reflexivity in all aspects of belief and practice. They articulate that it is wrong to blindly follow norms imposed from the outside and describe how they filter everything through their own feelings and apprehension. As we saw in Latifa's account of when she started to wear the hijab and avoid shaking hands with men (article II), her decisions to implement these practices, both of which she regards as prescribed in the orthodox Islamic tradition was evaluated both in terms of how they resonated with her cognitively and in light of her feelings both before and after having implemented them.

Furthermore, the interviewees place great value on respecting *other* people's freedom and choices. One is not to judge other peoples' practice or lack thereof but instead concentrate on oneself and leave judgment of others to God. The individual's exercising of his or her 'free will' is viewed as fundamental for any religious act to be valid in the eyes of both oneself and God. In some accounts, the liberal maxims of autonomy and authenticity extend as far as

situating other, non-Islamic life stances as equally valid to the Islamic tradition, resting on the logic that being authentic (or ‘true to oneself’) is more important than adhering to exactly the right ‘objective truth’ (which no one can know for certain). This applies especially to the young Muslims discussed in article III. This line of thinking mirrors the shift that Furseth (2006) points to in religious discourses in Norway from a ‘quest for truth’ to ‘being oneself’. All the young Muslims place, however, great weight on the imperative to be oneself, or to live in accordance with one’s unique personality and desires, and they reject a purely ‘conformist’ way of being Muslim. We saw for example in the case of Elias (article I), that although he overarchingly subscribes to ‘what Islam says’ as a normative framework, he also highlights the opportunities that exist for a personalised way of adopting this framework through a selective and gradual implementation – he ‘works on’ whatever *he feels* is most important first. Or when Leyla (article I) articulates how she regards the norm of wearing hijab as God’s will and the right thing to do, however allows herself to wait for a feeling of being ready (‘I am not there *yet*’).

Hence, we may conclude that the liberal moral discourse with its moral imperatives of autonomy and authenticity contributes considerably to the structuring of ways in which the young Muslims articulate their beliefs and practices. What varies is how this discursive vocabulary is negotiated in relation to what the young Muslims view as the normative framework of orthodox Islam. As we have seen, most of the interviewees do not *explicitly* invalidate the orthodoxy, or its approach to the Islamic sources, and we have seen how many of them combine the language of autonomy and authenticity with a vocabulary of obedience and self-discipline in accordance with an externally defined Islamic framework (see also Amir-Salvatore and Jouli 2006; Fadil 2008; Jacobsen 2011; Bendixsen 2013; Jouli 2015).

I have interpreted the young Muslims as reproducing the Islamic orthodox discourse when they reinstate the importance of performing the five pillars and of living ‘halal’ as defined by religious authorities (e.g. avoiding pre-marital sex and consumption of alcohol) and subscribe to the normative doctrines of the detailed faith. Moreover, I have depicted the orthodox discourse as present whenever the interviewees speak of ‘obeying’ God, of religious practices as a ‘duty’, or ‘obligatory’, or when they implicitly or explicitly underline the ideal of subordinating one’s own will to that of God (often articulated as ‘what Islam says’). I have also interpreted this vocabulary as present when they share narratives of become ‘more practicing’ or ‘working on themselves’ in the direction of normative Islamic beliefs or conduct. There are, however, various different ways to stay within these demarcations of

orthodoxy. While some take the official Islamic norms and doctrines highly seriously and are committed to implementing them, others seem to place them more in the background or to not regard fulfilment of every one of them as necessary. The latter attitude is usually combined with belief in a generous, understanding God (article II). The sources and voices that represent ‘the orthodoxy’ to the young Muslims also vary – from online sources and contemporary scholars and sheiks, to local imams, Islamic institutions, family members and other fellow Muslims.

What discursive premises and logics that are ultimately dominant in the young Muslims’ repertoire, also varies. Although these overarching discourses – one dominant in the secular-pluralistic Norwegian context, and the other in the Islamic discursive field, for the most part converge unproblematically in the young Muslims accounts, there are some moral dilemmas around which there appears to be a lot of ‘discursive tension’. As we saw in article I, discourse theorist Jacob Torfing (1999, 148–49), states that the order of a discourse is threatened when there is an emergence of an event or set of events which cannot be represented or symbolised or otherwise domesticated by the discursive structure. In the lives of the young Muslims, such ‘events’ can be questioning from friends about whether or not they believe that non-Muslims will go to hell, such as in Safiya’s story (article I and III), or a growing admiration for the religious beliefs and practices of non-Muslim friends, such as in Maryam’s story (article I). The two discourses are in conflict when it comes to the question of Islam’s embodiment of exclusive truth versus the validation of plurality in the domain of the sacred, a question that becomes actualised, not only around the dilemma of non-Muslims’ destiny in the hereafter, but also in the question of whether or not it is important to perform the specifically *Muslim* norms and practices, or whether it is enough to inhabit the more universal norms regarding ‘good’ behavior towards others (see Fadil 2008 on ‘the grammar of goodness’). The power-struggle is ultimately epistemological: between the belief in the Koran as the supremist moral authority and a *literal* articulation of God’s will, which is the fundament of the orthodox tradition, against the belief in each individual’s ability and right to determine for him/herself what is ultimately good and true. When read through the orthodox exegesis, the Quran is quite clear that being Muslim is required to be accepted by God and receive the reward of paradise (Roald 2004), whereas the liberal discourse cannot incorporate such a belief into its logic. While belief in the status of the Koran, and the subject position of being ‘inside’ the orthodoxy is at stake on the one hand, the recognition of the religious beliefs and moral endeavors of non-Muslim others is at stake on the other. To maintain a

coherent discursive logic (Torfing 1999), this dilemma must be resolved in one way or the other, one of which is admitting to a position of ambiguity or not-knowing, as we saw Reza do when asked about the idea of hell in article III.

As in Eidhamar's (2017) study, the young Muslims who identify with pluralistic friend-groups seem to struggle the most with reconciling their belief in a compassionate God with the possible damnation of non-Muslims (which they view as the position of the Islamic orthodoxy). Although the interviewees' uncertainty around this topic could partly be due to my own positionality as non-Muslim, it often became apparent that this was not the first time they had reflected on the question in front of a non-Muslim. While only one of the fifteen interviewees took the explicit position that being Muslim is necessary for 'salvation', many did not want to engage with the question and said they preferred 'leaving it to God'. Some expressed their uncertainty directly: 'it does not make quite sense to me', while others articulate their thoughts in vague terms which did not place them outside of the orthodoxy in any definite way: 'I don't know, but I have a *hope* that there can be [hope for non-Muslims in the afterlife]'. In article I, I argue that such 'double' articulations can be viewed as an attempt to keep both the structure of the Islamic orthodox discourse and the liberal moral discourse – both representations of reality and the epistemological premises they build on – intact in one's interpretative repertoire (Potter and Wetherell 1988).

Finally, there are also those among the interviewees whose articulations reflect a non-orthodox Islamic discourse that builds on a different hermeneutical approach to the Islamic sources which is used to dismiss a literal understanding of the concepts of paradise and hell. The young Muslims who position themselves in opposition to the orthodoxy (article III) also argue that the essential message of the Koran concerns the development of interpersonal virtues and character rather than about performing specifically *Muslim* duties. Ritual practices are viewed as voluntary rather than obligatory, as helpful tools to connect with God and thereby become a 'better' human being towards others (and towards oneself, as Safiya mentions in article II). In accordance with the liberal moral discourse, these aims can also be obtained through other traditions and sources of guidance besides the Islamic tradition. This inclusivistic language align with the liberal premises and logic while simultaneously maintaining the Islamic (self-)constituting premise (ref) of a divine will for humanity which is revealed through the Koran and the life of the Prophet. As such, it can be argued to synthesise the logics and premises of both discourses through the creation of a 'third position' which

often happens to resolve discursive tension and conflict (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka 2010, 156–152; Zock 2013, 31), such as that evoked by the dilemma of exclusivism.

6.3. ‘Therapeutic Islam’ and ‘social activist Islam’

Intersecting and overlapping with the young Muslims’ positionings within and vis-à-vis the Islamic orthodox discourse and the liberal moral discourse, I have identified their articulations as either reflecting more of a therapeutic religious discourse or a social activist religious discourse. Although Article II describes the therapeutic discourse as dominant in the material, I also comment that this might be connected to the disproportioned representation of women in the material, since the social activist discourse was particularly dominant in the accounts of several of the male interviewees. How the latter discursive vocabulary diverges from former was not much discussed in the article but will be done so here.

As Heelas and Woodhead (2005) have pointed out, the subjective turn is not only about the individualisation of authority in moral and religious matters but is accompanied with a shift in the religious person’s moral project towards a concern for the ‘free’ and ‘authentic’ unfolding and wellbeing of the self in the present life. Although the language of inner healing and transformation is not new to the Islamic tradition (see chapter 3.4.), the way that these concerns are placed in the foreground as the ‘reason to be’ of religious prescriptions is connected to the ‘highly contemporary reign of the concern for the self’ (cf. Hervieu-Léger 2006, 64) and have been described by scholars in the study of religion a tendency of therapeuticisation (e.g. Bellah 1985, Smith and Denton 2005). The therapeutic discourse overlaps with liberal discourse on selfhood and morality in that it builds on the premise that self-actualisation happens through a liberation from external constraints (cf. Madsen 2018, 23) and problematises other conceptions of self-realisation and fulfillment (Mahmood 2005; Fadil 2008).

I have interpreted the therapeutic religious discourse as present in the interviewees’ accounts when they describe a caring, supportive God who places few or no demands on them to behave or believe against their own judgement and desires; when Islamic practice is viewed primarily as a tool for enhancing mental-emotional wellbeing and growth in the present life; and when they locate moral authority in the realm of their own feelings. As we saw in article II, many of the interviewees frame their beliefs and practices as positively enhancing their

life-experience by helping them to cope with difficulties and feel better about themselves. For example, Shabana (article I and II) focuses, in her story of when she began to wear the hijab and pray five times a day, on how this practice changed her mood from being generally stressed and angry to being calm and positive:

I started to become less stressed than before. Because back then, if something didn't work out, I was like, 'oh my God why does things always have to go wrong!' Everything was so negative, but now I have kind of – my sisters say it too: "you have changed so much, you have become an optimist, you are so positive!"

I found, however, that the young Muslims' articulation of their beliefs and practices in a therapeutic language was not always concordant with the individualistic ethos of the therapeutic discourse in that many also expressed a desire to – over time – discipline themselves according to the will of God as defined by external representants of the Islamic tradition. Only for *some* of the interviewees was the imperative of realising psychological or mental-emotional wellbeing more dominant than that of fulfilling Islamic norms for the sake of obedience or devotion to God. This brings associations to the Islamic revivalist discourse described by Roy (2004) in which an emphasis on the 'inner' dimension of religious practice, such as faith and love for God and Islam's role in providing inner peace and psychological wellbeing merges with a 'Koranic moral conception of norms' (Roy 2004, 185, 193–94). We may regardless describe the 'therapeutic' religious discourse as reproduced in the young Muslims' articulations of their beliefs and practices. Similar to what has been described among young Evangelical Christians in Norway and Europe (e.g. Roeland 2009; Trysnes 2017), the young Muslims combine belief in a compassionate and loving God and emphasis on Islam's therapeutic benefits with a strong commitment to shared truths and a desire to gain approval by God through subordinating one's own will. Among most of the young Muslims in this study, prescribed religious practices are framed as simultaneously psychologically beneficial *and* as a duty towards God as well as having positive or negative consequences for the afterlife. In line with Fadil (2008) and Jacobsen (2011), I connect this to different discursive constructions of self-realisation through which the young Muslims shape their religious identities: one that advocates self-actualisation through liberation from external constraints – towards being 'true to myself and my own originality (...) something only I can articulate and discover' (Taylor 1991, 29), and one that builds on the premise that the realisation of one's 'truest', most 'authentic' self only can be obtained through subordination to God's will.

These understandings of (successful) self-realisation are negotiated interdiscursively in the young Muslims accounts and often converge unproblematically, although we may identify one or the other representation as dominant. Following Mahmood (2005), I do not regard the liberal position as one of agency and the inhabiting religious norms based on a desire to please God as not grounded in agency. Instead, I hold that subordinating and disciplining oneself according to a framework can be means by which to achieve the ‘good life’ as envisioned by the young Muslims and may meet their desire for a ‘subjectively’ grounded life. Commitment to a well-defined worldview may spring from a desire for certainty and tranquility which are important components of wellbeing. As Zahab (article I and II) articulates: ‘I cannot deal with everything being relative, I need some kind of structure in my life’. Subjecting oneself to a transcendent order may also be experienced as easier and more rewarding than striving to fulfil other demands and expectations from society on appearances and achievements (Roeland 2009, 212). The Islamic orthodox framework may just provide the freedom from such demands.

The other religious discourse I identified as dominant in some of the interviewees’ accounts was that which I have labelled a ‘social activist discourse’. It resembles what Roy (2004, 149) calls ‘humanistic and social propagandism’, or what Flaskerud (2018, 499) labels ‘Islamic humanism’, and also has many overlaps with the discursive vocabulary of ‘progressive Islam’ (Duderjja 2017). The social activist discourse is also found in various Christian contexts (Clarke 2006; Heelas 2008). Peter Clarke (2006) refers to this type of being religious (or spiritual) as ‘engaged spirituality’ which he identifies in various context and across the major ‘world religions’. Within this approach, he argues, spiritual practice includes service and activism of an altruistic kind and is directed at the greater well-being of family, friends and society as a whole, including its institutions and the environment (Clarke 2006, 128).

The interviewees whose (articulated) beliefs and practices are concordant with the social activist discourse focus much more on Islam as means for societal transformation (towards enhanced equality, justice, implementation of human rights etc.), than they do on the Islamic tradition as a means for ‘therapeutic’ healing and self-realisation. These vocabularies are however sometimes overlapping and may complement each other, such as in the account of Safiya (see article III) who emphasises both social and personal transformation to equal extent. I have identified this type of discourse as reproduced in the young Muslims’ articulations when they frame their voluntary work and/or career-choices as determined or

inspired by a religious-based calling to help or work for ‘the marginalised’, or to eliminate injustices in society, and when they emphasise that this is what Islam is mainly or really about. Whereas a few of the interviewees (Fahad, Shabana, Elias – article I) seem particularly engaged in helping *Muslim* refugees and immigrants, for example through arranging Eid-celebration in asylum-centers, most of the interviewees underlined that the imperative they felt from God and Islam to ‘help others’ concerned both Muslims and non-Muslim the same. In the literature on young Muslim in Europe, both the tendency of social activism mainly based on concerns for the Muslim *umma* (Jacobsen 2011; Linge 2014; Bangstad and Linge 2015) and a more general concern with human rights social justice (Roy 2004; Duderija 2017; Karagiannis 2017; Flakerud 2018) has been described.

Although the young Muslims in this study do not make explicit references to contemporary progressive Muslim scholars, some of them use a language that mirrors the ‘tenets’ which Duderija (2017) describes as constitutive of ‘progressive Islam’. These are for example the primacy ascribed to ‘orthopraxis’ – framed as theologically based struggle against societal oppression and injustice and *for* justice and equality; the call for reform of Koran-Sunna hermeneutics based on contextualist and rationalist principles; and the affirmation of religious pluralism as willed by God (Duderija 2017, 73, 97, 146). Duderija points out that, despite being justified on different terms (e.g. the theological premise that every human being the recipient and carrier of God’s spirit and therefore having the same intrinsic worth), progressive Islam is conceptually compatible with the modern human rights discourse and share the same concerns and values (ibid, 119). We find this most explicitly articulated in Safiya’s account (article III) who is a self-proclaimed feminist and social activist, and who also calls for a reformation of the Islamic tradition based on contextualist principles. Bilal (article II), on the other hand, exemplifies a young Muslim who links his identity as Muslim to being actively engaged in society and working on behalf of those subject to injustice, but who does not challenge the orthodox tradition. He does not concern himself with theology, have a relaxed attitude towards the obligatory practices, and places his social activism in the foreground of his religious practice. In fact, the interview with him was so dominated by societal concerns and engagement that I had to make efforts to have him talk about something that had to do with ‘inner’ experiences related to belief in God and gain knowledge about his more private religious practices. This illustrates the difference between ‘social activist Islam’ and ‘therapeutic Islam’: among those whose vocabularies were predominantly ‘therapeutic’, there was no need for encouragement for them to talk about

personal and intimate aspects of their faith which often connected to themes of inner healing, self-development, and transformation.

6.4. Intersections with contemporary spirituality

When I label some of the interviewees' articulations of their beliefs and practices 'spiritualised Islam' it is because of the overlaps I find with features associated with contemporary spirituality (chapter 3.5). In addition to Heelas' and Woodhead's (2005) definition of 'inner life-spirituality', as a way of approaching and conceptualising the sacred that differs from that of 'religious traditions of transcendent theism' (cf. Heelas 2008, 54), I rely on Besecke's (2007, 171) definition of 'reflexive spirituality' as a way people talk to each other about transcendent meaning which integrates awareness and acceptance of the plurality of religious meaning through use of a symbolic and universalistic language (Besecke 2007, 176).

Many of the features that were highlighted in chapter 3.5. as characteristic of the contemporary spirituality discourse were identified as prevalent in the accounts of the interviewees discussed in article III. The language of 'holistic healing' and the realisation of wellbeing through integration of 'body, mind, and spirit' is particularly recognisable in Nadia's articulations. She uses at one point the term 'holistic' and speaks of increased 'awareness' and 'inner balance' as purposes of her spiritual practice. She also practices some of the core practices within the holistic milieu such as yoga and meditation, which she argues can replace the Islamic ritual prayer because they fulfill the same purpose. As do Safiya and Reza, she describes God as more of an abstract presence than a personal figure, and she goes as far as saying that this 'force' can also be found within oneself. Although Safiya and Reza do not situate God 'within', but rather 'without' (cf. Heelas 2007, 15), they all three emphasise the ambiguous and symbolic nature of religious knowledge and are open to diverge interpretations and inclusion of elements from other traditions. Reza uses for example a characteristically 'eastern' religious vocabulary regarding the hereafter when he says that he believes the Islamic images of paradise refer to a state of being free from one's desires rather than obtaining a fulfillment of them. Nadia and Safiya interpret the Islamic imagery concerning the afterlife as symbols of something abstract and mysterious. They also share an inclusivist (or pluralist, in the case of Nadia) vocabulary around salvation in the hereafter in

that they do not regard it as necessary to identify as Muslim or perform specifically Muslim practices to obtain it. Moreover, Islam is framed as essentially promoting universal values that can be accessed also through other sources and traditions, albeit within a unique spiritual framework which, according to Safiya, would be good for anyone to implement in their life.

The perennial or universalist¹⁶, interpretation of the Islamic repertoire (Farstad 2017, 78; Jeldtoft 2011; 1142–3) overlaps with strands of Sufism, in which the core of Islam (accessed by the mystic) is viewed as encompassing the ‘true essence’ of all religions (Sedgwick 2017, 5–7). This illustrates how it sometimes can be problematic to distinguish ‘new’ configurations of discourses among young Muslims from those that are inherent to the Islamic tradition itself (Amir-Moazami and Jouili 2006; Farstad 2017, 86). As suggested in article III, we might conclude that there are overlapping ideas in the contemporary spirituality field and in the Islamic discursive field (contemporary and historical), and that young Muslims may draw more extensively on one or the other repertoire. I do not categorise any of the participants in this study as ‘spiritual, but not religious’, since they all identify specifically as *Muslims* and use a distinct Islamic repertoire to frame their beliefs and practices. Instead, I argue that it is not a matter of either-or, but of (interdiscursive) combinations of various Islamic and non-Islamic discourses concerning the transcendent, including that of contemporary spirituality. According to Fairclough (1992), this way of combining discourses – to the extent that it has not been done in that exact way previously – is a sign of and a driving force in discursive, and thereby social and cultural change (cf. Jørgensen and Phillips 2002, 73) In article III, I define the young Muslims’ mix of vocabularies as a ‘middle-positioning’ between so-called ‘inner-life spirituality’ and traditional adherence to religion (or ‘life-as’-religion) and argue that this represents a distinct approach to Islam from both revivalist and more secular variants of Islam. The secular is understood here as a pragmatic pick-and-choose approach where the transcendent is placed more in the background, whereas ‘spiritualised Islam’ involves a change in the interpretation of transcendent categories which to some extent mirrors the changes that Heelas and Woodhead (2005) describe as a shift from religion to spirituality. Such categorisations are off course, while being helpful in highlighting some of the commonalities and differences between religious identities, too simplistic when

¹⁶ Universalism can be defined as a more popular version of perennial philosophy, both of which hold that the world's religious traditions share a single, metaphysical truth underneath their seeming differences.

measured against the complexity of reality, something I hope that this chapter has not failed to communicate.

6.5. Ways of being Muslim: explaining the variation

The findings demonstrate a variety of ways that young Muslims in Norway – through their own discursive practice – reproduce, contest, and transform discourses that are available to them and dominant in their social surroundings (Fairclough 1992, 10). Their articulations reflect a combination of discourses from the Islamic tradition and other discourses on morality and transcendence that are available and dominant in their context(s). Young Muslims who are engaged in secular and pluralistic environments in their education and work settings are subject for example to the culturally hegemonic liberal moral discourse and shape their religious identity, at least to some extent, accordingly. The young Muslims also have in common that they are a minority, both in terms of ethnicity and religion, which means that the cultural and religious repertoires they adopt from their home environment are marginal in relation to those of the majority (Jeldtoft 2011, 1148). Young Muslims are in this context also positioned *by others* in specific, often stereotyped ways, something which their discursive construction, at least in part, are in response to (Bendixsen 2013; Buitleaar 2013; Jouili 2015).

The question remains of *why* young Muslim constructs their religious identity in a particular way, or why a particular discourse becomes dominant in their repertoire. According to Jørgensen and Phillips (2002, 142) we should consider that people do not have equal access to all discourses. The distribution of, and power-dynamic between discourses in a certain domain, or given social environment, is thus relevant here (see also Hervieu-Léger 2006, 62). For instance, the young Muslims' connections to and involvement with organised Muslim communities, where the orthodox discourse is dominant, are varying in degree and frequency (see chapter 6.6.), and so is the extent of their involvement in highly secular and/or religiously pluralistic social settings (see 2.3.). Regarding the latter, I have argued that the degree of engagement with diversity in the religious domain is as an important factor as to whether the premises of the liberal moral discourse becomes more dominant than those of the Islamic orthodoxy in the young Muslims' self-positionings and discursive repertoires. Depending on the dominant discursive structure, which becomes especially evident in relation to certain moral dilemmas (see 6.3.), we might categorise the young Muslims as having *dominantly*

liberal or orthodox religious repertoires instead of being either ‘orthodox’ or ‘liberal’ (e.g. Cesari 2004). We should also not leave out that the two discourses, and their constituting premises, are equally dominant in some young Muslims’ repertoire. In article I, I exemplified this with Maryam’s ambiguous articulations concerning the exclusivity of the Islamic revelation vis-à-vis the validity of her non-Muslim friends’ religious beliefs and practices. Moreover, I reflected on how this ambivalence could be related to the fact that she is more or less equally engaged in environments dominated by other Muslims *and* in secular-pluralistic social environments. Particularly significant in her life-story is the friendships with someone who are respectively Sikh and Orthodox-Christian. Moreover, feeling included in the Muslim community (both locally and globally) seems important to her, but so does inclusion in her religiously diverse friend-group. She expresses admiration for her friends’ beliefs and practice but is also careful not to step outside the demarcations of orthodoxy (see both article I and II). She becomes more confident, however, when she speaks of how (for example) Sikhism can be *complementary* to Islam in some areas:

I guess it’s pure curiosity, and then maybe that it can be complementary in some areas, since, you know, if Sikhism elaborates some points that are related to Islam but which Islam doesn’t necessarily say something about, then I don’t see anything haram in that, so to speak.

This statement includes an interesting convergence between the desire to stay on the right side of halal/haram within what she sees as the orthodox framework, *and* to acknowledge the value of religious diversity in line with the ethics of the liberal discourse. As does Otterbeck (2013, 132), I argue that such complexity in belief-statements should be expected among young Muslims who are situated in pluralistic social contexts, and that it can be interpreted as a tactic response to *and* compliance with different discourses and (presumed) expectations from different everyday environments (in this case also from me as an interviewer).

As we have seen, an individual’s identity or self-positioning should be regarded not as fixed but rather constantly in motion depending on contextual factors. Seeing the self as dialogical and continually (re)negotiated through social interaction (Fairclough 1992; Hermans 2018), is helpful in terms of explaining tensions and contradictions in articulations of beliefs. With the language of Dialogical Self Theory (chapter 1.6.2), we might for example say, in the case of Maryam, that there are power dynamics between positions and voices in her internal dialogue about who she is, just as there are power dynamics in the field of discourses in which she is embedded. For example, the position within Maryam’s self who is first and foremost the friend of an orthodox-Christian might voice a different view than her

position as a committed Muslim for whom the authority of the Koran and the orthodox tradition is unquestionable (see also Zock 2013, 17).

What discourses that are available to and dominant in each of the young Muslims' social context(s) depend on a multitude of factors such as primary and secondary socialisation, ethno-cultural family-background, gender, experiences, personality traits, type of higher education, etc. As noted by Otterbeck (2013, 132), beliefs are also not constructed simply based on cognitive processes but are dependent on embodied experiences and feelings such as those of shame, security, fear, love, belonging etc. Although emotions too are socially structured and (at least partly) constituted by discourse (Riis and Woodhead 2010, 5), these factors make the construction of beliefs highly complex and unique to each individual. Nonetheless, religious transmittance and experiences with the religion in childhood are important factors and will often affect what the young Muslims reproduce, contest or transform from available religious discourses later in life (see e.g. Østberg 2003). From the present study, I need only mention Amina's story (article I) of how she became frightened and concerned when she encountered an Islamic discourse with emphasis on God's judgment and punishment in one of the mosques in Oslo, which stood in sharp contrast to the positive experiences she had with Islam in her upbringing, and which she perhaps therefore rejected. However, we have also seen, in the case of Reza and Leyla – who had similar upbringing, but highly different Muslim identities (article I; see also 2.3.) that religious socialisation in early life does not necessarily determine the type of religious identity developed later in life. As argued by sociologist of religion Lene Kühle (2012, 114-15), focusing mainly on parent-child religious transmission gives a very limited picture of what is going on in terms of religious socialisation among minorities in pluralistic societies – as it is both interweaved and interacting with many other sources of socialisation.

While acknowledging the particularities involved in each individual's construction of beliefs and a religious identity, I have described some patterns in the discourses of the young Muslims which I have connected to the sociocultural context in which they are currently embedded. I have argued, along with others, that, despite the recent increase in 'individualised' engagement with Islamic traditions among young Muslims in Norway and elsewhere, social mechanisms continue to operate through 'discursive webs of power' (cf. Fadil 2008) and shape religious identities, beliefs, and practices in particular directions. The young Muslims do not only reproduce elements of their parents' religious vocabularies, or of other historical and contemporary Islamic discourses that have been transmitted to them, but

also integrate non-Islamic discourses on morality, transcendence and selfhood in their religious repertoire. They sometimes also challenge constructions of meaning involved in either of these or combine them in new ways. As suggested in article II, the position of being situated ‘in-between’ competing normative discourses/in a complex ‘field of discursivity’ (cf. Jørgensen and Phillips 2002), may just provide the opportunity to be creative.

6.6. Notes on the category of ‘non-organised’ Muslims

One of the findings of this study has more to do with how we as researchers construct our categories of (young) Muslims than it has to do with young Muslims’ own constructions of their religious identities. It concerns the distinction between ‘organised’ and ‘non-organised’ young Muslims. As noted in chapter 1.5., the organised/non-organised distinction came into use in the field when researchers drew the attention towards a neglect of ‘ordinary’ peoples’ religiosity in their everyday life (Ammermann 2007; Mc Guire 2008; Jeldtoft 2011; 2012; Otterbeck 2011; 2013; Dessing et al. 2013). It became an analytical tool for researchers of religion to include those who are often not represented in studies of Islam due to their lack of participation in formal religious settings. This study too departed from the assumption that young Muslims who are active in organised settings were overrepresented in the research, at least in the Norwegian context, something which led to the methodological choice of recruiting participants through other channels than mosques or organisations, and to include only young Muslims who were not presently active in a specific mosque or organisation. However, I soon discovered that this distinction was not entirely applicable to the field of young Muslims in Norway. Although the interviewees all identified as not active in a particular mosque or organisation, there were many examples in their accounts of loose connections to organised environments in the form of social ties due to former engagement, occasional participation, or interaction with ‘organised’ Islam online – all of which contribute to a blurring of the category of ‘non-organised’. In fact, I would argue that most of the young Muslims are situated in somewhere ‘in-between’ the two categories. We have Fahad, who pray regularly in the mosque but does not belong to any one in particular, and who was part of a Muslim student organisation for a longer period in the past; Yosef, who feel a sense of belonging to his ‘family mosque’ were he has contributed with reading the Koran for Friday prayer on occasion throughout the years; and Latifa, who is part of an online group who follows the teachings of a specific sheikh – which arguably represents a new form of

‘organised’ Islam (see also Kuhle 2012). There is also Maryam, Latifa, Elias, Bilal and others who goes to lectures or debates arranged by Muslim organisations on occasion – some of whom have participated more regularly in the past. Finally, there are those who attend organised Muslim settings only for the main rites of passages such as funerals and weddings, quite similar to the majority of non-Muslims in Norway (see chapter 2.1.).

Based on these findings, I argue that the organised/non-organised distinction does not capture the many ‘loose’ ways in which young Muslims interact with organised Islam and that we should be careful with assuming that young Muslims who are found outside of organised Muslim environments are necessarily liberal and pragmatic while those found ‘inside’ of them are necessarily devoutly orthodox (see also Jeldtoft and Nielsen 2012). I maintain, however, that the distinction is methodologically helpful in that it enables us to locate and include young Muslims who are not represented when the outset for a study is a Muslim organisation.

6.7. Conclusions and suggestions for further research

This study has identified multiple discourses through which young Muslims in Norway construct their religious identity and articulate their beliefs and practices. A discourse analytical approach has been employed to say something about the characteristics of beliefs and practices among Muslims in contemporary Europe beyond the thesis of religious individualisation. It has also allowed me to take account of the critical insight presented by various researchers that individualised religion too is shaped by social structures, including discursive structures embedded in power relations. Rather than investigating the extent to which beliefs and practices are constructed individualistically in contrast to being absorbed from external religious frameworks, I have attempted to say something about the multiple discourses that are contributing to shaping the young Muslims’ own discourses on Islam and the transcendent, *including* the liberal moral discourse with its individualistic ethos. The study has pointed to ‘therapeutic Islam’ and ‘social activist Islam’ as two, sometimes overlapping, religious vocabularies among young Muslims in Norway, both of which may intersect with orthodox and liberal discursive structures of which one or the other usually (but not always) is dominant. The study has also demonstrated intersections between liberal Islamic discourses and the discursive vocabulary of contemporary spirituality.

The findings have both confirmed and provided nuances to the existing literature on young Muslims' beliefs and practices in Norway and Western Europe. By including 'non-organised' young Muslims who are situated on the outskirts of the Muslim community and often embedded in highly secular and religiously pluralistic environments, the study has represented a broader picture of Muslim belief and practice in Norway than what is found in previous literature. For future studies, I suggest a further investigation of the prevalence and distribution of the discourses defined in this thesis such as 'social activist Islam' and 'therapeutic Islam' – including attention to gender as a structuring factor in the distribution of these, as well as further research of the forms and prevalence of 'spiritualised Islam' as a hybrid between Islamic discourses and the language of contemporary spirituality. In sum, the findings demonstrate a variety of ways in which the young Muslims negotiate, reproduce, contest, transform and combine different constructions on selfhood, morality, religion, and transcendence, and how they through some of these configurations are contributors of change in the religious-spiritual landscape of Norway and the Islamic discursive tradition.

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Article I

Aarvik, Signe. Between Orthodoxy and Subjectivism: discourses on moral authority among Young Muslims in Norway. *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, Vol 11 (2). DOI <https://doi.org/10.1163/22117954-bja10049>

Abstract

This article investigates how beliefs and practices are legitimised among young (non-organised) Muslims in Norway. The findings confirm previous studies in showing how young Muslims in Europe often combine a discourse of submission to Islamic orthodoxy with a liberal vocabulary of autonomy and authenticity, although the tendency to divert from orthodoxy is more prevalent in this study. A variety of ways that young Muslims combine liberal and orthodox premises in their legitimisations are illustrated. The article argues that a high degree of engagement with pluralistic social contexts, including interreligious friendships, may challenge a previously dominant orthodox structure in the young Muslim's outlook, partly because of the difficulty of maintaining an exclusivist stance that includes the possible damnation of non-Muslims. While this may lead to liberal discursive premises becoming dominant, examples are also given of how some young Muslims navigate an ambiguous position where both discursive structures are kept intact.

Article II

Aarvik, Signe (2021). 'Prayer is not for God, it's for us': Therapeutisation of Islam among Young Muslims in Norway. *Nordic Journal of Religion and Society*. 34:1, 29-39. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.1890-7008-2021-01-03>

Abstract

This article explores beliefs, values and religious practices among young adult Muslims aged 20–32, who were born in or have spent most of their lives in Norway, and who are currently undergoing, or have completed, higher education. More specifically, it investigates the extent to which their accounts mirror a broader trend described as therapeutisation of religion. The analysis of qualitative interviews with fifteen individuals finds several features that are concordant with a therapeutic discourse: attentiveness and authority given to one's subjective inner life; the goal of mental-emotional wellbeing as motivation for practice; the belief in a loving and supportive God rather than a strict judge; and the emphasis on fulfilment in the present life. However, the findings also show limitations to the adoption of a therapeutic outlook, and point to where and how the Islamic tradition represents an intersecting, sometimes conflicting, discourse on self and morality.

Article III

Aarvik, Signe (2021). 'Spiritualized Islam': Reconfigurations of Islamic dogma among young non-organized Muslims in Norway. *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*. 32:1, 81-96.

DOI <https://doi.org/10.1080/09596410.2020.1846447>

Abstract

This article provides examples of how some young Muslims in Norway reconfigure Islamic norms and doctrines in the direction of contemporary spirituality. These young Muslims' beliefs include elements of 'objective' Islamic dogma, while simultaneously sacralizing the significance and authority of subjective life to the degree that it challenges established orthodoxy. Their interpretations of Islam may be described as a synthesis of two fundamentally different approaches to the sacred, namely 'life-as-religion' and 'subjective-life spirituality', as described in the work of Linda Woodhead and Paul Heelas. An emphasis on the symbolic, abstract and ambiguous character of religious dogma allows for not only a high degree of subjective interpretation, but also a pluralist attitude towards other religions and worldviews. Aspects of the interviewees' life-stories suggest that spiritualization of Islam is linked to concerns with inclusion in liberal-secular and pluralistic social settings. It is argued that the tendency towards spiritualization represents a trajectory among young European Muslims that is distinct from the already well-defined tendencies of secularization and Islamic revitalization.

Appendix 1a: Intervjuguide

TEMA:	MULIGE SPØRSMÅL
<p>Oppvekst - islam</p> <p>Innledningsspørsmål: Kan du fortelle litt om din oppvekst og hvilken betydning islam har hatt underveis i denne?</p> <p>(Forhold til: foreldre, venner, klassekamerater, lærere, religiøse ledere, nordmenn, muslimer og ikke-muslimer, foreldrenes kultur og andre representanter for denne, eventuelle transnasjonale relasjoner)</p>	<p>Hva har endret seg underveis og hvorfor? Når var du MEST ulik den du er nå? Hva er det viktigste du tar med deg som foreldrene dine har gitt deg? Hva tar du med og eventuelt ikke fra deres kultur? Hvilke personer har betydd mest for deg? Har du hatt noen viktige aha-opplevelser? Hvilke hendelser har vært viktige for hvem du er i dag? Når og hvor har du følt deg mest hjemme? Når og hvor har du eventuelt følt at du ikke passer inn?</p>
<p>Forhold til den islamske tradisjonen i dag – praksis, tekster, lærde mm.</p>	<p>Når er religion/islam viktig i din hverdag/ditt liv i dag? Hva setter du mest pris på i den islamske tradisjonen? Hva slags praksis utfører du og hvorfor? Hvilke tekster i Koranen eller hadithene betyr mest for deg? Er det andre tekster/bøker som har vært viktige (også ikke-islamske)? Hvilken betydning har Profeten og hans Sunna i livet ditt? Er det noe du har syntes eller synes det er vanskelig å forholde deg til? Hvilke islamske lærde forholder du deg til? Hvordan ville du forklare Sharia til en som ikke vet noe fra før? Er det noen nettsteder eller lignende som har vært viktige for deg? Hvordan skiller din oppfatning av islam seg fra dine foreldres? Andre?</p>
<p>Dypere i religiøse erfaringer og livstolkning: Gudsopplevelser mm.</p>	<p>Hvilke av Gudsnavnene er viktige for deg? Hvordan vil du beskrive ditt forhold til Allah? Er det mulig for deg å snakke om Guds nærhet eller tilstedeværelse i verden og ditt eget liv – når og hvordan? I den islamske tradisjonen er Shaytan en nokså sentral skikkelse – noen betydning for deg? Har du opplevd noe overnaturlig/noe som ikke helt kan forklares logisk?</p>
<p>Livsanskuelse: Syn på dette livet, meningen med livet, tanker om etterlivet, menneskesyn (muslimer og ikke-muslimer)</p>	<p>Hva er meningen med dette livet i dine øyne? Når opplever du livet som mest meningsfullt – og har du konkrete eksempler på dette? Hva tror/håper du skjer når du dør? Hva tenker du er det viktigste man kan gjøre som menneske med tanke på frelse/Paradiset/livet etter døden? Hvilken forskjell utgjør det å være muslim og ikke?</p>

	Hvordan ser en ideell/perfekt verden ut i dine øyne? Hva hindrer verden i å være slik?
Etikk, verdier, levereregler	Har du noen levereregler? Verdier du lever etter? Noen idealer/personer du forsøker å etterligne i dine handlinger? Hvordan vet du hva som er rett og galt i konkrete situasjoner? Eksempler? Hva gjør du hvis du har gjort noe du tenker er galt?
Andre mulige spørsmål	Hva er det viktigste du ønsker å formidle videre til eventuelle barn? Hva er det viktigste du har lært til nå i livet? Hvem er dine forbilder generelt i livet? Yndlingsfilmer/serie/bok/musikk?

Appendix 1b: Interview guide

TOPIC:	POTENTIAL QUESTIONS
<p>Childhood, upbringing, religious transmittance</p> <p>Invitation: Would you tell me a little about your childhood and your life until now with focus on the role of Islam/religion?</p> <p>Relationships to others – groups and individuals</p>	<p>What has changed along the way and why?</p> <p>What are the most important things you learned from your parents? What do you take with you from their culture?</p> <p>Who have been important to you in the area of religion or in general?</p> <p>Did you have any huge aha-moments or points of transformation?</p> <p>What events have been important/has shaped you?</p> <p>Where have you felt belonging?</p>
<p>Relationship to the Islamic tradition today</p> <p>Practices, authorities, texts</p>	<p>When is religion / Islam important in your everyday life today?</p> <p>What do you appreciate most in the Islamic tradition?</p> <p>What kind of practice do you perform and why?</p> <p>Which texts in the Qur'an or hadiths mean the most to you?</p> <p>Are there other texts / books that have been important (also non-Islamic)?</p> <p>What is the significance of the Prophet and his Sunna in your life?</p> <p>Is there something you have found or find difficult to relate to?</p> <p>Which Islamic scholars do you listen to?</p> <p>How would you explain Sharia to someone who did not know anything before?</p> <p>Are there any websites or the like that have been important to you?</p> <p>How does your perception of Islam differ from that of your parents? Others?</p>
<p>Beliefs, the divine, religious experiences</p>	<p>Which of God's names are important to you?</p> <p>How would you describe your relationship with Allah?</p>

	<p>Is it possible for you to talk about God's presence or presence in the world and your own life - when and how?</p> <p>In the Islamic tradition, Shaytan is a fairly central figure - any significance to you?</p> <p>Have you experienced something supernatural / something that cannot be completely explained logically?</p>
Beliefs – the purpose of life, the afterlife etc.	<p>What is the meaning of this life in your eyes?</p> <p>When do you experience life as the most meaningful - and do you have concrete examples of this?</p> <p>What do you think / hope happens when you die?</p> <p>What do you think is the most important thing you can do as a human being with a view to salvation / Paradise / life after death?</p> <p>What difference does it make to be a Muslim and not?</p> <p>What does an ideal / perfect world look like in your eyes? What prevents the world from being like this?</p>
Ethics	<p>Do you have any living rules? Values you live by?</p> <p>Any ideals / people you try to emulate in your actions?</p> <p>How do you know what is right and wrong in specific situations? Examples?</p> <p>What do you do if you have done something you think is wrong?</p>
Other questions	<p>What is the most important thing you want to convey to any children?</p> <p>What is the most important thing you have learned so far in life?</p> <p>Who are your role models in general in life?</p> <p>Favorite movies / series / book / music?</p>

Appendix 2: Information letter

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjektet

A Qualitative Study of Beliefs and Meaning Making among second generation Muslims in Norway.

Bakgrunn og formål

Prosjektet er en doktorgradsstudie knyttet til programmet for Teologi og Religion ved VID Vitenskapelige Høgskole. Formålet med studien er å bidra til økt kunnskap om tro og livstolkning blant unge voksne andregenerasjons muslimer i Norge. Prosjektet skriver seg inn i et forskningsfelt som studerer endringer i muslimsk religiøsitet som en følge av migrasjon og globalisering.

Du er blitt spurt om å delta i denne studien fordi du svarer til kriteriene om å identifisere deg som muslim, har foreldre som er født og oppvokst i et annet land enn Norge, er selv oppvokst i Norge og er mellom 20 og 32 år. Utvalget er gjort med utgangspunkt i prosjektleders eget nettverk, samt via enkelte relevante nettsider.

Hva innebærer deltakelse i studien?

Deltakelse i studien innebærer å stille opp til et intervju på maksimalt to timer. Intervjuet vil tas opp med lydopptaker i sin helhet. Spørsmålene vil omhandle deltakerens forhold til islam gjennom oppveksten og frem til i dag. Elementer ved troslæren som oppleves relevante og viktige for deltakeren i dag er et sentralt tema. Intervjuet er delvis strukturert, som vil si at intervjuer har noen overordnede temaer og en rekke *mulige* spørsmål, men er åpen for hva deltaker selv ønsker å formidle innenfor hvert tema.

Hva skjer med informasjonen om deg?

Alle personopplysninger vil bli behandlet konfidensielt. Navnet ditt vil bli byttet ut med et fiktivt navn og personlige opplysninger vil ikke fremstilles slik at de kan spores tilbake til deg i eventuelle publikasjoner. Lydopptak vil oppbevares i prosjektleders hjem og slettes etter fullført transkribering. Eventuelle personopplysninger om deg er det bare prosjektleder som har tilgang til, og disse vil lagres adskilt fra øvrige data.

Prosjektet skal etter planen avsluttes i juni 2020. Etter dette vil prosjektleder, hvis deltaker tillater det, beholde personopplysninger privat fram til 2025. Dette i tilfelle det skulle være aktuelt å følge opp prosjektet med videre forskning. Opplysningene skal da ikke brukes til noe annet enn å ta kontakt for spørsmål om å bidra til nytt eller videreført forskningsprosjekt.

Frivillig deltakelse

Det er frivillig å delta i studien, og du kan når som helst trekke ditt samtykke uten å oppgi noen grunn. Dersom du trekker deg, vil alle opplysninger om deg bli anonymisert.

Dersom du ønsker å delta eller har spørsmål til studien, ta kontakt med prosjektleder Signe Aarvik på telefon 97507973.

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, NSD - Norsk senter for forskningsdata AS.

Samtykke til deltakelse i studien

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien, og er villig til å delta

(Signert av prosjektdeltaker, dato)

Appendix 3: Project approval by Norwegian Centre for Research Data



Signe Aarvik
VID Misjonshøgskolen Vid vitenskapelige høgskole
Postboks 184 Vinderen
0319 OSLO

Vår dato: 21.02.2017

Vår ref: 52120 / 3 / STM

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

TILBAKEMELDING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 12.01.2017. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

52120	<i>A Qualitative Study of Beliefs and Meaning Making among Young Second-Generation Muslims in Norway</i>
<i>Behandlingsansvarlig</i>	<i>VID vitenskapelig høgskole, ved institusjonens øverste leder</i>
<i>Daglig ansvarlig</i>	<i>Signe Aarvik</i>

Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet, og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger vil være regulert av § 7-27 i personopplysningsforskriften. Personvernombudet tilrår at prosjektet gjennomføres.

Personvernombudets tilråding forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i meldeskjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, ombudets kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven og helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/meldeplikt/skjema.html>. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://pvo.nsd.no/prosjekt>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 10.06.2020, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Kjersti Haugstvedt

Siri Tenden Myklebust

Kontaktperson: Siri Tenden Myklebust tlf: 55 58 22 68

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

Dokumentet er elektronisk produsert og godkjent ved NSDs rutiner for elektronisk godkjenning.

