

The presentation and self-presentation of mosques in Norwegian mediascapes: construction of ‘the good ones’

Alexander Gamst Page^a and Sobh Chahboun^b

^aDepartment of Social Work, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway; ^bDepartment of Special Pedagogy, Queen Maud University College of Early Childhood Education, Trondheim, Norway

ABSTRACT

Mosques in Norway are subjected to high levels of suspicion and scrutiny and have frequently been the target of negatively charged media narratives. When examined, though, much of this reporting, even from respected outlets, is wholly unsubstantiated. Some have circular narratives where the source for the stories seems to be the organisations’ failure to proactively refute them. Other reporting contains no explicit allegations, but take a suspicious tone suggesting that there may be some wrongdoing somewhere. This argument of this paper is that this is part of the socially constructed imaginaries surrounding Muslims in the west, where they are placed into categories of acceptable or unacceptable, with the onus being on themselves to prove that they belong in the former category. The default assertion seems to be that Islamic religious organisations are suspect, and that they are expected to make an extra effort to show that they are ‘one of the good ones’.

KEYWORDS Islamophobia; mosques; Muslims; stereotypes; imaginaries; media analysis

Introduction

Norway is a historically Christian society, but one which has undergone a gradual, decades-long secularisation process (Østhus 2021). However, like many Christian heritage societies, the idea of a cultural opposition to Islam persists despite a decline in Christian believers, and Norwegian Muslims are subjected to higher-than-average levels of scrutiny and suspicion (Husain, Mirza, and Tirmazi 2022). Part of this may have to do with our propensity for seeing ‘the other’ as ruled by their culture (Wikan 1999). This, coupled with a generally negative portrayal of Islamic values (Døving 2015) creates an image of a group which will unthinkingly act in accordance with a barbaric belief system. The preconception of cultural automatons in Norway may be

CONTACT Alexander Gamst Page  alexander.gamst.page@ntnu.no

© 2024 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

particularly strong vis-à-vis cultures assumed to have religious bases, as Norway's secularisation creates an ideal where freedom of thought and morality are not only valued, but seen as a requisite for being fully human, an ideal from which Muslims in particular become excluded (Veninga 2018). Media portrayals also play an important role in creating such associations. Norwegian Muslims comprise approximately 4% of the population (Østby and Dalgård 2017), but are given disproportionate space in media discourses, often with a negative inflection (Døving 2020). This paper is an exploration of the ways in which Muslim organisations, particularly Mosques, present themselves to the public and are portrayed in Norwegian media.

Central to this study is the western imaginary of 'The Muslim', which has always been contentious (see Said 1978), but has worsened since September 11th. At this time, political and media rhetoric fuelled an association between Islam and terrorism, and thus the construct of 'Muslim-as-threat'. In Europe, it seems as though the fear of terrorism gradually shifted into a less tangible existential dread where many of the anxieties of globalisation were laid at the feet of Muslims collectively (Poole 2011). In this way, we see a widespread assumption, not shared by everyone, but prominent enough to be noticeable, that Islam is threatening or suspect (Alghandi 2015). In common parlance, Islam, and hence anyone presumed to be Muslim, became delineated into moderate and extreme, the former presented as acceptable to European society, the latter unacceptable (Scharbrodt 2011). We observe in the present analysis that those in the former camp are expected to prove their bona fides through acts or statements either against the unacceptable Islam or in support of Norwegian values. Thus, we see a noticeable trend in Norwegian mediascapes where Mosques face an unforgiving scrutiny, although the current findings suggest that this may be alleviated by their own media presence and engagement with criticism.

Method

Background

The study on which this paper is based spun off from the preparatory research of the Norwegian contingent of the PLURISPACE project, studying organisations dealing with the incorporation of Muslim groups in Oslo and Drammen. Both of these are urban areas with large Muslim populations and multiple places of worship. As part of the preparations for recruiting participants for PLURISPACE, the first author of this paper began by mapping organisations involved with integration and inclusion of Muslims in these urban centres. Knowing that some mosques had activities dedicated to incorporation, such as Norwegian language courses or community outreach

programmes, the more prominent Oslo and Drammen mosques were included. These were drawn from government registers (Norwegian Government 2021). In Oslo, inclusion was limited to those with more than 1000 registered members. As Drammen's overall population is lower, the criterion was set at 500 registered members. Inclusion in this list did not necessarily entail that these would be recruited, and, when this paper was first drafted, determinations as to suitability had not been made, and no potential participants had been contacted.

This was only intended to be a preparatory investigation into which organisations had programmes place for the incorporation of their members. However, researching these organisations also dredged up the media coverage they had attracted. In this regard, there were certain recurring elements in the ways in which the mosques were portrayed. We repeatedly noticed stories with a suspicious or accusatory tone, but with no basis presented. There were also several stories focusing on the mosques' spending, particularly on their premises. It also appeared as though the mosques which provided less information about themselves also tended to be those with more negative portrayal. This led to the decision to more systematically review the mosques' media data, and thus spin this off into a study in its own right.

The present study

This thus became an analysis of the presentations and self-presentations of mosques within Norwegian mediascapes. Data was gathered through online research. We reviewed their website, if any, as well as whether there were social media accounts belonging to the mosque, and what kind of communication these were used for. Lastly, we searched online for newspaper articles or stories wherein the mosque was mentioned.

The data presented in this paper is based entirely on publicly available sources, such as newspapers, organisational websites and social media posts. The mosques' media presentations that are reviewed are primarily news-stories, predominantly from the major national publications or local newspapers, in other words, legacy media. Fringe publications with a clear political bias are not included, except in a few cases where government politicians or MP's give interviews to such outlets. In these cases, it was felt that the interviewee, being in a position of trust and authority, raised the legitimacy of the story to where it needed to be taken more seriously. Self-presentations are the mosque's own websites, any interviews given by mosque leaders to the legacy media, and their own social media presence. This is primarily Facebook, although some also have Instagram or Twitter accounts.

From this, we wished to explore firstly, how Muslim religious organisations are presented in legacy media. Second, we wished to explore how they

presented themselves through their own communications. This includes websites, social media, interviews and participation in such activities as outreach and interfaith dialogues. Another variable was at whom this communication was primarily aimed. For instance, is social media used for the organisation to disseminate information to the general public, or to communicate with their existing members? Through this investigation, the patterns in the media narratives previously observed became clearer.

The data was analysed through a mixture of content analysis and thematic analysis. As has been described, the impetus for this paper was the realisation that certain themes recurred in the preliminary research. These were a) implied wrongdoing on the part of the mosques without any basis provided, b) a focus on how much mosques were spending, particularly on their premises, and c) a correlation between degree of self-presentation with the negativity of presentation. Therefore, it seemed logical to utilise content analysis in order to more systematically determine the presence of these themes. Thereafter, thematic analysis was done to delve into these themes, how they relate to each other and what their implications were.

Background and theory

Constructs of 'the Muslim'

As technologies of communication have improved, so has the availability of news, discourses and images from other places (Appadurai 1996). Such images do not exist in a vacuum, but may come pre-embedded in transmitted narratives, or be taken up into local narratives. Reports of terrorism, for instance, are often put forward as part of arguments espousing a supposed threat of Islam (Morton 2017). Non-western migrants face multiple vectors of marginalisation in Norway, which such narratives may exacerbate. These narratives may also become self-supporting, as difficulties in such areas as finding employment may be seen as an unwillingness to work or to integrate (Ali 2020). In this way, it is almost impossible for migrants and their descendants not to become second-class citizens if the narratives of the majority population situate them as such (Appadurai, 2019). The narrative that is often built up around Islam feeds into an idea that it is 'incompatible with western values' (Ewart, Cherney, and Murphy 2017). 'Values' here is not a scientific concept, but more of a political talking point where the vagueness is probably intentional, allowing it to be filled with whatever contents the speaker requires. Whatever it may mean, only 6% of Norway's population consider Islam fully compatible with Norwegian values, and only 19% hold that it's somewhat compatible, both considerably lower than for any other religion (Brekke, Fladmoe, and Wollebæk 2020).

In general, cultural distance, or the perceived difference between cultures, has a large effect on the experiences of migrants and their descendants (Mahfud et al. 2018), but those from Muslim majority countries, or those presumed to be Muslims, also have to contend with negative images of Islam (Strabac, Aalberg, and Valenta 2014). Islam has always had a special place in the mental landscape of what is nebulously termed 'The West' and is often portrayed as immoral and backward (Døving 2015). Despite being a diverse religion with many sects, regional differences and unclear outlines, it has typically been presented as a unified whole in the west, forcing us to differentiate between Islam and the externally constructed narratives surrounding it (Quinn 2008).

After 11 September 2001, Islam was increasingly presented as a threat in western media (Poole 2011). In one sense, we can see that religious terms became more prominent. Terms such as jihad and Islamism became more frequently used in News reporting, displaying an assumed association between Islam and terrorism (Bani Younes, Hassan, and Azmi 2020). This assumption became very noticeable in Norway on 22 July 2012, when a bomb was detonated at the government headquarters. Initially, before the perpetrator was known, the major news outlets discussed the event as an act of terrorism and speculated that it was likely to be Islamic extremists responding to Norwegian involvement in Afghanistan and Libya (Norway's public reports 2012). The association between Islam and terrorism was further demonstrated by the fact that, once the perpetrator was known to be a white far-right extremist, the use of the terms 'terror' and 'terrorism' sharply declined in these same outlets (Eimot 2014). That attack was also not linked to the perpetrator's religion in the way that is typically the case when atrocities are linked to someone with an Arabic name. Partly due to this linkage, Islam becomes, in public perception, a religion of violence. Muslims have a tendency of being assumed to support terrorism unless they speak out against it, giving many the feeling that they are required to proactively denounce acts that have nothing to do with them, or be implicated (Yildiz and Verkuyten 2013; Author, 2021). Islam, in the public imagination, becomes bifurcated into the 'moderate' or the 'extreme', where a major part of where one is considered to fall depends on religiosity (Scharbrodt 2011).

In the Norwegian context, more than half the population is found to have distrust of Muslims, rising significantly for those Muslims seen as strongly religious (IMDi 2020). While relatively left-wing and liberal, Norway has experienced the same rise of right-wing populism that can be seen elsewhere in Europe (Halikiopoulou 2018). Also, if only 25% of the population holds that Islam is even somewhat compatible with Norwegian values, this must mean that such attitudes exist across the political divide. The incompatibility of Islam has become a central part of the political rhetoric of the right, which held an unprecedentedly strong position in Norway at time of writing. In

2013, the labour government of Norway was replaced by a coalition government consisting of the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party, the Christian Democrats and the Progress Party. Especially the latter are characterised by animus against immigration, particularly from Muslim majority countries (Bangstad and Munzl 2010; Fangen and Vaage 2018).

Media narratives play a major role in spreading, and maintaining such animus against Islam, and there are many studies attesting to this. For many migrant and post-migrant communities, the places of worship become a focal point (Guest 2003; Nguyen et al. 2013), and mosques have been explicitly targeted in Progress Party rhetoric (Progress Party 2021). However, there are few studies specifically covering the effects of media representations of the mosques themselves in western societies. One of the few that do cover this issue is Bowe and Makki (2016), which analyses the ways in which Muslim prayer spaces are framed by US media. Many of these narratives fall into the same patterns explored above. While they describe significant amounts of islamophobia, most of the media narratives which the authors explore are basically positive towards Muslim communities. However, there is a definite trend that even these positive stories are placed within a polarisation of 'the good Muslims' and 'the bad Muslims', which seems analogous to the moderate vs. extreme dyad explored previously. Some of the discourses were also framed along the archetype of 'Muslim-as-threat'. Here, however, the presentation takes on a further dimension by being linked not only to Muslim communities, but to the concept of a separate Muslim space. Here, the fact that the media narratives are centred around physical buildings added an element of secrecy. They were places where brainwashing and radicalisation of children could be happening under our very noses. The fear of radicalisation behind closed doors, as well as the wellbeing of children, is mirrored in two other studies of Islamic education within mosques in Britain (Cherti, Glennie, and Bradley 2011) and Holland (Sözeri, Kosar-Altinyelken, and Volman 2019). These touch on many of the same themes as Bowe & Makki (2016), but emphasise the child abuse and child welfare concerns to a greater extent. All these studies link the proposed abuse and extremism to seclusion. By setting up a religious congregation, the members are assumed to wish for a parallel community and not to incorporate with their surrounding societies.

One common concept that emerges, and which will be important for this paper as well, is that of framing. Framing, in this context, is how media outlets create a certain image of reality by selecting which parts of this reality are salient, and what their relationship to each other are (Entman 1993). This is a deceptively simple premise that carries quite profound implications. Part of this is embedded in the discourses that these outlets use, which might in this sense be seen as the normalised reality implicit within their statements. That is to say that some statements carry with them an assumed version of reality that needs to be in place in order for the statement to make sense (Foucault and

Sheridan 1975). Saying that someone is ‘one of the good ones’ only makes sense with the assumption that there are bad ones. One important part of the selection to bear in mind is that media narratives frame discourses simply by being narratives. This creates a tautology where the very act of writing a newspaper column about something in itself becomes a statement that the subject is newsworthy. In this way, the media is not merely a reporter of what is objectively worthy of notice, but play a major role in determining what is to be granted prominence, and how it is to be presented (Bell and Entman 2011).

Findings

Presentations and self-presentation of mosques in Norwegian media

This section revolves around media presentations, and self-presentations, of Mosques in Norwegian media. As part of the preparations for PLURISPACE, we conducted preliminary research on all potential organisations. This included internet searches, such as reviews of each organisation’s website, and any media coverage they had received. It was quickly clear that there were patterns in the way Norwegian mosques were presented, which was the impetus for this paper.

Name	Nationality/ Ethnicity	Members	Website	Social media	News items identified
Oslo					
Tawfiq Islamic Centre	Somali	6642	No	Yes	5
The Islamic Cultural Centre	Pakistani/ Turkish	4952	Yes	Yes	4
The Islamic centre and activity house	Pakistani	1297	Yes	Yes	0
Central Jamaat Ahle Sunnat	Pakistani	6283	Yes	Yes	7
World Islamic Mission	Pakistani	4475	Yes	Yes	2
The Turkish Islamic Union (Diyamet)	Turkish	3682	Yes*	Yes	1
Albanian Islamic Cultural Centre	Albanian	4578	Yes	No	0
Masjid Attaouba	Moroccan	3318	Yes	Yes	0
Bait-un-Nasr Mosque	Indian/ Pakistani	1413	Yes	Yes	1
The Islamic Society (Rabita)	Mixed	3370	Yes	Yes	0
The Islamic Cultural Centre	Turkish	1016	No	No	0
Drammen					
The Islamic Society (Rabita)	Mixed	1221	Yes	Yes	1
Turkish Islamic Congregation	Turkish	516	No	No	6
The Islamic Cultural Centre	Turkish	1249	No	No	3
The Turkish Religious Community	Turkish	1184	Yes	Yes	1
The Islamic Kurdish Union	Kurdish	691	No	No	0
Albanian Islamic Cultural Centre	Albanian	2098	Yes	Yes	0
Drammen Mosque	Pakistani	519	Yes	Yes	2

*Has a website, but this appears to be a copy-paste of that of the Swedish branch.

Self-presentations

Social media

For many, social media are platforms of communication where one might reach a wider audience than one otherwise would. Quite a few of the mosques (e.g. Masjid Attaouba and CJAS) had social media accounts, primarily Facebook, although some also used Twitter and Instagram (e.g. Furuset). However, rather than communicating outwards, the types of posts seemed more aimed at the existing membership. They would contain information about events at the mosque, synopses of meetings, information about births and deaths and the like. Many of the mosques that were reviewed (e.g. Tawfiq) had started Facebook accounts during the pandemic. These especially seem overwhelmingly to be aimed at communicating with the members rather than outwards, and were used to conduct prayer service and Khutbah to the congregation during lockdown.

Websites

Social media was mainly used for practical information, and while some mosques had websites that are also utilised in this way (e.g. CJAS 2021) most of the mosques that had websites posted there about their core values and philosophy. Some such values might be tolerance, compassion and justice (Furuset moské 2021), or peace, harmony and tolerance (Diyanet 2021). Many of these websites (e.g. ICC Norway 2021; World Islamic Mission 2021) centre around the dual identity of being Norwegian and Muslim, living both in accordance with Islam and the rules of Norwegian society. Quite a few also emphasise interfaith understanding and contact between Norwegian Muslims and non-Muslims (e.g. DiYANET Drammen 2021; Furuset moské 2021; ICC Norway 2021).

Some of the websites also explicitly invite visitors (Masjid Attaouba 2021; Rabita 2021), particularly inviting school field trips to come learn more about Islam (e.g. Diyanet 2021). We see a recurring theme of the mosques who have websites emphasising that they and their members should be a part of Norwegian society an part of their local communities. Others, on the other hand, seem to communicate separation. While Diyanet emphasises the importance of mutual cultural respect, members are not referred to as Norwegian, but as Turks who have adopted a new homeland (Diyanet 2021). QIKSH allocate significant space to economic matters, especially the 'corpse fund', which deals with repatriation of the bodies of members who die in Norway.

Interviews

Another way that these mosques communicate their positions is through media statements, although it is important to note that they do not necessarily speak for all their members. For instance, in 2013, the imam of Central Jamaat Ahle Sunnat sparked controversy when he stated in an interview that Norwegian media had a bias against Islam because it is run by Jews. When asked for comment, one of the Mosque's leaders backed the Imam, taking it one step further by asking 'why do you think the Germans killed them? One reason is that they are disruptive people in the world' (NRK 2013). This story eventually died down, but later, this same Imam fell into hot water again for this sparked harsh criticism, naturally enough, and it was reported that the board of the mosque had instructed the Imam to issue a public apology, or step down (Dagbladet 2016; NRK 2016b).

In 2012, Ubaydullah Hussain, a jihadist and former member of WIM announced that it was the duty of Muslims to oppose 'the infidel'. A spokesperson from WIM quickly disavowed the statement, pointing out that Hussain was no longer associated with the Mosque (Verdens Gang 2012).

Media presentations

There are several one-off stories in our sample. However, a large proportion of the news items that we review fall into one or both of two thematic areas, which are concerns about finances and about child welfare.

Finances

Financial concerns is by far the most recurring of the media themes. One of the most contentious of which relate to Tawfiq Islamic Centre's internal power struggles (Aftenposten 2019a, 2020). The reason for the media taking an interest was that the leaders have lifetime appointments, and allegedly control €4.4 million (NRK 2020a). This reporting implies corruption in this regard, especially related to the leaders residing abroad, but does not contain any explicit allegations. This led to the municipal governor threatening to rescind Tawfiq's status as a religious organisation. This was resolved in 2020 when the governor decided not to withdraw funding (NRK 2020b). This notion of foreign influence occurs elsewhere, such as in reporting that there is close cooperation between Diyanet-Oslo and Turkey's Directorate of religious affairs, with the allegation being that several Turkish imams, Diyanet's among them, are funded by and answerable to the Turkish state (Dagbladet 2020)

The insinuation of wrongdoing despite any real basis crops up quite often, most egregiously in a piece on Drammen's Turkish Islamic Congregation. They had purchased a new building for €1.4 million, which they planned to use as a Mosque, a cultural centre, Qur'anic school and to rent out the

premises for private events (Drammens tidende 2017a). Later the same year, the paper reported that a case had been erected against the Mosque (Drammens tidende 2017b). The actual part of the piece that concerns the Mosque seemed to be quite narrow and was not extensively explained. From what little information was included, the issue appears clerical, that in order to use the premises as announced, DTIM would need to apply for the building to be reclassified. The bulk of the story was about illegal activity which had been conducted in the building before the purchase, despite the story ostensibly being about DTIM. Bizarrely, the story goes back and forth between the stated topic and the earlier events, stating a few paragraphs in that there is no relationship between the two.

Another form this financial theme takes is misappropriation of funds. Starting in 2009, the Islamic Cultural Centre had received €97,000 through a daughter company, which was allocated to help children do homework. However, in 2019, The Department of Education conducted a surprise inspection, and found no sign of such activities. The municipality of Oslo announced that they were considering demanding the money refunded, and possibly pressing charges, but would allow the ICC a chance to explain first, which a spokesman for the ICC said was being written (Aftenposten 2019b). If there have been further developments in the case, this has not been reported.

Another example is Furuset Mosque. Much of the media coverage of Furuset has concerned the construction of the building itself, which drew much ire from Muslims and non-Muslims alike. Threats of violence were reported, from the plans becoming known and throughout the construction process. The root of the issues seem to be the size of the building, with a capacity far exceeding the actual membership of the congregation, and the location near the main road into Oslo, where such a large building would dominate the skyline (Verdens gang 2011).

Sometimes, the price spent on premises is the entirety of the story, as was the case when World Islamic Mission's premises needed to be retiled, at a price tag of roughly €1.6 million (Aftenposten 2023), or when the Oslo branch of Rabita planned a new building that would cost €19.5 million (Aftenposten 2021). At other times, these price tags are thrown into seemingly unrelated stories with no explanation. This is the case for the ICC (NRK 2016a), or DTIM (Aftenposten 2019b).

Child welfare

The second most recurring theme echoes that covered in the literature, and is concerns about child welfare. This is often linked to after school homework services and Qur'anic school or language training (Aftenposten 2019c). Here too, this is linked to education and the idea of cultural isolation. This latter issue was raised by Jon Helgheim (MP) to the far-right outlet Human Rights Service, where he decried mosque after school services, saying this took

children away from socialisation with their non-Muslim peers (Human Rights Service 2020).

The most prominent story about afterschool homework services concerned The Islamic Cultural Centre. In 2009, the Imam was accused of violence against children, the claims being that children were caned if they came late to Qur'an school, or hadn't done their homework. The case was dismissed, but the officer in charge stated that 'nevertheless, it was worth bringing charges, because we have communicated what kind of behaviour we don't want in Norway' (Dagbladet 2009). This overnight childcare was the centre of a later story (Aftenposten 2019e). The language used was extremely loaded, with the title 'They call it afterschool childcare', and the phrase 'afterschool childcare' set in brackets in the article itself. Details such as the narrowness of the streets and the proximity to the bins are dwelt upon. The article opens with the phrase 'it is hard to see inside', which the article later explains refer to the ground-floor windows having curtains.

There have also been some concerns about religious and cultural education being carried out outside Norway. In 2016, the local newspaper *Drammens tidende* (2016), and the NRK (2016a) reported that adolescent girls from DTIM were sent to Belgium or Turkey in what was characterised as Qur'anic education. The girls in question take a gap year between grades 7 and 8, and travel to these places to learn more about the Turkish culture and Islam. Muslim women in Drammen with personal experience of this practice were quoted as saying that this is problematic, as the girls' educations are delayed. Others defend the practice, saying that DTIM do not have the resources to teach adolescents as well as children, and that it is important that the girls learn about Islam from 'the right sources' (NRK 2016a).

Discussion

Proactive transparency

The treatment and reactions these religious organisations have met has been varying, but several patterns emerge. A clear trend discernible in these representations is an expectation from the majority society that Muslim religious institutions operate with transparency. On the surface, this seems like a reasonable proposition. However, this transparency is expected to be proactive. That is to say, at the point where suspicion arises, the fact that the missed information has not already been provided, is taken as evidence that the suspicion has merit. This suggests an expectation that it should have been shared ahead of time, and that a failure to already have shared whatever information the observer wants, is taken as evidence of malfeasance.

There is a clear distinction between the various Mosques we here are investigating with regard to how they engage with the broader society.

More importantly, we have seen that some are marked as being 'closed', with a clear implication of moral judgement for being so. This is a point we see in prior research, that closedness is presented as a negative, and linked to both an increased capability of doing negative acts behind closed doors, and an indication that there is no wish to become part of the surrounding society. It is indeed true that it varies how much information the mosques put out into the public space, as well as a difference as to who the intended audience seems to be. Some direct their messaging to non-Muslims, such as when inviting visitors, holding interfaith seminars, or teaching schoolchildren about Islam. Others have neither websites or social media pages and put very little information out into the public sphere. Media and Islam-sceptical politicians tend to refer to the latter as 'closed' or 'extreme'. This linkage that closed must mean 'extreme' is also one which is discernible in the prior research. This also likely stems from similar mindset as the demand for proactive sharing, as this is expected in order to assuage suspicion. The act of hiding means that one has something to hide, and what would a Muslim community have to hide if not extremism?

This question is not as facetious as it might appear, because such thoughts seem to inform the framing of media narratives. While the moniker 'closed' here is used in the sense of closed to outside scrutiny. In addition, the frequent pairing of the terms 'closed' and 'extreme', suggests an understanding that these concepts are related, that they are thought to go hand-in-hand. Of course, in some cases there is some basis for suspecting that a given mosque might represent more extremist views. There are examples of high-ranking members of some mosques who have made problematic statements. However, we also see that foundations such as these are not necessary, and that Muslim communities may be accused of extremism based solely on the perception of closedness. Rather, it is the lack of self-reporting itself that is used as evidence of whatever undesirable is being alleged. 'It is hard to see inside' was, as we will recall, the first line of the story on DIKSIN. Coupled with the overall tone of that piece, it is hard to read this in any other way than opacity, itself, is evidence of wrongdoing. The implication here seems to be that anything less than complete and proactive transparency signifies that there is something to hide.

In this way, we may read this as an assumption that non-Muslims have a right to transparency from Muslim organisations. With regard to the overnight childcare, we have seen that this has sparked controversy. On the one hand, it is clear that children's safety should be safeguarded, and that any reasonable suspicion of wrongdoing should be investigated. The investigation in 2009, for instance, seemed completely justified. However, it is notable that no such basis is presented in the 2019 story, and that the mere fact of children spending the night itself is presented as the transgression. Phrases such as 'for the first time we have uncovered' (Aftenposten 2019d) carries

with it the implication that the possibility for children to stay overnight was concealed, that there was an attempt to hide this fact, but here too, no actual evidence of deceit or obfuscation is presented. The implication seems to be an assumption that non-Muslims are entitled to Muslim transparency, and that Muslims are required to justify and explain their actions. Failure to do so is, in and of itself, used as evidence of wrongdoing. This feeds into the narratives outlined earlier, where Muslims fall into acceptable/unacceptable, where they are assumed to be the latter until proved otherwise, and that they themselves are responsible for providing the evidence. In this way, the assumption becomes that a failure to proactively share information, or the act of asserting privacy, becomes evidence of wrongdoing.

Concerns about murky finances

The call for transparency we have seen so far have mostly been fairly general. These have also been in line with prior research in the field. However, one recurring, specific area where lack of transparency is criticised, and which seems particular with the Norwegian context, is how the mosques are financed. However, here too it is typically left quite vague what exactly is being alleged. The largest expense tends to come when a religious community builds new premises. A large proportion of the legacy media coverage of these organisations is reporting how much the Muslim communities pay for their buildings. This is sometimes included, apparently apropos of nothing, as part of an otherwise unrelated story. At other times, the sale is the main focus of the story, usually coupled with vague allusions of wrongdoing such as those described above.

There are several examples of this, but the most extreme is a piece on DTIM in *Drammens tidende* was another example of the tone of the story seeming to imply some nefarious activity with very little basis. As we saw, the core of the issue was that DTIM needed permission to reclassify the building in order to allow for the intended use. This seems like a bureaucratic hurdle that any number of organisations would have contended with at some time or another, and it seems unlikely that this would be routinely reported on. However, the title of the story was 'Criminal case erected against mountain centre', immediately followed by the Turkish congregation being identified as the new owners. After this, the story continues to list the serious criminal activity carried out by the *previous*, owners which are unrelated to the current owners. Given that the headline is about the case levelled at DTIM, the activities of the previous owners do not seem relevant. Indeed, the story itself points out that they are not related, but nevertheless proceeds to make this the bulk of the article. It may be that the intention of this inclusion is to confuse the reader and make them think that the serious allegations are against DTIM. This seems

more likely given the structure of the article. The activity of the previous owners is not merely laid out in the beginning as a background fact, but is returned to repeatedly throughout the text. This makes it easy for a casual reader to forget how little of this pertains to the actual case that the story claims to be about. One might even rhetorically ask why, if the author knows that this has nothing to do with the subject of the piece, it takes up so much space, or indeed why it is mentioned at all.

It should be noted that the above example is not typical. We do, however, see numerous examples of legacy media pieces covering organisations purchases of real estate, constructing new buildings or refurbishing existing buildings, and reporting on the price. Some of these appear to be fairly neutral and factual, such as the reporting on WIM's façade. However, many of these reports on spending carry a sinister undertone. An example of this is a story on DIKSIN, where it is noted that the 'controversial movement' paid €9.8 million for their building. Here, the overall negative tone of the piece, coupled with prefacing the statement with characterising the movement as controversial, cannot help but make the amount of money seem sinister or suspicious. At other times, this sense of malfeasance is implied by pointing out that it is unclear where the money comes from. Here the implication seems to be that unaccounted financing may come from abroad, such as from the Turkish or Saudi government, with concerns that this would impact the independence of the organisation. In the same vein, news stories sometimes point out that not all the leaders of a given mosque reside in Norway.

Cultural compatibility

Another issue that seems to inform much of the reporting is the issue of Islam being compatible with Norwegian culture. Again, it is unclear what this means, but a reasonable inference is that there is a suggested incongruity in someone incorporating into Norway, and retaining their Muslim identity. Such an interpretation would be borne out by the fact that migration is seen as a positive by so many in Norway, and yet Islam is so negatively viewed. This is a concern among many in Norway, as most do not believe that Islam is fully compatible with western values (Brekke, Fladmoe, and Wollebæk 2020). Some of the more general critiques seems to be informed by this animus. For instance, the animosity against 'closed' religious congregations seems to stem from this idea of cultural compatibility.

However, there are some more explicit accounts that fall within this category. The concern about children's education that we see in some of these cases, are often explicitly linked to integration. This is especially the case in those instances where young people spend a year in the homeland of their parents or grandparents, such as we saw with the reporting on Tawfiq.

The critical coverage of building new premises sometimes also fall within this category, especially if the proposed building will outwardly resemble a mosque. This was the concern in much of the reporting on Baitun Nasr. This was not the first mosque in Norway, but became quite controversial at the time it was built, as it was in a central location, and with a large enough building to dominate the urban landscape.

Conclusions

One of the interesting points of this analysis is that Muslims in Norway seem to be tarred with the same brush as in other European countries as being strange or threatening, despite there not having been a basis for this stereotype. Much of the reporting we have reviewed does not mention terrorism, or in any other way explicitly refer to Muslims as threatening, although such appears to be the implication. We see a very high level of scrutiny and suspicion, which is weaponised against Muslim groups. Vague allegations may be levelled with little to no basis, whereupon any response other than total openness is used as evidence of guilt.

This can be explained by the globalised flow of images and discourses. A significant part of Norway's mediascapes consisting of news and popular culture are shared with other western countries, especially the anglophone. This means that Norway is exposed to, and shares in, the discourses that these create. With regard to the split between acceptable and unacceptable, we see that the burden is laid on both the individual Muslim and representatives of Muslim organisations to show that they belong to the former group. This is done in various ways, but a big part of this is disavowing extremism as a whole, as well as individual extremists. By distancing themselves from the unacceptable, they can communicate distance to them, thus positioning themselves as something else. In a binary, this will tend to be in the opposing bracket.

Suggestions for future directions

One potential methodological weakness was the distinction between legacy media and fringe publications. We delineated thusly in order to cordon off spurious information. However, we found that legacy media also seemed to make bad-faith arguments, misrepresent information and present speculation as fact. A further study on media narratives would therefore be well advised to take such publications into consideration, as well as social media posts aimed at mosques, not just produced by them. The experiences of Muslims will naturally be shaped by how they are perceived, and this in turn will be affected not just by facts, but also misleading media narratives presented as factual.

This brings us over to the more interesting area of future research. Gathering media publications and discerning the narratives embedded within them is a somewhat academic exercise. However, there are real people who are impacted by such representations. Therefore, we would suggest that future research into this area would be most beneficially engaged by studying how such narratives affect societal attitudes, and how these in turn affect Muslim communities and their members.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This work was supported by the PLURISPACE project, HERA.

References

- Aftenposten. 2019a. "Intern strid i somalisk moské gjorde at politiet måtte rykke ut." Accessed August 20, 2021. <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/aw56AO/intern-strid-i-somalisk-moske-gjorde-at-politiet-maatte-rykke-ut>.
- Aftenposten. 2019b. "Leksehjelptilbudet til Det islamske kultursenter fikk 95 000 kroner. Naa vurderer oslo kommune aa kreve pengene tilbake." Accessed September 9, 2021. <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/70oxLv/leksehjelptilbud-det-til-det-islamske-kultursenter-fikk-95000-kroner-n>.
- Aftenposten. 2019c. "Vil utvide omstridt tilbud med muslimsk overnattings-«SFO» i Oslo." Accessed September 6, 2021. <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/RRQLKr/vil-utvide-omstridt-tilbud-med-muslimsk-overnattings-sfo-i-oslo>.
- Aftenposten. 2019d. "Slik har Det Islamske Kultursenter finansiert eiendomskjøp for 101 millioner." Accessed September 9, 2021. <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/3Je9v0/slik-har-det-islamske-kultursenter-finansiert-eiendomskjoep-for-101-mil>.
- Aftenposten. 2019e. "De kaller det SFO med overnatting." Accessed September 7, 2021. <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/WbWEor/de-kaller-det-en-sfo-med-overnatting>.
- Aftenposten. 2020. "Fylkesmannen snur i striden om den somaliske moskeen. Vil vurdere krav om statsstøtte på nytt." Accessed August 20, 2021. <https://www.aftenposten.no/norge/i/pA633o/fylkesmannen-snur-i-striden-om-den-somaliske-moskeen-vil-vurdere-krav>.
- Aftenposten. 2021. "Vil bygge islamsk kultursenter i Oslo sentrum." Accessed September 9, 2021. <https://www.aftenposten.no/oslo/i/7KRe84/vil-bygge-muslimsk-kultursenter-i-oslo-sentrum>.
- Aftenposten. 2023. Accessed August 10, 2023. <https://www.aftenposten.no/oslo/i/WRRzkk/norges-foerste-moske-har-faatt-ny-fasade-for-tredje-gang>.
- Alghandi, E. A. 2015. "The Representation of Islam in Western Media: The Coverage of Norway Terrorist Attacks." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature* 4 (3): 198–205.

- Ali, J. A. 2020. "Muslims as Second-Class Citizens." In *Muslim Minorities and Social Cohesion: Cultural Fragmentation in the West*, edited by A. W. Ata, 162–174. London: Routledge.
- Appadurai, A. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Appadurai, A. 2019. "Traumatic exit, identity narratives, and the ethics of hospitality." *Television & New Media* 20 (6): 558–565
- Bangstad, S., and M. Munzl. 2010. "'Anthropologists are Talking' About Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism in the New Europe." *Journal of Anthropology* 75 (2): 213–228.
- Bani Younes, Z., I. Hassan, and M. N. Latiff Azmi. 2020. "A Pragmatic Analysis of Islam-related Terminologies in Selected Eastern and Western Mass Media." *Arab World English Journal (AWEJ)* 11.
- Bell, C. V., and R. M. Entman. 2011. "The Media's Role in America's Exceptional Politics of Inequality: Framing the Bush Tax Cuts of 2001 and 2003." *The International Journal of Press/politics* 16 (4): 548–572. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161211417334>.
- Bowe, B. J., and T. W. Makki. 2016. Muslim neighbors or an Islamic threat? A constructionist framing analysis of newspaper coverage of mosque controversies. *Media, Culture & Society* 38 (4): 540–558.
- Brekke, J.-P., A. Fladmoe, and D. Wollebæk. 2020. Holdninger til innvandring, integrering og mangfold i Norge. *Integreringsbarometeret 2020*. Rapport 2020:8. Oslo: Institutt for samfunnsforskning.
- Cherti, M., A. Glennie, and L. Bradley. 2011. *Madrassas' in the British Media*. London: Institute for Public Policy Research Briefing.
- CJAS. 2021. "Central Jamaat-e Ahl-e Sunnat." Accessed September 9, 2021. <https://cjas.no/>.
- Dagbladet. 2009. "Moske-talsmann om voldssiktelse: - Unødvendig å gå så hardt ut." Accessed July 25, 2021. <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/q216g/moske-talsmann-om-voldssiktelse-unoedvendig-aa-gaa-saa-hardt-ut>.
- Dagbladet. 2016. "Omstridt Oslo-imam får fortsette - men må beklage." Accessed July 25, 2021. <https://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/omstridt-oslo-imam-far-fortsette-men-ma-beklage/60453516>.
- Dagbladet. 2020. "Tyrkia sponser imamer i Norge. Kan miste statsstøtten." Accessed July 25, 2021. <https://www.dagbladet.no/nyheter/tyrkia-sponser-imamer-i-norge-kan-miste-statsstotten/73132593>.
- Diyanet. 2021. "Norveç Türk Diyanet Vakfı." Accessed August 29, 2021. <http://www.diyamet.no/icerik/amac-ve-hedefler>.
- DiYANET Drammen. 2021. "Det Tyrkiske Trossamfunnet i Drammen Og Omegn." Accessed Accessed 9, 2021. <https://www.diyanetdrammen.com/>.
- Døving, C. A. 2015. "The Way They Treat Their Daughters and Wives: Racialisation of Muslims in Norway." *Islamophobia Studies Journal* 3 (3): 62–77.
- Døving, C. A. 2020. "'Muslims are . . .'" Contextualising Survey Answers." In *The Shifting Boundaries of Prejudice: Antisemitism and Islamophobia in Contemporary Norway*, edited by C. Hoffmann and V. Moe, 254–273. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press (Universitetsforlaget AS).
- Drammens tidende. 2016. "Jenter sendes på koranskole før videregående: tragisk." Accessed September 9, 2021. <https://www.dt.no/nyheter/drammen/religion/jenter-sendes-pa-koranskole-for-videregaaende-tragisk/s/5-57-481089>.

- Drammens tidende. 2017a. "Kjøpte fjellsenteret for 14 millioner: Har alltid vært min drøm." Accessed September 7, 2021. <https://www.dt.no/nyheter/drammen/naring-sliv/kjopte-fjellsenteret-for-14-millioner-har-alltid-vart-min-drom/s/5-57-750941>.
- Drammens tidende. 2017b. "Ulovlightssak mot fjellsenteret." Accessed September 7, 2021. <https://www.dt.no/drammen/nyhet/naringsliv/ulovlightssak-mot-fjellsenteret/s/5-57-756620?&session=83a97f49-020f-4317-958b-add6e8376189>.
- Eimot, K. 2014. *Terrorisme i den norske mediediskursen*. Master Thesis, University of Oslo.
- Entman, R. M. 1993. "Framing: Toward Clarification of a Fractured Paradigm." *Journal of Communication* 43 (4): 51–58. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.1993.tb01304.x>.
- Ewart, J., A. Cherney, and K. Murphy. 2017. "News Media Coverage of Islam and Muslims in Australia: An Opinion Survey Among Australian Muslims." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 37 (2): 147–163. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2017.1339496>.
- Fangen, K., and M. Vaage. 2018. "'The Immigration Problem' and Norwegian Right-Wing Politicians." *New Political Science* 40 (3): 459–476. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2018.1487145>.
- Foucault, M. 1975. *Discipline and Punish*. A. Sheridan, Tr. Paris: FR, Gallimard.
- Furuset moské. 2021. "Hensikten med en Moské." Accessed September 6, 2021. <https://furusetmoske.no/hensikten-med-en-moske/>.
- Guest, K. J. 2003. *God in Chinatown: Religion and Survival in New York's Evolving Immigrant Community*. Vol. 11. New York: NYU Press.
- Halikiopoulou, D. 2018. "A Right-Wing Populist Momentum? A Review of 2017 Elections Across Europe." *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 56 (S1): 63–73. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.12769>.
- Human Rights Service. 2020. "Regjeringen er livredd for å ta i islam. Nekter å svare Carl I. Hagen." Accessed August 20, 2021. <https://www.rights.no/tag/tawfiq-islamsk-senter/>.
- Husain, A., F. Y. Mirza, and T. Tirmazi. 2022. "Muslim Youth in the United States." In *Radicalisation, Extremism and Social Work Practice*, edited by L. Robinson and M. R. Gardee, 48–69, London: Routledge.
- ICC Norway. 2021. "ICC Norway (Facebook page)." Accessed August 27, 2021. https://www.facebook.com/iccnorway/posts/3906960042749408?__tn__=-R.
- IMDi. 2020. "Integreringsbarometeret." Accessed November 18, 2021. <https://www.imdi.no/om-imdi/rapporter/2020/integreringsbarometeret-2020/>.
- Mahfud, Y., C. Badea, M. Verkuyten, and K. Reynolds. 2018. "Multiculturalism and Attitudes Toward Immigrants: The Impact of Perceived Cultural Distance." *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology* 49 (6): 945–958. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022022117730828>.
- Masjid Attaouba. 2021. "Marokkansk trossamfunn - Masjid Attaouba." Accessed September 6, 2021. <https://www.attaouba.no/>.
- Morton, S. 2017. "Introduction." In *Literature, Migration and the 'War on Terror'*, edited by F. Tolan, S. Morton, A. Valassopoulos, and R. Spencer, 2–6. London: Routledge.
- Nguyen, A. W., R. J. Taylor, L. M. Chatters, A. Ahuvia, E. Izberk-Bilgin, and F. Lee. 2013. "Mosque-Based Emotional Support Among Young Muslim Americans." *Review of Religious Research* 55 (4): 535–555. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13644-013-0119-0>.
- Norway's public reports. 2012. Rapport fra 22. juli-kommisjonen. *Norwegian Government Security and Service Organisation* [report]. <https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/bb3dc76229c64735b4f6eb4dbfcdbe8/no/pdfs/nou201220120014000dddpdfs.pdf>.

- Norwegian Government. 2021. "Antall tilskuddstellende medlemmer i tros- og livssynssamfunn i 2021." Accessed August 20, 2021. <https://www.regjeringen.no/no/tema/tro-og-livssyn/tros-og-livssynssamfunn/innsiktsartikler/antall-tilskuddsberettigede-medlemmer-i/id631507/>.
- NRK. 2013. "En klassisk antisemittisk konspirasjonsteori." Accessed August 23, 2021. <https://www.nrk.no/osloogviken/imam-mener-joder-styrer-media-1.10876038>.
- NRK. 2016a. "Sendes på koranskole før videregående." Accessed September 9, 2021. <https://www.nrk.no/osloogviken/xl/sendes-pa-koranskole-for-videregaende-1.13198162>.
- NRK. 2016b. "Omstridt imam fortsetter." Accessed September 9, 2021. <https://www.nrk.no/norge/omstridt-imam-fortsetter-1.12902161>.
- NRK. 2017a. "Abid Raja: – Ingen god dag for muslimer." Accessed August 20, 2021. <https://www.nrk.no/norge/sterkt-kritisk-til-at-islamsk-rad-ansatte-nikabkledd-kvinne-1.13448280>.
- NRK. 2017b. Accessed August 20, 2021. <https://www.nrk.no/norge/kulturdepartementet-holder-tilbake-stotten-til-islamsk-rad-1.13579566>.
- NRK. 2020a. "Kulturdepartementet holder tilbake støtten til Islamsk Råd." Accessed August 20, 2021. <https://www.nrk.no/norge/kontrollerer-moskeens-millionverdier-pa-livstid-1.15151987>.
- NRK. 2020b. "Fylkesmannen har avgjort moskestrid: Får trolig statsstøtte." Accessed August 20, 2021. <https://www.nrk.no/norge/fylkesmannen-har-avgjort-moskestrid-far-statsstotte-1.15192479>.
- Østby, L., and A. B. Dalgård. 2017. 22nd of November. 4% Muslimer i Norge? <https://www.ssb.no/befolkning/artikler-og-publikasjoner/4-prosent-muslimer-i-norge-329115>.
- Østhus, A. (December 13, 2021). Sekularisering i Norge. <https://www.ssb.no/kultur-og-fritid/religion-og-livssyn/artikler/sekularisering-i-norge>.
- Poole, E. 2011. "Change and Continuity in the Representation of British Muslims Before and After 9/11: The UK Context." *Global Media Journal* 2 (4): 49–62.
- Progress Party. 2021. Vil kjempe mot Islam Net. Accessed November 22, 2023. <https://www.frp.no/nyheter/vil-kjempe-mot-islam-net>.
- Quinn, F. 2008. *The Sum of All Heresies: The Image of Islam in Western Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rabita. 2021. "Velkommen til Rabita Det Islamske Forbundet." Accessed September 9, 2021: <https://www.rabita.no/>.
- Said, E. 1978. *Orientalism*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Scharbrodt, O. 2011. "Shaping the Public Image of Islam: The Shiis of Ireland as "Moderate" Muslims." *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 31 (4): 517–533.
- Sözeri, S., H. Kosar-Altinyelken, and M. Volman. 2019. "Mapping Discourses on Mosque Education in the Netherlands: A Content Analysis of the Dutch Press, 2010–2016." *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 40 (3): 358–371. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2017.1316705>.
- Strabac, Z., T. Aalberg, and M. Valenta. 2014. Attitudes towards Muslim immigrants: Evidence from survey experiments across four countries. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 40 (1): 100–118.
- Veninga, J. E. 2018. "From Danish Cartoons to Norway's Anders Breivik: Secularism and Perceptions of Muslims in Scandinavian Social Imaginaries." *Journal of Religion & Society* 17:175–200. Supplement.
- Verdens gang. 2011. "Omstridt moské åpnes i Oslo." Accessed September 6, 2021. <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/1mj9B/omstridt-moske-aapnes-i-oslo>.

- Verdens gang. 2012. "Oslo-moske advarte mot demo-arrangør." Accessed September 9, 2021. <https://www.vg.no/nyheter/innenriks/i/QQJ3A/oslo-moske-advarte-mot-demo-arrangoer>.
- Wikan, U. 1999. "Culture: A New Concept of Race." *Social Anthropology* 7 (1): 57–64. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S096402829900004X>.
- World Islamic Mission. 2021. "World Islamic Mission." Accessed August 28, 2021. <https://wim.no/om-wim>.
- Yildiz, A. A., and M. Verkuyten. 2013. "'We are Not Terrorists': Turkish Muslim Organizations and the Construction of a Moral Identity." *Ethnicities* 13 (3): 359–381. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796812451219>.