IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS INSTITUTE DEPARTMENT OF CIVILIZATION STUDIES

PH.D. THESIS

ANTI-MUSLIM RACISM IN FINLAND: FINNISH FEMALE MUSLIM CONVERTS' EXPERIENCES ON RACIALIZATION AND MISRECOGNITION

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THESIS SUPERVISOR

ASST. PROF. ÖNDER KÜÇÜKURAL

ISTANBUL, 2023

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by

LINDA HYÖKKI

A thesis submitted to the Alliance of Civilizations Institute in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Civilization Studies

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ASST. PROF. ÖNDER KÜÇÜKURAL

ISTANBUL, 2023

APPROVAL PAGE

This is to certify that we have read this thesis and that in our opinion it is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Civilization Studies

Thesis Jury Members

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This is to confirm that this thesis complies with all the standards set by the Alliance of Civilizations Institute of Ibn Haldun University.

Date of Submission Seal/Signature

ACADEMIC HONESTY ATTESTATION

I hereby declare that all information in this document has been obtained and presented in accordance with academic rules and ethical conduct. I also declare that, as required by these rules and conduct, I have fully cited and referenced all material and results that are not original to this work.

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ÖZ

FİNLANDİYA'DA MÜSLÜMAN KARŞITI IRKÇILIK: FİNLANDİYALI MÜSLÜMAN KADINLARIN IRKLAŞTIRMA VE YANLIŞ TANIMA

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Bu tez, Müslüman olan Finlandiyalı kadınların Müslüman karşıtı ırkçılık, ırkçılık ve yanlış tanınma konusundaki deneyimlerini incelemektedir. Araştırma, Fin toplumundaki ırk ilişkilerine ilişkin mevcut statükonun eleştirisine dayanmaktadır. Bu nedenle çalışma, bir fenotip ve sosyal olarak inşa edilmiş bir ırksal kategori olarak beyazlığın tarih boyunca Fin kimlik inşasının bir parçası olduğunu keşfedecektir. Müslüman olan Finlandiyalı Müslüman kadınların Müslüman karşıtı ırkçılıkla ilgili deneyimleri, Sámi ve Romanların tarihsel "etnokültürelleşmesinin" ve karşılaştıkları ırkçılığın bir devamı olarak görülmelidir. Çalışma aynı zamanda Tatar azınlığın Finlandiya toplumundaki konumunu ele alıyor ve onların statülerini, Müslüman karşıtı ırkçı terimlerle ırksal ve kültürel Ötekiler olarak tanımlanan diğer Müslüman topluluklarla "Finleşmiş" Müslümanlar olarak karşılaştırıyor. Çalışma ayrıca Müslüman karşıtı ırkçılığın toplumsal cinsiyete dayalı biçimlerini de analiz edecek ve oryantalist "ezilen Müslüman kadın" klişesine odaklanacaktır. Bu tezindeki görüşmeler aynı zamanda din değiştirenlerin hikayelerindeki faillik kavramını ve klişenin mühtedi kadınların kamusal alanda Müslüman kadınlar olarak kimliklerine nasıl yansıdığını analiz etmek için Du Boisian çifte bilincini keşfedecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Müslüman Karşıtı Irkçılık; dönüştürmek; yanlış tanıma; ırklaştırma; Fin Müslümanları; kadın Müslümanlar

ABSTRACT

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This thesis explores the experiences of Finnish female Muslim converts on anti-Muslim racism, racialization, and misrecognition. The research is rooted in the criticism of the current status quo regarding race relations in Finnish society. The study will thus explore how whiteness as a phenotype and as a socially constructed racial category has been part of the Finnish identity construction throughout history. The experiences of Finnish female Muslim converts on anti-Muslim racism are to be seen as a continuum of the historical "ethnoculturalization" of the Sámi and the Roma and the racism they have faced. The study also considers the Tatar Muslim minority's position in Finnish society, comparing their status as "Finnishized" Muslims to the other Muslim communities, who are by anti-Muslim racist terms defined as racial and cultural Others. The study will also analyze gendered forms of anti-Muslim racism, focusing on the Orientalist stereotype of an "oppressed Muslim woman." The interviews conducted for this thesis will also explore the concept of agency in the converts' narratives of their conversion stories and the Du Boisian double-consciousness to analyze how the stereotype is reflected in the female converts' identities as Muslim women in public.

Keywords: Anti-Muslim Racism; conversion; misrecognition; racialization; Finnish Muslims; female Muslims.

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Finally, I thank my aunt, Lahja and my uncle Jani. My aunt has been my rock, and I would still call her for well-thought, grounded advice regarding tough decisions. She and her husband, having raised me, are proud of who I have become. I am humbled to be the first Ph.D. holder in our family. I wish to carry the honour of this title with integrity and provide an example for all future generations. Within my family and my community.

“*With Him are the keys of the unseen, the treasures that none knoweth but He. He knoweth whatever there is on the earth and in the sea. Not a leaf doth fall but with His knowledge: there is not a grain in the darkness (or depths) of the earth, nor anything fresh or dry (green or withered), but is (inscribed) in a record clear (to those who can read).*” (The Holy Qur’an 6:59)

Linda Irinja Hyökki

MAGLAJ, 2023

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Finding my Religion, Losing my Finnishness

"Are you girls Finnish?" the man behind the counter asked. "Yes, we are," I answered. "Like, 100% Finnish, both of you?" he continued with his question. I looked at my cousin, who chuckled in surprise. It was a weekday evening in late fall of 2017 when she and I decided to get a take-away pizza. After a long day in Helsinki city doing fieldwork, I craved something salty and greasy. I was in Finland for Ph.D. fieldwork, and due to having lived abroad since 2008, one part of my homesickness had been missing eating in the restaurants run by mostly Turkish or Kurdish families. Since the 90s, when immigrants started to open food establishments in Finland, their pizzas and kebabs had become a favored choice for Finns needing a stodge. "Oh, here we go again." I thought about the guy's inquiry. I was used to questions like that.

As a Muslim convert who wears a headscarf, my outer appearance has, several times before, caused people to ask me about my identity. But I felt uncomfortable for my cousin. Her features are a bit darker than the stereotypical "blonde, blue-eyed girl" from the North, and I was unsure whether she had ever experienced a similar situation. Had people questioned her "Finnishness"? What would anyone think about such a question, especially in such a situation, over a pizza order? "Yes, 100% born and bred here," I told him confidently. "But *you* are a Muslim?" The guy looked at me. "Yes, I am, *alhamdulillah*[1]." "Well, *you* look Finnish, but *your friend* doesn't," he said, pointing at my cousin. She, however, just laughed, surprised at this guy's boldness to talk to strangers like that. Yet, I got annoyed and challenged him: "So, are *you* then Finnish?" "Yes... Well, no… Erm, I do have citizenship, but I am Turkish," he answered. I responded by switching to Turkish and asking for his *memleket*[2], a

[1] Arabic phrase meaning "Thanks to God."
[2] Depending on the context, this Turkish word means "homeland," "country," or "home town."

customary question in a small talk situation I had gotten used to after four years in Türkiye. I wanted to switch the focus of the conversation from us to him – after all, such a question about our backgrounds was not customary small talk in Finland. In doing so, I felt that he and I could continue the conversation in a discursive cultural space in which it *was* expected. I also wanted to show that it was my turn to ask the questions, trying to balance the dialogue so that it would not turn obtrusive from his side. It seemed to work, my language skills tickled the guy, and we exchanged a few more words about Istanbul before our tuna pizza was ready. My cousin and I left the establishment wishing him a good night.

My first experience of being visibly recognizable as a Muslim occurred after starting a new job as a cleaning lady at a busy hotel in the city center of Turku. I had gotten to the interview through a fellow university student already employed with the company, and the recruitment team had me sign the contract immediately after the job interview. I was happy; it had already occurred to me that getting a job wearing the *hijab*[3], for instance, as a cashier or in a department store – some of the most typical student jobs – would be difficult. Hence, I was relieved that I could finance my student life without a bank loan. During the first day, I was on my usual rounds with my colleague when a woman responsible for the company's regional operations welcomed me to the job. Her face revealed a moment of shock as she saw me in my uniform and scarf. She stuttered about wanting to talk to me one-on-one, and we went to an empty room, where I followed her. She asked me about "that thing on your head," as she put it with a decent move of her hand circulating her face. For a second, I felt discouraged and expected to get the sack. Although she stayed polite, she told me the scarf would be a problem. "Why?" I asked, "Have customers already complained about me?" "No, but the hotel manager might say something about it," she explained. I was surprised; even though she confessed that it would not be a company policy to forbid me from wearing the scarf on the job, she was expecting trouble for it from the people who had little to do with me. Usually, I would not be in any contact with the hotel manager during my working hours as I dealt with everything related to my tasks with my colleagues at the cleaning company. Yet, I was determined to keep the job and have my right to clean those rooms and toilets while wearing my scarf. "Well, if that is the case, I am more

[3] By *hijab* I mean different styles of scarves worn by Muslim women to cover their hair, neck and décolleté.

than happy to talk to the manager directly about any issues he might have with me and my scarf," I responded confidently. "Oh, hmmm…" she hesitated momentarily, and I saw a window of opportunity to show that I was ready to be adjustable. "Alright, if you think it could contribute positively in any way, I will wear a scarf that matches the color of the uniform and make sure it is not eye-catching." She seemed to take a moment to think and finally told me it would be fine; she would speak with the hotel manager herself, and we agreed on a "job scarf" that would not stick out from the rest of the red and yellow colored uniform.

Looking back, I feel blessed that this was pretty much the only major incident or conflict that I had to experience due to my Muslim identity in 2005-2008 when I lived in Turku and before I left Finland to live abroad. I had heard from my fellow sisters in faith several times about their experiences of discrimination and verbal harassment in public. Thus, from day one, I had expected more trouble when I started to wear the scarf. Indeed, I felt overly self-conscious initially because I had, after all, changed a lot in my outer appearance. I had not only adopted a scarf to my outfits, but I would also wear skirts and long dresses daily, a style that had not so far been part of how I would present myself. Today, I do not dress like that anymore, as I now mainly cover my head with a turban and have, for practical reasons, changed my skirts to a combination of pants and longer tunics.

However, converting to Islam meant that alongside changes in my everyday-life practices, I had also become part of a minority that, on the institutional level, was not on an equal footing with the majority population. For instance, although Islam was being taught in schools to Muslim pupils as an alternative to the Evangelic-Lutheran religious education or ethics classes, there were no private Islamic schools, nurseries, or mosque buildings – except for one owned by a Tatar community[4]. Hence, even though practicing Islam was allowed within the constitutional freedom of religion, many of us felt that Muslims were not recognized as equal citizens who *belonged*. For that and a few other personal reasons, I moved for postgraduate studies to Germany, where I felt the Muslim minority had a better status both on the institutional and social levels. Moving to Germany, I thought, would be a good change of environment in

[4] see also chapter three.

general and help me to find more opportunities to live as a Muslim in a community with more organized community activities. Between 2008-2013 I studied and worked in Germany, learning much about community activism from the Muslims I was in close contact with. Being a convert and a young Muslim student in Germany gave me somehow a feeling of not always having to be the odd one out; universities had Muslim Student Associations – I had never heard of in Finland when I studied there. Alas, I remember being the only girl with a headscarf in my university – and German Muslims had already been able to institutionalize Islam on a whole other level than what I was used to in Finland.

However, Germany has a long history of racist ideologies, and in 2009 I followed the tragic death of an Egyptian-born mother, Marwa El-Sherbini, in the hands of an attacker she was facing in a courtroom for his previous insults about her *hijab* at a playground (Connolly & Shenker, 2009). That time I realized to which extent the hatred towards my religion could go and how easily I was victimized with my visible attire for hate-crimes. However, it was not until later that, through first-hand experience, I understood that hate crimes, verbal harassment, and micro-aggressions are only relatively mundane manifestations of anti-Muslim racism.

I would also realize that anti-Muslim racism operates in Finland as part of larger discourses in which ethnic and religious minorities are systematically marginalized to maintain power structures and to hold on to the idea of culturally and racially heterogenous nations. Though Europe swore "Never again" after the devastation of WW2, it watched in the 1990s as Bosniak Muslims were massacred for the only reason of not being an ethnic Serb or an ethnic Croat. This happened regardless of whether, in post-communist Bosnia and Herzegovina, the label "Muslim" did not necessarily even mean a person would self-identity as a believing Muslim. Later, I learned about the history of racism in my home country and how the Sámi and the Roma[5] have had to pay the price in the Finnish racial-cultural nation-making. Thus, I believe that research on Finnish convert Muslims and their experiences with anti-Muslim racism

[5] It should be noted that by "Roma" I mean the Roma community which is considered one of Finland's "historical minorities" and who came to the country several centuries ago. I do not consider in this thesis the Roma community that has only during the last decade arrived in Finland from Eastern European countries such as Romania and Bulgaria after the addendum of these countries to the European Union.

must be situated in the larger context of the histories of other minorities in the country because the experiences of converts do not occur in a vacuum. They reflect the historical continuities of otherization and racially motivated power dynamics to which Finnish minorities such as the Sámi People and the Roma have been subjugated.

Walking home from the pizzeria, I pondered upon what had just happened. Even though my cousin had been the target of othering that evening, I immediately thought I would be the one whose Finnishness would be questioned again – due to my Muslimness. I had already previously experienced being harassed, discriminated against, and publicly denigrated for my religious identity. I will reflect on these experiences more in the following chapters as I have taken an autoethnographic approach to my research. These are personal narratives that I have merged into my writing about anti-Muslim racism.

Using autoethnography is especially beneficial in describing everyday experiences of societal phenomena such as racism. Adams et al. (2017, p. 4) have explained that "doing autoethnographic fieldwork allows what we see, hear, think, and feel to become part of the 'field.' Autoethnography can write about experiences in private contexts, such as the bedroom or bathroom, or everyday interactions when others make offensive comments or internal feelings of dissonance or confusion." My experiences with anti-Muslim racism as a Finnish female Muslim convert thus inform my analysis of my interlocutors' – likewise Finnish female Muslim converts – narratives on anti-Muslim racism.

I have conceptualized the othering experienced by Finnish female Muslim converts that follow from anti-Muslim racism on the one hand as racialization and on the other as misrecognition of their identities as *Finns*. In terms of racialization, I follow the definition provided by Meer and Modood (2010, p. 77), who argue that it invokes not "(…) a biology but a radical 'otherness' and the perception and treatment to individuals in terms of physical appearance and descent." The process of racialization, which in the context of anti-Muslim racism targets Islam as a religion and "Muslim" as an identity marker, is also fundamental to understanding anti-Muslim racism as "cultural racism," as I will discuss more in detail in Chapter four. Because of this, anti-Muslim racism does not refer to hatred, violence, or discrimination against Muslims

based merely on presumptions about their religious views or targeting them as a religious group. Instead, it refers to hatred, violence, or discrimination against Muslims based on a perceived affiliation with an ethnoreligious group, similar to how anti-Semitism came to regard Jews. Meer and Modood thus further explain that "the implications [of racialization] is that non-Christian religious minorities in Europe can undergo processes of racialization where the 'otherness' or the 'groupness' that is appealed to is connected to a cultural and racial otherness which relates to European peoples' historical and contemporary perceptions of those people that they perceive to be non-European" (ibid.).

I derive the concept of misrecognition from the theory of recognition developed by the Frankfurt School critical theorist Axel Honneth (1995). In the context of my thesis, I treat it as a type of moral injury, a stripping of space for self-identification and the valorization of that identity for society. Researchers have already acknowledged the usefulness of misrecognition in analyzing Muslim minorities' experiences of othering and anti-Muslim racism in European contexts (Amer, 2020; Blackwood et al., 2015; da Silva et al., 2022; Dobbernack et al., 2015; N. Hopkins, 2011; P. Hopkins et al., 2017; Jakobsen, 2015; Pilkington & Acik, 2020). The imperative for social progress lies in abandoning corporative structures and ways of determining social standing based on "(…) predetermined worth of traits that are attributed as types, to entire groups" (Honneth, 1995, p. 125). Following this, I see anti-Muslim racism as a phenomenon that rejects this imperative and produces forms of misrecognition through racialization within social esteem.

Suppose we take recognition as acknowledging one's identity as legitimate and accept that anti-Muslim racism treats all Muslims as a monolithic entity and ascribes to all Muslims particular characteristics. Nasar Meer has connected this context misrecognition to the lack of space for self-identification and talks about the misrecognition of Muslim consciousness (Meer, 2012). I argue followingly that the racialized or stereotypical identities produced by anti-Muslim racism are a form of misrecognition that target the Finnish female Muslim converts' identities as Finns and as Muslims. On the one hand, a particular "Muslim" identity is imposed on them. On the other hand, they "lose their Finnishness" upon conversion as "Finnishness" is

socially and politically constructed upon normative racial and cultural lines so that the identity marker "Muslim" is perceived as non-Finnish.

I have chosen to utilize the autoethnographic approach as it builds into the big picture of understanding how Finnish Muslim converts experience anti-Muslim racism and what are its manifestations within the social construction of race (i.e., whiteness and Whiteness) and culture (i.e., "Finnishness") in Finland. I have thus reflected on my experiences of the racialization of my identity and the misrecognition thereof in situations when my identity as a Finn, my "race," and my Muslimness have come to intersect and has led to moments of interaction with family, friends, and even strangers where I have found manifestations of anti-Muslim racism. At times, these have also intersected with my gender identity and how anti-Muslim racism is influenced by gendered stereotypes about Muslim women in general. Importantly, similarly to how Tony E. Adams as a self-identifying gay/queer person, has used autoethnography to investigate the influence of normative heterosexuality in his everyday interactions (Adams et al., 2017, pp. 6–7), I, too, narrate in my thesis snippets of my life wherein my "researcher" Self has been silently engaged and has interpreted the influence of anti-Muslim racism to the interactions.

The pizzeria encounter occurred two years after Finland, and many other European countries had observed a strengthening of the far-right's political power and influence in the public discourse. A significant factor had been the increased number of refugees arriving from mainly Muslim-majority countries due to the conflict in Syria and Iraq, which had fueled general polarization encouraged by the far-right. Moreover, violent attacks in European countries committed in the name of the so-called Islamic State (ISIS) in 2015 and 2016 further directed the focus of political and public discourse on Muslims. The anti-immigrant sentiments that arose amidst discussions on integration politics were a significant component of anti-Muslim racism, which was projected toward the newcomers and Muslims already living and born in Finland. Thus, Muslims who had previously been experiencing racism that was marked by hostility towards them as POC[6] were now experiencing hostility targeting their Muslim identities (Creutz et al., 2015).

[6] POC = People of color, person of color

The following thesis will show that Muslim converts often face hostility based on their Muslim identity, which manifests in denying their "native" cultural identity; in the anti-Muslim racist discourse, the two identities are seen as exclusive. I will situate the experiences of Finnish Muslim converts within the broader phenomena of racism, racialization, and discrimination in Finland. I will also reveal how racialization and hierarchization of minorities operate on different levels depending on how the identity marker "Finn" is understood. Much research on converts in Western contexts has examined how converts negotiate their allegedly incompatible identities as Muslims and those bound to their native societies (Carr & Haynes, 2015; Galonnier, 2015; Köse, 1999; Moosavi, 2015; Özyürek, 2015; Soutar, 2010; van Nieuwkerk, 2008; Vroon-Najem, 2019; Younis & Hassan, 2017). However, there have so far been no academic studies done on Finnish converts. In Finland, converts are viewed by those with anti-Muslim sentiments as alien bodies to their imagined culturally homogenous national communities, as I will discuss in the following chapters. This process of racialization is felt especially by converts who adhere to certain religious dress practices, like the *hijab,* and are thus more visible as Muslims.

It can be thus argued that Finnish Muslim converts "lose their Finnishness" and are discursively excluded from the imagination of "Us" in the Finnish national and cultural context. This is due to the racialization and the misrecognition of their identities; the narratives of my interlocutors will show. When others perceive them as racialized, they can become victims of racist hate crimes motivated by an anti-Muslim bias. Such are examples from my interlocutors' narratives when they are, for example, referred to as a "f*king Somali." This misrecognition of their identities is connected to understanding the super ethnos, "the Finns," as white, excluding the Muslims and racializing them as non-White.

My experiences with racialization made me realize that what Muslims face in terms of discrimination and hostility is not purely about the religion per se but what the religion of Islam is alleged to represent. Those who have converted to Islam sometimes struggle with feelings of belonging and disconnection in European societies. Despite the historical connections between Islam and the rise of European civilization, Islam is still primarily seen as an outside religion in Europe and is alleged to be incompatible

with the idea of "Europe." Thus, this is related to Irfan Ahmad's concept of *domophilia* (Ahmad, 2013) and how anti-Muslim hatred has become a civilizational endeavor. *Domophilia* is driven by nativist thought and tries to classify individuals to establish in- and out-group boundaries inside these cultures. Followingly, Islam, Muslims, and their rituals are targeted explicitly by anti-Muslim racism in European societies. Followingly, in response to long-achieved globalization and relatively open borders, anti-Muslim racism rejects Muslims as a component of the physiology of the European landscape (Allievi, 2012). As I will discuss more in detail in chapter four, Islamophobia is a term frequently used by academics to describe the same experiences I have studied in my thesis. I accept the term Islamophobia in its applicability. Still, to highlight the connection of this phenomenon to other forms of racism in its structural and societal patterns and the process of racialization embedded within, I have chosen to speak of anti-Muslim racism.

These experiences and the stigma connected to the gendered stereotypes spread by anti-Muslim racism lead further to the condition of double consciousness (Du Bois, 2007). I will analyze my interlocutors' narratives about their based on the concept of double consciousness in chapter six. Their experiences of anti-Muslim racism and the stereotype of an "oppressed Muslim woman" affect how the converts strive to assert their belonging to their native society. By utilizing the analytical concept of double consciousness, I will reveal how the power of stereotypes on Muslim women and the effects of practical anti-Muslim racism in Finnish society come to light and Muslims as a racialized community are hindered from having their full humanity recognized (Dickson D., 1992; Itzigsohn & Brown, 2015). As the Muslim identity is racialized by the anti-Muslim racist discourse and Muslim women are depicted as alien bodies to the Finnish society, Muslim women seek recognition by employing strategies to counter the stereotypes the anti-Muslim racist discourse imposes on them.

My analysis of Finnish female Muslim converts' experiences on anti-Muslim racism benefits also from the concept *coloniality*. My argument in this regard is that convert women are in Finland affected by coloniality as a legacy of Orientalism that has informed today's anti-Muslim racist tropes. Keskinen, Mkwesha, and Seikkula (2021, p. 49) defined coloniality as a global system of power whose fundaments were laid during the colonial period and still affects how the world is divided according to the

perpetual economic, cultural, and intellectual hierarchies. It is the same Orientalist imagery, in particular of Muslim women, that characterizes today the "colonial being" (Abbasi, 2020) or "colonial condition" (Brayson, 2019) of Muslim women in European contexts, be they POC or white converts. In this regard, my research aims to contribute to breaking thinking structures about Muslim women and, consequently, Muslim convert women that are Eurocentric due to the legacy of colonial thinking.

Scholarship on race and racism is relatively new in Finland. However, I argue that when analyzing the situation of various Muslim communities in Finnish society, we must pay attention to the social status of Muslim converts to reveal the intersection of race and culture. In the last two decades, it has focused mainly on the Sámi and Roma ethnic minorities, anti-Black racism, Russophobia, and xenophobia towards immigrants from Muslim-majority countries. Muslims are largely ignored in Finnish critical scholarship on race. Even the most recent and seminal work titled "Race, Power and Resistance. Racialization, Whiteness, and Coloniality in Finland" (Keskinen, Seikkula, et al., 2021), does not include any texts on Finnish Muslims and their experience of racialization. Considering how the anti-immigration discourse has heavily drawn on typical discursive frames such as the clash of civilizations, the "Islamization" of society, gender equality (especially problematizing Muslim women's dress), and the "inherent incompatibility" of Islam with Western/Finnish values. Hence, my thesis will contribute to the broader focus on the experience of Muslim converts, which has so far not been researched in the Finnish context.

A vital contribution to the discussion on racial hierarchies in Finland will be my analysis of Finnish female Muslim converts' experiences of anti-Muslim racism in terms of normative whiteness debate and Whiteness in Finnish society. In my investigations, I will engage the concept of whiteness as a phenotype that, to a certain extent, distinguishes Finnish female Muslim converts from the POC Muslims, but also with the idea of Whiteness as a socially constructed category that intersects with race, religion, and socio-economic capital. Drawing on how I developed an interest in studying anti-Muslim racism, this thesis can be said to have started from my biography and benefited from the practices of autoethnographic research. I have retrospectively and selectively used epiphanies that stem from sharing similar experiences with my interlocutors and how I have identified myself as a Finnish female Muslim convert

(Ellis et al., 2010). In some of these personal narratives, racial hierarchies and how I see myself within them also play a role. In the following chapters, I will reflect on the experiences that have accompanied me throughout my journey as a researcher and a Muslim convert and which relate to the subsequent discussions. I have had to think critically about what my limitations were, and still are, in understanding this reality. As my following chapters problematize questions of identity, race, and culture, I do not draw only on the interview materials but also from my personal life and reality to reflect how my knowledge is situated in the knowledge construction process of my thesis.

Apart from the autoethnographic part, my observations as a member of the Muslim community in Finland, and my personal experiences on anti-Muslim racism in Finland and the struggle for recognition as a white Muslim convert woman, my thesis draws on semi-structured interviews conducted with Finnish Muslim converts. This form of interviewing echoes the epistemological premises of the feminist standpoint theory and overlaps with the critical approach to ethnographic research in general. The semi-structured interviews were to understand the phenomenological perspective of experience while giving primacy to the lifeworld of the participants as a source of knowledge (Brinkman, 2014). I was interested in listening to my interlocutors' experiences about how they perceived, made sense of, and coped with anti-Muslim racism in society. The reasons for my methodological choices are embedded in my research project's politics and critique. My position as an activist-researcher, in a broader sense, is a contributing component. From the start, my lifeworld has not only made it possible for me to enter the ethnographic endeavor and reach out to the community of Muslim converts in Finland, but my own experiences have also, to a certain extent, necessitated the critical aspect of my methodology (Berry, 2011). Doing critical research on anti-Muslim racism in Finnish society necessitates adopting a critical perspective toward the status quo, making the study a moral and political undertaking. In chapter two, I discuss this objective concerning my methodology in more detail.

1.2 Structure of the Thesis

I will start in the next chapter with methodological considerations and explain how I have approached my research aim regarding data collection and analysis. As my primary data collection followed ethnographic methods and is rooted in the critical research paradigm, I will reflect on how my subjectivity as a peer to those I interviewed has affected my positionality throughout the study. I will reflect on my positionality and "ethnographic subjectivity" within the fieldwork as I conducted semi-structured interviews with 27 Finnish Muslim converts for this thesis. My final write-up, however, involves interviews with ten women and one male, as these provided a rich array of material for the themes that I included in the interview analysis. My reflections on my fieldwork during the three-month stay in Finland to record the interviews and beyond involve gaining access to the field and where the interviews were conducted.

Furthermore, as a critical researcher, I acknowledge my part in the knowledge construction of this study. Thus, I will discuss how I, a researcher, a peer, a woman, and a Muslim, have interacted with my interlocutors and the study topic throughout the research process. I will also discuss how my study is rooted in the criticism of the current status quo relating to racial relations in Finnish society.

I will then move on to the third chapter and briefly introduce the demographics of the Finnish Muslim community. The history and current demographics of Muslims in Finland are essential for understanding how Finnish convert Muslims are situated within the larger Muslim community. For instance, racialization is connected to their minority position within the majority and Muslim communities. To situate the convert Muslims into this context, I will start by commenting on two terminological aspects that will follow my discussions throughout this thesis. Firstly, I will explain my preference for the term *convert* over the term *revert*. Secondly, since my research is heavily connected to discussing race and racial relations in Finnish society, I will explain why I have chosen to capitalize "White" and "Whiteness" in specific contexts. Lastly, my third chapter will provide an overview of literature considering studies on Muslim converts experiences in Western contexts, which primarily function as one body of the literature to which my thesis will contribute.

Continuing with issues of my research connected to terminology, I will, in the fourth chapter, offer a detailed discussion on the notions of *Islamophobia* and *anti-Muslim racism*. At the same time, I will make a case for my choice of the latter. The Muslim converts I interviewed for this thesis were all phenotypically white, which raises the question of how I can employ anti-Muslim racism as a conceptual tool in my research if "Muslim" is not a race. My terminological choice is also methodologically crucial since it will allow me to emphasize the concept of racialization as a constituent of anti-Muslim racism. Thus, racialization will be a central component of my subsequent analyses of the converts' narratives. Therefore, as I will show, anti-Muslim racism is understood as a form of cultural racism, which does not build on biological characteristics but on cultural ones constructed as inherently connected to one's ethnic or religious background. This provides the basis for understanding modern Finnish society's structures, power dynamics, and meanings associated with race and culture.

Having introduced the concept of racialization, I will, in the fifth chapter, continue grounding my investigation by establishing how whiteness as a biological race and, consequently, the socially constructed Whiteness has been part of the European and Finnish identity construction throughout history. Finland is one of many European countries where the narrative of a white-Christian heritage of the "Finnish people" has been dominant in cultural identity; I will also discuss what kind of linkages we can establish between white racial dominance and Christianity. I will use the example of the Sámi and the Roma peoples to show how in Finland, the racialization of minorities as non-white and their problematization in cultural terms have been connected to global Orientalism and colonialism. As my thesis aims to show the experiences of Finnish Muslim converts on anti-Muslim racism are to be seen as a continuum of this historical, cultural racism. I will show how from the late 19th century up until today, there have been scientific and cultural underpinnings of seeking to maintain a culturally and ethnically homogenous Finnish nation.

In my sixth chapter, I will connect the discussion on whiteness and Whiteness in the Finnish context to the racialization of Muslim converts. Since the recognition theory by Axel Honneth frames my discussion on Finnish Muslim converts' experiences of anti-Muslim racism, I will make a case for racialization being a form of misrecognition in social esteem. To make my case about the racialization being related to the visibility

of the converts as Muslims, I will offer as a parallel example the case of the Tatar Muslim minority. The Tatars have been framed as "good Muslims" and are an "example of Muslim integration" due to their tendency to "blend in" and practice Islam less visibly than other Muslims. However, their position in Finnish society as an ethnic-religious minority challenges the role of religion being the sole definer of Muslims as racial Others in Finland. On the one hand, their "passing as White" highlights the hierarchies within the socially constructed Whiteness in Finland. On the other hand, the construction of Muslims with a migratory background and converts as "bad Muslims" lead to the misrecognition of Muslim identity. In the last part of the chapter, I will analyze Finnish Muslim converts' accounts of being constructed as racial and cultural others. I also argue that their struggle for recognition in marked by adopting practices implemented from their national culture modified so that they comply with Islamic principles. I will also show how Muslim converts use values common in their national culture and Islam as a counter-narrative to otherization.

My last discussion chapter will continue with analyzing the excerpts from my interviews. It focuses on gendered forms of anti-Muslim racism. I will present these, on the one hand, in the Orientalist stereotype of an "oppressed" Muslim woman. On the other hand, I will investigate how the gendered stereotype as a form of coloniality finds resonance in Finland by being imposed on Muslim women and operationalized through the so-called "Muslim Question." Having established in the previous chapters the historical continuum of racialization in Finland, the discussion connects in the seventh chapter today's anti-Muslim racist depictions of Muslim women and the "Muslim Question" to the governance measures targeting the Sámi and the Roma. As the concept of agency is at the center of the political and public debates on Muslim women, I will, through the interview analyses, continue to discuss examples of how Muslim convert women in their conversion stories relate to the stereotypical claim of lacking agency. The chapter will finally also show how the stereotype of an "oppressed" woman is reflected in how the female converts perform their identities as Muslim women in public. A central concept in this regard will be the Du Boisian double-consciousness which I instrumentalize as a conceptual tool to analyze how the converts seek to counter the stigma resulting from these stereotypes as they struggle for recognition and social esteem.

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

2.1 Introduction

This doctoral thesis explored how Finnish Muslim converts experience anti-Muslim racism and the othering embedded within it, which I conceptualize as racialization and misrecognition of their identities. The methodological composition of this study follows critical ethnography. The "reflexive turn" in qualitative studies paved the way for researchers to engage more with their research environment and interlocutors. Following this development, critical ethnography, inspired by the tradition of Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, not only scrutinized the reflexive engagement of the researcher further (Madison, 2011) but also called for a critical discussion of the socio-historical and cultural context in which the research endeavor takes place. Thus, the aim of my research has been, on the one hand, to situate the experiences of Finnish Muslim converts within the broader phenomena of racism, racialization, and discrimination. On the other hand, the aim has been to disclose how racialization and hierarchization of minorities operate on different levels depending on how the identity marker "Finn" is conceptualized.

In the following chapter, I will explain how I have approached this aim regarding data collection and how my critical approach has influenced the research design from the planning to the write-up of the thesis. I also reflect on how my subjectivity as a peer affected my positionality and choices throughout the research process. I am aware of the colonial legacy of ethnographic research and, most importantly, how especially Western anthropologists have used it as a method for studying "the Other" in the culturally (and spatially) "non-Western" considered field. However, my subjectivity as a native (white) Finn and a Muslim convert binds me to the "field" and the topic of this study in a manner that does not always give me the "privilege" of separating the "Here" and "There." The "field," the community I have conducted my study with, and the Finnish society, are continuously part of my everyday reality. Hence, the "field," as it has been for many other ethnographers, is not a distant location to which I would

arrive to conduct my study and then return “home” to make sense of it and report to others (Aggarwal, 2000). Instead, I relate to all of it through my life history and continuous experiences of anti-Muslim racism that affect my identity and everyday life.

The reasons for my methodological choice are embedded in my research project's politics and critique. Another factor is, in a broadened manner, my role as an activist-researcher. From the start, my lifeworld has not only made it possible for me to enter the ethnographic endeavor and reach out to the community of Muslim converts in Finland, but my own experiences have also, to a certain extent, necessitated the critical aspect of my methodology (Berry, 2011). The critical investigation of anti-Muslim racism in Finnish society requires a researcher to inhabit a critical stance toward the status quo, making the research a moral and political project. Hence, personal and academic reasons intertwine with my decision to study this topic and my approach. Ethnography and interviewing are widely used in researching the life worlds of Finnish Muslims (Alakärppä, 2022; Himanen & Creutz, 2022; Karhunen, 2022; Pauha & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013). Yet, Muslim converts have been largely left out as the community under study in Finnish academic publications, except for Katri Karhunen’s (2022) recent article on the experience of Muslim women wearing the headscarf at work, for which she used interviews conducted mainly with Muslim converts. However, experiences of anti-Muslim racism, racialization, or identity have barely been investigated in the Finnish context, particularly from the perspective of the Muslim convert community. There is a knowledge gap for studies that give the Muslim convert community a voice in the larger conversation on oppression and racism in Finland.

The Finnish academic community has evolved in terms of interest towards Muslims and Islam in Finland, developing from the Orientalist tradition of the 19th and early 20th centuries focusing on Islam in the Middle East and the Arabic language (Juusola, 2013) to a variety of ethnographic and cultural research on Muslims and the image of Islam in Finland (Martikainen et al., 2008; Pauha & Konttori, 2022). Apart from the research on Tatar Muslims and their integration into Finnish society, interest in Muslims in Finland has grown since the 1990s due to increased immigration from Muslim-majority countries. Followingly, studying Islam as a religion and Islamic

religious practice became more important in understanding how the newcomers in Finnish society were adjusting and navigating the cultural differences and how the Finnish society could accommodate the needs of Muslims, for instance, in the healthcare and education sector (Sakaranaho, 2010). However, Muslims are still researched mainly from the perspective of immigration. There is still a lack of acknowledgment and critical inquiry into how anti-Muslim racism, or Islamophobia, affects Muslims daily.

Most importantly, I see a lack of recognition of how anti-Muslim racism in Finland is part and parcel of the historical continuum of racism and racialization of minorities. In this way, anti-Muslim racism in the Finnish context contributes to producing and maintaining hierarchies in the society where whiteness is maintained as a characteristic of the majority society (Keskinen, Seikkula, et al., 2021). This is particularly visible in the academic attitudes of disregarding the need for criticism of Orientalism in the Finnish academe based on the argument that Finland, unlike France or Great Britain, lacks the history of colonialism (Juusola, 2013, p. 551). Such attitudes that seek to distinguish one's nation from others in moral superiority and create an image of a particular innocence in what is deemed politically and historically shameful such as the involvement in colonialism, are manifestations of what Anna Rastas (2016) has considered "Finnish exceptionalism." However, as I will show in chapter four, Finland is part of the global colonial complicity (Keskinen et al., 2019; Vuorela, 2009). In chapter six, I argue that Finnish Muslim converts are also impacted by coloniality. Hence, I see the imperative for critical ethnography in studying the lives of Muslim minorities in Finland and the acknowledgment that Finnish society cannot guard itself in an ivory tower against the impacts of global and domestic colonialism (Keskinen, 2021). Moreover, I believe that the contemporary anti-Muslim racism and the subsequent societal and structural oppression of Muslims in Finland must be investigated in this historical context to change patterns of belief and practice.

My research is inspired by the feminist standpoint theory, which uses oppressed groups' voices as an illuminating source of knowledge about themselves and society (Harding, 2004a, p. 4). As Harding (2004b, p. 129) contends that to form a comprehensive understanding of racism, oppression, and othering, as well as to change the patterns of beliefs and structures, we must consider all perspectives of oppression

and complement them with each other. Hence, I do not claim that my research and the focus on Finnish Muslim converts is the best and only way to understand anti-Muslim racism in Finland. Still, it is one of many, and I intend to disclose this perspective that has not been given a voice. It is hence unquestionable that my starting point has been to reject any idea about reality being "out there" like something that can be captured in its entirety from a positivist, value-free viewpoint.

My study benefited instead in this sense from the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology and its broader application to social research. Herein the interlocutors' accounts of the world as it appears to them are taken as a legitimate description of the multiple realities that this study aims to voice (Brinkmann et al., 2014). As per the Heideggerian understanding, this reality is shaped and informed by the locality and historicity of each person experiencing it (Laverty, 2003, p. 27). Hence, as knowledge construction is influenced by the individual and their experience, including their pre-commitments, the empiric knowledge from my interviews with Finnish Muslim converts does not only constitute their statements. This premise must also be considered in analyzing how I gained access to the interlocutors and how and where the interviews were conducted.

Furthermore, the knowledge construction was also affected by how I, as a researcher, a peer, a woman, and a Muslim, interacted with my interlocutors and the study topic throughout the research process. In the following sections of this chapter, I will delve deeper into this study's methodological aspects. This historicity of those involved in the study is embedded in the principles of hermeneutic phenomenology. Likewise, my historicity and locality have affected the knowledge construction of this study, and my presence has extended over the years and during my fieldwork in 2017 within the community form the participant observations, which traditionally is considered one of the ethnographic methods.

2.2 Data Collection and Analysis

The data for this thesis come from my fieldwork in Finland between October and November 2017, for which I applied ethnographic methods. I conducted semi-structured interviews, all audiotaped for later analysis, with 27 Finnish Muslim

converts, out of whom 20 were women and seven were men. The location of the interviews varied from the interlocutors' private homes to public spaces such as libraries. The duration of the interviews was approximately 1.5 to 2 hours. The impact of attitudes relating to appropriate gender relations within the community of Finnish Muslim converts largely influenced the location for the interviews with male interlocutors, which I discuss in more detail later in this chapter. Before I started each interview, I obtained informed consent via audio. I explained to all interlocutors that I would use the data for my Ph.D. thesis, other publications, and academic work. Apart from the autoethnographic approach that I have taken to my research which has resulted in my own experiences integrated into the analysis, I have used my observations as a participant in the field. I consider myself a participant since I am a member of the Muslim convert community, and I have, even before my designated fieldwork in 2017, spent years amongst Muslim converts in gatherings, mosque meetings, and private settings. My experiences and observations from these times have thus also formed the knowledge used to analyze the different facets of anti-Muslim racism and how Muslim converts experience it in Finland.

My research's focus on the experiences of Finnish-born Muslim converts on anti-Muslim racism, specifically in Finland, determined the inclusion criteria for participation in the interviews. Thus, individuals who resided in Finland and came from a family background without any immigration history could be categorized as "white Finns" instead of Finns identifying as people of color. My interlocutors were Muslim converts, i.e., not "born to a Muslim family." Instead, they had previously been either Evangelic Lutheran, as per the majority faith confessed in Finland or non-religious. However, it should be noted that the informal social networks I used comprised Muslim women from all ethnic backgrounds. Nevertheless, in these terms, the interlocutor selection had to be purposive so that I could explore a specific phenomenon. I will discuss how I reached out and gained access to the individuals I interviewed in the next section. The interview data should be comparable as my interlocutors would share particular characteristics (Hennink et al., 2011, p. 84; Palys, 2008), which in this case was their phenotype. Therefore, in my communication, I explained that I was looking for "ethnic Finns" who had converted to Islam and not, for example, Muslims with a migratory background.

The complicated relationship between the identity marker "Finnish" and race, my poor critical stance towards it at the beginning of the research process, and how my understanding of it was still biased were revealed as I reached out to potential interlocutors. I was visiting the house of a male convert whom I knew from my activist circles for planning action. During the visit, I asked him for help getting contact information for Finnish male converts, and he asked me whether I would also be interested in his story for my research. However, this brother was Black. I found myself thus in quite an awkward situation because as I knew him personally, I also learned how he, despite his racial background, considered himself a Finn, just the same as I would. He had not been born in Finland, but he had been raised from his early childhood in the country, and thus he had a strong cultural identification with Finland and Finns. I was embarrassed to tell him he would not be "suitable" for my study due to his racial background. My research aim was to disclose the racialization of phenotypically white Finnish converts. It was not only the embarrassment of using his "race" against him, but I also felt I was judging his personal story as "not interesting" in my research. However, I explained to him my research focus and how it was connected to the racial background of the interlocutors. He understood me well, and we laughed at the misunderstanding.

The 27 interviews I conducted during my fieldwork in Finland were sufficient to provide a rich insight into the converts' experiences. I had assumed that a large amount of data would be necessary for this thesis, but with the female interlocutors, for the large part of my research themes, saturation was reached around the 10th interview. With the male interlocutors, all seven interviews provided different insights into the experiences of anti-Muslim racism. Male converts can be classified in many local contexts as a "hidden" population and more demanding in terms of strategies when reaching out to potential interlocutors (Ellard-Gray et al., 2015). However, I felt that to disclose the female Muslim converts' experiences of racialization as intertwined with one's visible identity markers, it would be helpful to hear the experiences of male converts as well. Male converts are rarely recognizable as Muslims since they do not have as distinguished dress as female converts tend to have. Hence, because Finnish convert men are less easily "racialized," they are not as easily victimized by anti-Muslim racism as female converts are (Allen, 2015; Brice, 2010; Chakraborti & Zempi, 2012; Rogozen-Soltar, 2012). I have included in my analysis excerpts from

one male interlocutor's accounts as they highlight the intersectionality of gender and other identity markers in the experience of anti-Muslim racism. I have decided to dedicate a complete research article on male converts experiences separately as a post-thesis project. I also made this decision based on space restrictions, as I already had sufficient material for the thesis with the female convert interviews.

I employed different strategies to reach out to potential interlocutors depending on the gender group. For the female interlocutors, I used my already existing social media networks for Muslims in Finland, as I had for a long time already been part of a Muslim women's Facebook group and interacted there with several other members. I could also reach out directly to people with whom I was friends and ask them if they would be willing to participate in the interviews. For the male interlocutors, I used a friend I knew with contacts to convert men as gatekeepers to gain access since I had no personal connection to them. The identities that I carried with me during the fieldwork and beyond as a researcher, a Muslim convert, and a woman had both positive and negative impacts on the process of reaching out to potential interlocutors and how I critically had to reflect on my positionality within the community, which I discuss more in detail later in this chapter.

All interlocutors were adults from their early 20s to their late 50s. Seventeen interlocutors lived in the Helsinki metropolitan area, nine were from other cities, and one lived in a small town in Southern Finland. Regarding the travel around the country for fieldwork purposes, my "base" was in my hometown, near Helsinki, from where I could easily, by public transportation, reach locations in the metropolitan area where most of the interviews took place. As I attended the city of Jyväskylä for a conference, visited a friend in Tampere, and spent two weeks as a visiting researcher at the Migration Institute of Finland in Turku, I scheduled interviews for each city according to the visits I had planned to these cities.

I had planned to interview in different cities to see whether the experiences would differ. My interviews showed that those who lived in tighter communities in small towns would be more prone to experience social pressure and disapproval towards their conversion. They reported experiencing anxiety about being subjected to hostility, as their "Muslimness" stood out in the constrained socio-spatial

circumstances. For instance, Noora[7], who lives in a small town, wanted to tell her father about her decision to wear the headscarf because he was a taxi driver, and she was afraid that he would see her on the streets one day and be shocked. She was thus scared to wear the headscarf in her hometown because everyone there knew her. Noora felt she could start wearing the headscarf in public after she told her dad about this change. Also, Amal, who converted in the 90s when she was 16 years old, lived in a small town when she converted to Islam. She kept her conversion a secret from her family until she became 18 and moved out of her parents' house. When Amal started to wear the *hijab*, people stared at her quite a lot, and she lost her friendships. She recalled having a conversation about the headscarf with her mother. Her account reflected her agency that Muslim women are in the anti-Muslim racist discourse claimed to lack, which I will discuss more in detail in chapter six:

> My mother was like, 'I understand if you are a religious person, but don't wear it [the headscarf] so that other people can see,' I was like, 'Oh, I will wear it.' When I look at my life, that time made me very strong. That I dared to make those big decisions in that small shantytown." (Amal)

My primary method of inquiry was the semi-structured interview. This form of interviewing echoes the epistemological premises of the feminist standpoint theory. Herein the aim is to describe the phenomenological perspective of experience while giving primacy to the lifeworld of the interlocutors as a source of knowledge (Brinkman, 2014). I was interested in listening to my interlocutors' experiences about how they perceived, made sense of, and coped with anti-Muslim racism in society. Drawing from my research questions, the literature review on anti-Muslim racism and Islamophobia, previous studies on Muslim converts in European countries (Galonnier, 2015; Köse, 1999; Moosavi, 2015; Özyürek, 2015; Soutar, 2010; van Nieuwkerk, 2008; Vroon-Najem, 2019), and my experiential knowledge, I had predetermined a set of themes I wanted to cover during the interview. Thus, my semi-structured interview took a more specific form of what Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014) have called "theme interviews."

[7] All names of my interlocutors have been changed.

I developed my interview guide by defining my conceptual question (Josselson 2013, 36) based on the literature I reviewed on anti-Muslim racism, racialization, and recognition theory. My conceptual question, "How do Finnish Muslim converts experience anti-Muslim racism and the othering embedded within it?" was aimed at understanding which aspects of recognition or the lack thereof played a part in my interlocutors' experiences of racialization. At the same time, my premise was that racialization was a manifestation of misrecognition. I developed research themes (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2014), including the conversion process, identity as Muslims and Finns, anti–Muslim racist hate speech and violence, and anti-Muslim racist structural discrimination.

In formulating the interview questions based on the themes, I stayed flexible in their wording, as proposed by Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014), to ensure that the design and conduct of the interview respect the phenomenological aspects of narration. By phenomenology, I mean giving primacy to the lifeworld of the interlocutors as a source of knowledge (Brinkman, 2014). For instance, I considered that not all the notions I – as a researcher – would use in my work would be like the vocabulary my interlocutors would use in their reports on their lived experiences (Hyvärinen, 2017b, pp. 181–182). My interlocutors might also be unfamiliar with academic terms such as "racialization," which does not mean they have not experienced the manifestations. Hence, for instance, to explore my research theme on hate speech & violence within experiences of racialization, I would ask a question such as "Have you ever experienced an act of violence or hate speech? If yes, describe the situation and tell me what happened?" I let my interlocutors report on incidents of violence and hate speech where they felt they were victimized due to their identity as Muslims. For instance, one of the female interlocutors told me how she had received slurs such as "F*king Somali." When analyzing the interviews, I would categorize such accounts as anti-Muslim racism and racialization. The data analysis and the themes have evolved throughout my writing process. I have modified the themes according to how I have detected patterns between the interviews (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2014, p. 173) and compared them with the literature I reviewed for my discussion chapters.

As I conducted my interviews, I stayed flexible in changing and omitting the questions when I noticed that some worked better than others. This practice shaped my

interviewing to focus instead on the interlocutors' experiences rather than rigidly following my literature review of my assumptions that had formed based on the theories and my own experiences on anti-Muslim racism in Finland. Hyvärinen (2017, p. 22) has argued that letting theory determine the themes might endanger the design of the interview questions to be irrelevant to the individual interlocutor's lived experience and thus distract the researcher from exploring the factual field. However, the model proposed by Hirsjärvi and Hurme (2014) allows for flexibility to ensure that the design and conduct of the interview respect the phenomenological aspects of narration. It is up to the researcher to distinguish whether certain concepts that emerge from the literature review may be unsuitable for the socio-cultural context of the field. The themes are neither meant to bind the researcher to a strict questions chronology. Instead, the interlocutor is given space and time to narrate their experiences, feelings, and understanding of events and concepts. As a result of this method, the themes are introduced into the discussion. The interviewer monitors the flow of the individual stories and decides when each theme is most suitable for the particular case.

In the beginning, I had aimed to write the whole thesis around the theory of recognition (Honneth, 1995) and investigate the lack of recognition in social esteem and legal relations. In chapter six, I explain how I have used Honneth's theory and the concept of misrecognition to analyze my data to focus only on social esteem. After a few interviews, I was surprised that the converts I was talking to did not experience any lack of recognition in the legal realm of societal relations. When I asked, for instance, whether they felt they would move abroad due to legal restrictions on religious practice, none answered positively. Hence, I had to take a step back and rethink where I would put the focus of my questions during the interviews.

This realization helped me think critically about my biases and prejudices about how Finnish Muslim converts living in Finland would experience anti-Muslim racism. The instrumentality of a critical approach is also highlighted when the researcher's subjectivity and positionality are scrutinized. My activism and engagements with authoring country reports for the European Islamophobia Report had caused me to assume that the structural aspect of anti-Muslim racism was very high and that the converts would bring this up. However, this was not the case. It was also meaningful regarding how I felt the differences in experience between myself and my

interlocutors. As someone who did not live in Finland, I was an outsider, and I had to come to terms with it – at the end of the day, the true experts on anti-Muslim racism were my interlocutors and not me. In the next section, I will discuss in more detail the aspects of my insider-outsider positionality regarding the research design and its linkage to the micropolitics of critical ethnography.

2.3 Doing Critical Ethnography on An-Muslim Racism and Muslim Converts in Finland

2.3.1 Gaining Access to the Interlocutors and the Field

As I knew from my personal experiences living as a veiled Muslim woman in Finland and having friends who embraced the most different styles of Islamic attire, even the levels of harassment could vary between the women based on the degree of their "visibility" as Muslims. Thus, in my initial letter, I posted in the Facebook groups and other strategies I used to establish contact with interested interlocutors. I did not mention the headscarf as any requirement for participating in the study. Still, I stayed open to female interlocutors with the most different attire styles. In the end, my interlocutors were a diverse range of Muslim women, ranging from those who wore the face veil to those who did not cover their hair in any way.

I converted to Islam in 2007 and have since, along with a relatively vast network of friends, established several acquaintances and Facebook-contacts with other Muslim converts in Finland. I also have access to private social media groups for Muslim women, otherwise closed to outsiders, i.e., non-Muslims. Therefore, as these existing networks I already had, provided a lower threshold in terms of access, I reached out to my interlocutors by using these social groups and snowballing. I contacted female Muslim converts from two focus groups with whom I had previously conducted interviews regarding the construction of the central mosque in Helsinki. I had asked the focus group interlocutors whether they would be interested in participating in individual in-depth interviews that would be part of my Ph.D. thesis. I had taken the names and contacts of those who agreed. I sent them private messages through Facebook or WhatsApp when I contacted potential interlocutors in September 2017 and followed up on their willingness to be interviewed. My position in the community

and social media groups as another convert sister allowed me to post a call in the women's Facebook groups and invite interested individuals to contact me privately.

Quite soon after I started reaching out to potential interlocutors in social media, as explained in the previous section, I realized that my positionality in the convert community as a "peer" would not be as straightforward as I expected. It would not guarantee an avalanche of responses from interested individuals. At this point, I had to leave aside my assumption that being "an insider" interviewer and researcher would automatically mean that finding individuals who were willing to be interviewed by me would be easier than for "an outsider" researcher who would not share a religious affiliation with the researched community of converts. Song and Parker (1995) found that the "insider/outsider" binary often takes static identities for granted. Hence, they call for considering partial and simultaneous commonalities and differences between the researcher and the interlocutors. At the time of my research, a Ph.D. candidate at a Turkish university, I had left my home country 12 years before my Ph.D. research.

The time I had spent abroad as an expat revealed itself as a disconnecting element in my degree of closeness to the interlocutors. I learned to understand that I was not after all that much connected to the networks and the local communities as I thought I was, except for my Facebook-friendships and the personal friendships I had cultivated frequently. I was an expat who visited the country once or twice a year and never participated in weekly events or Friday prayers of the mosques, nor did I have a fixed group of "sisters," a clique, around me. Thus, I was not a member of any community but had contacts here and there across the country and in different communities. My friendships with other female converts were mainly based on long-time friendships before I left Finland to study abroad, so I had less connection with recently converted women. This made me rethink my status as an "insider" in the community, and I realized that I could be more "outsider" than I thought I was.

The current insider status of the researcher is also acknowledged to impact the level of trust the researcher can have vis-à-vis the interlocutors (Sherry, 2008). Therefore, after realizing the alienation I had gone through after so many years from the "turf" of the community I felt attached to, I had to rethink the question, "Who do *I think I am,* and *why* should anyone trust me as a researcher?" How could I feel guaranteed that my

religious affiliation would win the immediate trust and willingness of my "sisters" to share their stories with me? For many, I was a stranger, just like any non-Muslim researcher could also be. The realization of how personal fieldwork with in-group interviewing can get pushed me to reflect on how others in the community would see me. I understood that using social media networks to reach out to potential interlocutors, such as FB-groups, put a restriction on this image. I would have to accept that my social media persona, the things I posted and commented on in the groups, the image I gave about myself in my profile pictures, etc., might not help. The Muslim community, as well as the convert community in Finland, is as diverse as it might get; thus, differences in interpretation of religious issues exist. Unfortunately, the community can also be very judgmental. For instance, I did not personally know every Muslim convert in the group, so I was not in control of the opinion they could form about me. Based on that opinion, some could have chosen not to join my research. Being a peer does not automatically open the magic doors of access to the field.

When reaching out to male converts, I had to change my strategy, which reflected the gendered aspects of my "field." Firstly, I could not use informal social networks since I had never so far developed close personal relationships with Finnish male converts. This was because I had adhered to distanced gender relations which had kept me connected on a personal level with female converts only. I was also not a member of any Facebook group in which male converts would be heavily represented and where I could post a general inquiry for interlocutors. Moreover, male converts in Finland can be described as a "hidden" population group. Due to their low number and thus lack of even informal networks and "invisibility" among the public, they are more challenging to identify, which also impacted my possibilities to find suitable interlocutors. Thus, I could reach two individuals by using a common friend as a gatekeeper, after which snowballing enabled me to reach out to the rest of my male interlocutors. Trusted and familiar persons – female and male – linked to the community of male converts helped spread the word about my research and forwarded me the contact details of potential male interlocutors who otherwise would have been out of my reach.

The social etiquette in the Muslim community relating to gender relations highlights the relativity of access for even a Muslim-researcher. In qualitative fieldwork, the

researcher must be sensitive to cultural factors when reaching out to potential interlocutors (Hennink et al., 2011; Jensen, 2008). It would go beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed description of Islamic social etiquette and discuss how it is implemented differently depending on the social, geographical, and individual context. However, in sum, the Islamic good manners related to a woman and man who are not *mahram*[8] to each other require that the two should not be alone in a room. There are many ways to overcome this imperative when accommodation is necessary due to situational context, such as professional encounters or leaving a door open. However, many Muslims do not want to spend time with a non-*mahram* person, even in public, out of religious conviction.

Since varying interpretations of appropriate gender relations exist, I was prepared and wanted to respect that not all male interlocutors might be willing to have private conversations with me. Thus, I decided to proceed rather carefully and be rater safe than sorry, as I did not want to cause my interlocutors to feel uncomfortable participating in my study. For instance, I wanted to approach a male convert I knew of from social media; however, to avoid appearing intrusive and bold, I asked our common friend to check whether it would be ok. Indeed, one man who had been referred to me through his friend did not respond even after many contact attempts. I found out from other male interlocutors that he had reservations about meeting with me for the interview in a one-on-one setting.

Some qualitative research manuals (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2014) encourage the researcher to persuade even less responsive interlocutors who have expressed initial interest in the study to find a suitable date and location for the interview. However, the abovementioned case made me step back and think about where to draw the line while trying to get an interview date without pressuring the interlocutor. After all, I knew it was also very much possible for a male interlocutor to turn away from participating in my research out of respect for his wife's wishes if she did not wish for her husband to

[8] A person with whom marriage by Islamic law is prohibited because of close blood relationship, having been breastfed by the same woman, or because of being related by marriage. For social relationships between the genders, one is also allowed to stay with a *mahram* in a closed space such as a house or a room without a third person present, and a woman is allowed to appear without her veiling in front of a *mahram* male.

meet with me alone. In the next section, I will discuss how gender relations within the Muslim community impacted my research design and the interviews.

2.3.2 On Safe Grounds: The Interview Location

Apart from the strategies for reaching out to potential interlocutors and social etiquette, gender relations also impacted the choice of interview location when conducting interviews with female and male converts. As Elwood and Martin note (2000, p. 656), the interlocutor should be informed beforehand about the contents and topic of the interview to evaluate and choose the most suitable location. Some interlocutors had already participated in interview studies and "knew the drill." However, for many interlocutors, it was their first interview. Thus, I suggested conducting the interview in their homes or an alternative location of their choice. In my communication with the interlocutors before the interviews, I indicated that the place should be where they feel comfortable speaking. I said it would be best to choose as undisturbed as possible location and ensure that it would be a "safe space" where they could freely express their opinions and tell their stories without others listening to our conversations. This way, I tried to ensure a sense of intimacy for discussing sensitive issues (Adler & Adler, 2001).

I did not want my interlocutors to feel burdened in participating in the interview. For instance, this could be the case if they would have to make an additional effort and travel to a distant location, primarily since many of my interlocutors were employed or students, even with families, so I completely adjusted myself to their daily routines. With most of them, I met either on their off days or after work time, and with most of the female interlocutors, I met in their homes. As a fellow Finnish Muslim convert and thus a peer to the interlocutors, I cherished the familiarity I could establish with many of my interlocutors. Conducting the interviews partly in my interlocutors' homes was a strategy for me to avoid power hierarchies (Elwood and Martin, 2000). Still, I think the social context of the homes I visited enhanced my relationship during the interviews with many interlocutors.

The interview locations outside the interlocutors' homes were the prayer room of a university, a fast-food restaurant, a coffee shop, and a public library. The daily

schedule was also the reason for choosing the university prayer room and the fast-food restaurant with two female interlocutors. The former was a quiet and calm room that the university had reserved for the use of all believers and even non-religious students as a space for taking a silent break or observing religious prayers. Fortunately, we were undisturbed as the interlocutor knew the busiest times when the room was used during the days, and we could meet in the quiet morning hours. In the fast-food restaurant, privacy was, however, not provided. The interlocutor was, however, speaking freely, and I believe it was rather me who felt a little uneasy in the busy environment, worrying now and then whether the choice of location (suggested by the interlocutor) could hinder the data I was about to retrieve.

However, conducting interviews in the interlocutors' homes was not as straightforward of a task with the male interlocutors as with the female interlocutors. I did not visit male interlocutors' homes without their wives being present. In my communication with potential interlocutors, I considered this social etiquette relating to non-*mahram* persons spending time without a third party. When I allowed them to choose where to meet me, I mentioned that I would consider an interview in their homes if their wives were home. This was also, for me, personally important. Other options were a coffee shop or a public library, which were locations chosen by some of the male interlocutors who were either unmarried or for whom a place out of their home was more convenient in terms of their schedule that day.

Apart from personal convictions and preferences, community pressure can also affect how social etiquette must be considered when researching the Muslim community. I had proposed a community mosque since I considered it a public space and "open." However, one un-married male whom I reached out to for the interview told me that he would not consider the mosque as a neutral ground as it would be uncomfortable for him to be under so many observing eyes of fellow sisters. He was afraid they would not understand the situation in its correct context and could misinterpret the purpose of our meeting and make inappropriate conclusions about our relationship. I understood that with this comment, he wanted to protect both my and his reputation within the community, and thus we agreed to meet in a coffee shop where fewer people known to him would be around.

The interview location is a crucial part of research design, and the procedures I undertook while reaching out to my interlocutors show that the question of who gets to decide on the location plays a role in interviews with communities where cultural codes are a significant part of everyday life. Consequently, the interview location plays its role in constructing reality, thus contributing to the interview as an interactional "event" (Herzog, 2005, pp. 25, 36). Moreover, Elwood and Martin (2000) advise, for this reason, the researcher not to overlook the aspects of the interlocutors' locality and personal story. These could be observable, for instance, through the decoration of the house or the interactions between the interviewer, the interlocutor, and anyone else in the interview location. The authors (ibid.) argue that these are integral to the interlocutor's experience and identities. These contributing factors can be analyzed as elements of the "structuring of social reality" (Herzog, 2012, p. 210). Indeed, each interview in my study was an individual encounter, and the fact that in some cases, there were also other people except for myself, and the interlocutor present affected the knowledge construction. I recall an interview with a male interlocutor whose wife sat mostly beside him. Her knowledge of the Finnish language was not very good, so she and her husband mainly communicated in Arabic. At some point, the interlocutor referred to an aspect of religion relating to sexuality. The wife interfered in Arabic by telling him he shouldn't discuss such issues with me. I was able to understand her comment but said nothing. The man continued by changing the subject.

It should be noted that qualitative interviewing is recommended to conduct the individual with only the interlocutor and the interviewer present to ensure that outsiders cannot disturb the situation and that the person is free to speak, as even family members might intervene and cut the person's narration (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 2014, p. 127; Josselson, 2013, p. 54). In my study, public spaces inevitably brought outsiders to the larger environment of our interview setting, but in no case was that a disturbance of the discussion in my evaluation. When the interviews were conducted in the interlocutors' houses, with female interlocutors, only children would now and then come and need something from their mother, but the spouse was never present. According to the social etiquette among Muslims, which I have mentioned before, such a situation would have been somewhat awkward as women tend to sit by themselves if a Muslim woman visits another one in her home. With male interlocutors, however, the spouse's presence varied from an active interview listener

who sat with us in the living room to a distant observer who would merely greet me upon entering the home and then disappear to her chores.

As I have discussed so far regarding my research design, I have had to think critically about my "ethnographic subjectivity" (Berry, 2011) and my positionality that follows from it within the research setting at large. As Madison (2011, p. 10) explains, "(…) positionality requires that we direct our attention beyond our individual or *subjective* selves. Instead, we attend to how our subjectivity concerning others informs and is informed by our engagement and representation of others." In practice, this meant critically reflecting on how my identities as a researcher, as a "sister in Islam," and "peer" as a Muslim convert, and maybe quite in an equal manner, my identity as an expat living abroad would affect the research project. However, as I will explain in the next section, these reflections also concerned the tensions and contradictions that followed my positionality concerning the Muslim converts I interviewed, affecting how I made decisions regarding my behavior during the interviews and how my interlocutors behaved towards me.

2.3.3 The "Peer" Researcher: Mirroring Myself in Others

The contemporary ethnographic approach to qualitative research has been affected by social sciences' post-modern philosophy and interactionist sociology insights. It thus entails a constructivist understanding of epistemology which shifts our understanding of the role of the researcher away from the traditional imperative of a "detached" observer. Knowledge production within the interview situation is understood to be co-constructed by the researcher and the interlocutor (Borer & Fontana, 2012, p. 48). This fundamental change has induced the necessity of a methodological discussion by the researcher over their role in the research process, mirroring the "reflexive turn" in social sciences simultaneously.

My subjectivity influences my positionality with all the multiple layered identities I carry during the research process. My commitment to my Ph.D. and engagement with the topic beyond the thesis was influenced by my subjectivity as a "peer" (Ryan et al., 2011). I have drawn on this aspect of my identity in being resilient to continue my work. Again, my subjectivity as a researcher has impacted the "academic why" behind

my endeavors. My commitment to working on the topic was not just related to an academic interest but ran deeper as a person who had first-hand experienced hostility and hate was one of the many reasons that triggered in me the wish to do something about how I felt about the injustices I and many others were constantly experiencing. It was a no-brainer to me that I was not alone in my experiences, and I continuously saw how the voices of my sisters went unheard in the public debates on anti-Muslim racism. As Islam was mainly associated with foreigners and immigrants and hence an issue of integration – as was the fight against anti-Muslim racism framed as a hindrance to integration – I was not satisfied as I felt that the discussion around the topic did not do justice to the experiences of Muslim converts, who were not immigrants nor in need of integration policies.

Choosing critical ethnography for my Ph.D. study has allowed me to embrace my subjectivity while staying aware of both the positive and the negative ways my positionality may affect the research process. Whereas traditional ethnography saw notions such as "going native" in the field as a hindrance to the ever-sought objectivity (Davies 1999, p. 71), critical ethnography has embraced the potential that is invested in the researcher's subjectivity as "researchers hope and expect their value biases to influence the research process and outcome" (Spencer et al., 2014, p. 91). Juvonen (2017) has defined "in-group interviews,"[9] i.e., where the researcher is part of the community they deal with, as beneficial regarding easier access and rapport building. However, there is always the risk of the researcher adopting too lax ideas about "privileged," static positionality without considering how both the differences and the commonalities of identity markers shared with the interlocutors affect how one is positioned in the field (Ryan et al., 2011; Song & Parker, 1995).

I realized soon after I started reaching out to potential interlocutors that as a member of the Muslim convert community, I did share this part of my identity with my interlocutors. However, many other factors, such as my gender, my socio-economic

[9] For the lack of a better translation in English, I adopted the term "in-group interview" as suggested by Dr. Tuula Juvonen in an email correspondence (12.20.2017). Juvonen, a scholar of Gender Studies, used the Finnish term "sisäpiirihaastattelu" in her article (Juvonen, 2017) on interview settings in which the interviewer shares with the interlocutors a lifeworld that is based on a certain characteristic such as religious affiliation or sexual orientation. The Finnish term thus connotates to an interview that is done within an exclusive social circle, an "in-group."

background, the fact that I had not been living in Finland since 2008, and how I lived and practiced Islam, would create divisions between me and those I was reaching out to. Chaudhry (1997), a Muslim Pakistani researcher, experienced alienation and distancing from the Muslim student community she was researching at a North American university, despite that she had expected to be able to establish connections more quickly due to the common religious background and the ethnicity she had in common with some of the students. However, as she reflected upon her positionality, she realized that it is precisely because of the cultural closeness to the interlocutors, which a "peer researcher" cherishes, that specific conversations might cause uncomfortable feelings.

I had a similar experience once during my interviews when the woman I was interviewing was telling me about her conversion journey. She had a very distinguished way from other interlocutors I had talked to so far of explaining Islam and how she found it as a religion convincing, for instance, in how it regulated gender relations and how sharia law functioned. I was at the time struggling with wearing the headscarf and had a few months ago decided to switch from the scarf style that is closed in the front to a turban. The woman I was interviewing had always appeared to me as a strict follower of Islamic rulings, and she also frequently argued with other women about the "correct way" of following the rules in social media. Even though my relationship with her had always been amicable and we often interacted as Facebook friends, something made me feel insecure at that moment, and I perceived her tone as patronizing. This made me question how I had so-far defined my positionality and the "coffee table talk" I expected to have. In this regard, Bhavnani, Chua & Collins (2014, pp. 170–172) note that critical researchers should be aware of "fabricated positionalities," which imply unchangeable identities of both sides and what they call a "homogenized field." Thus, during the interviews, I was a peer to those I interviewed but, at the same time, a researcher, which might have also affected the way the woman talked to me in that very specific setting.

The conversations I had with my interlocutors did not happen in a natural setting – even though most were done while having a cup of coffee together – but they were staged for my research. The interlocutors knew they were there to participate in my study, and I was there to gather data. I hence had to question my assumptions related

to the way how the woman I was interviewing perceived me; was she treating me as an "outsider" and, for that reason, extensively explaining the Islamic theology, or maybe she was trying to make *dawah*[10] as if I was a Muslim, but an ignorant one. Also, it might have been that she was just used to explaining Islam to others in this manner and projected it to the interview situation and meant not to address me personally. These feelings came back when I was listening to and analyzing her interview. Still, in retrospect, I told myself that my feelings were unjustified since, probably for her, these theological details were biographically important in her spiritual journey and agency in choosing Islam, as I will discuss in chapter six.

In many other instances, due to my positionality as a "peer researcher," the interlocutor's accounts overlapped with my experiences of being a Muslim convert in Finland. They highlighted our commonalities, which would not have been possible for a researcher outside the community. This would help me to break the traditional hierarchies of an interview setting where I, as a researcher, would only ask questions and listen to the answers provided by my interlocutor. Instead, I wanted to construct a conversation between two equals (Ellis & Berger, 2003, p. 163). I wished my interlocutors to see me as a recipient of their story (Josselson, 2013, p. 11) and encouraged each interlocutor to tell the most authentic personal account. This was manifested on the one hand during my interview with Lauri; he told me how he used to follow the rule of not shaking hands with the opposite sex in a stricter way than before. I then also told him about my own experience with hand shaking and how I had changed my attitude towards the practice over the years, as I used to refuse a handshake from a man entirely but later started to implement a more situational strategy.

On the other hand, during my interview with Noora, she told me how she had thought about leaving the practice of wearing the headscarf because of the general negativity around Islam that had made her feel pressured/self-conscious about her visibility as a Muslim. This made her feel like she always had to answer people about terrorist attacks committed by Muslims to distance herself and that her visibility made her a general representative for all Muslims. While she was telling me all of this, she became very

[10] Generally understood as a "call to Islam".

emotional. She started crying because she felt terrible about her doubts regarding the headscarf, specifically during Ramadan. My reaction was also emotional as we talked about how Ramadan is supposed to be the most spiritual time for a Muslim person, but she still had these thoughts and could not understand why. What made me emotional was the struggles that I had been going through regarding wearing the headscarf, and I mirrored them in her experience and self-doubt.

As this thesis is also partly my story, and I relate to the reported experiences on various levels, I have felt, and still think, that it is my obligation to carry these voices where applicable to the larger audience. At times I have thought that it has been the thesis and my background as a doctoral student that supported me while I have, as a Muslim convert, spoken about anti-Muslim racism in Finland. Other times, my identity as a Muslim convert has given me a voice while I have presented my research's (until now) preliminary results. The critical paradigm does not only acknowledge the plurality of "truths" but that identities are also complex, fluid, and socially constructed and the consequent impact of intersectionality in race, gender, social class, and sexual orientation on the researcher's subjectivity and the field. The critical paradigm calls for reflecting beyond the "insider/outsider" status, which has traditionally been regarded as the degree to which the researcher shares commonalities with the interlocutors and how the established degree of "closeness" affects the access to the field and aspects of rapport. Therefore, it enabled me to engage with my positionality within the research setting and how I have positioned myself toward my research outside this thesis project. In the next section, I will discuss critical ethnography as a method and its three aspects, accountability, partiality, and positionality.

2.3.4 The Micropolitics of Research

Anti-Muslim racism operates within a society's power structures that use race, religion, gender, and class in marking and discriminating against Muslims and people perceived as such as the Other. I have aimed to tell the stories of my interlocutors by giving their voices a stage in which emancipation and social change can emerge. I have also aimed to address the resulting injustices and marginalization of Muslims in the Finnish context. Influenced by these objectives, my study is located within the philosophical paradigm of Critical Theory, seeking to use the interlocutors' understanding of social

reality as a basis for social criticism (Spencer et al., 2014, p. 91). As Gunzenhauser (2004, p. 77) has argued, doing critical ethnography is an academic endeavor with a moral and a political aim, as through "(…) their analysis or actions in the field, critical ethnographers hope to free the oppressed or at least to contribute in some way to their emancipation." Following this, it was from the beginning my understanding that through my interviews, I would seek to bring forth the voices of Finnish Muslim converts on hostility, racism, and discrimination as part of the data I present in this thesis. This reported knowledge, stemming from those who have first-hand experience with the phenomenon, including myself, is otherwise left unheard in Finnish society, media, political platforms, and so far also in the academe.

The civil rights movements in the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s set up a new political consciousness among academics, and a way for critical qualitative inquiry was paved (Bhavnani et al., 2014, p. 165). The critical paradigm is inspired by the tradition of the Frankfurt school that emerged from the legacy of the Marxist theory and embodied, therefore, the imperative for research to contribute to social change. Thus, the critical paradigm contrasts itself with two other significant paradigms of qualitative research, the postpositivist and interpretive, in its political and value-oriented objective to "make domination and subjugation obvious and to help oppressed groups to emancipation" (Willis, 2007, p. 48). As Foley (2002, p. 470) illustrates his own "becoming of" a critical ethnographer, he explains how American researchers in the 1960s and 1970s came to realize that their works had been part of the "international 'development' projects that promoted global capitalism of a discipline that was "founded upon liberal, humanist doctrines of meliorism, orientalism, colonialism, and racism." Critical ethnography settled as a distinctive branch with its methodology (Carspecken, 1996; Madison, 2011; Thomas, 1993), and with its value-oriented and political objective, it has been well applicable to studies on sexual, linguistic, and religious minorities (Bakali, 2016; Heller, 2011; J. R. King, 1999; Miled, 2019) that have been historically –or still are – oppressed and marginalized in local and global contexts.

While early ethnographers understood the researcher to inquire through an objective lens, free from bias and pre-commitment, the purpose of their research endeavors became entangled in the broader agenda of creating discourses of the Other for the colonial enterprise (Davies, 1999, p. 45). Even after the notion of reflexivity was

introduced into the politics of ethics in qualitative research, techniques were used to eliminate the impact of the subjective researcher on the research setting (e.g., in participant observation) or the interview situation (Davies, 1999, p. 7) in the quest for neutrality in the inquiry, the data and results. Such research endeavors would only have as their goal a descriptive/interpretive account of the lifeworld experienced by the studied community. Hence, any possible oppression or injustices experienced by the interlocutors as part of their lifeworld would not be challenged by the researcher, and even if the researcher would have done as much as "gazed into his/her biography," positionality and how this subjectivity interacts as part of the field context, would be overseen (Burawoy, 2009, p. 39).

However, from the beginning, I did not want to engage in a "hit and run" kind of research, meaning that I would merely *use* my interlocutors for my benefit, i.e., authoring the Ph.D. thesis. Instead, I should ensure that whatever knowledge about the social realities of Finnish convert Muslims was created during the research process, I would take it further than my writing desk. In the critical paradigm, the context of the research endeavor and its micropolitics play a significant role (Spencer et al., 2014, p. 91). The researcher questions aspects of their research endeavor, such as "What will be done with the research?" "Who will benefit from it?" or "Why do I have the authority to make claims about 'the field'?" These questions are tightly connected to the researcher's positionality and reflexivity in critical ethnographic research (Madison, 2011, p. 8). Considering that critical ethnography is never apolitical, these questions find their underpinnings frequently vis-á-vis discussions of historical and societal oppression, inequalities, and questions of power. Länsman (2008) has argued that research on the indigenous Sámi communities in Finland[11] is expected to benefit the communities, especially when the researcher is also part of the Sámi community. The question of benefits mentioned by Länsman (2008) breaks from the colonial legacy of ethnography and anthropology. It is one of the "three elements of critical research": accountability, partiality, and positionality (Bhavnani et al., 2014). These three elements are fused in how I have conducted research and been involved with anti-Muslim racism outside of academe.

[11] In chapter four I provide a detailed discussion on the historical oppression of the Sámi people in Finland and how their racialization as non-Finns and non-White is to be understood in the wider context of racism in Finland.

I have previously mentioned (Hafez & Hyökki, 2019) that giving agency representation for my interlocutors would contribute to my accountability as a researcher. It manifested, for instance, as an attempt to consider the meanings of either taking an Islamic name or keeping their birth-name for Finnish converts and how that is intertwined with their self-image as persons embracing a new identity as Muslims. However, the accountability I have felt towards my interlocutors has, over the years, evolved beyond such technicalities in two ways. Firstly, it is manifested in my endless strivings always to bring up the perspective of Muslim converts in my public engagements against anti-Muslim racism. I am still involved in the community, working together occasionally in community-based projects and NGO works on an advocacy level. As my involvement with the research topic has not just been restricted to the academe – or by extension to my personal experiences as a Finnish Muslim convert – I also have, as an activist, strived towards the fight against anti-Muslim racism and emancipation of Muslims in Europe at large.

Secondly, since my academic goal has been to make my interlocutors' stories accessible to a larger audience, the priority is to make my research accessible to my interlocutors, those without whom I would not have been able to embark on this journey in the first place. I have thus aimed to publish my research in open-access journals. I have written Op-Eds in international media outlets, and I have been invited to comment on news relating to anti-Muslim attacks and to speak on the topic as an activist and a researcher. Hence, my profile would not have fit the conventional ethnographer who can detach him-/herself from the field. Still, I have naturally been in an activist collaboration with the group I have studied (Lather, 2001, p. 479). Hence, I have brought the insights I have won from my research into the activism I have embraced in the last years in fighting against anti-Muslim racism.

As I have explained above, my research has aimed to situate the experiences of Finnish Muslim converts, on the one hand, within the larger phenomenon of racism, racialization, and discrimination that minorities experience in Finland and, on the other hand, to disclose how racialization and hierarchization of minorities operate on different levels depending on the way how the identity marker “Finn” is conceptualized. While I have been working to reach this goal, the concepts of

racialization and misrecognition have been an integral part of my analysis. While the narratives of my interlocutors on their experiences thereof have served the purpose of challenging the construction of Whiteness within Finnish society (Hyökki, 2022), my research has echoed the practice of partiality in critical ethnography (Bhavnani et al., 2014). My study thus questions the power relations embedded in the dominating representations of not only "ethnic Muslims," Muslim converts, but also Tatar Muslims, who are a small minority of Finnish Muslims. To disclose the complex racial hierarchies applied to Muslims in Finland, I criticize the construction of the Tatar Muslims as a "Finnishized" Muslim community in chapter six and how this contributes more to the marginalization of converts and other Muslims in Finland. Moreover, in chapter seven, I offer excerpts from my interviews that concentrate on countering the representation of Muslim women as lacking agency (Hafez & Hyökki, 2019) and analyze how the anti-Muslim racist representations of Muslims in general lead to a double-consciousness and influence how Muslim converts present themselves in public spaces.

Importantly, as Miled has argued (2019, p. 12), critical ethnographers cannot stay in the comfort zone of a researcher/knower but must acknowledge the "contested terrain" and the "shaking grounds" they move on while dealing with topics surrounded by political tensions. In the case of my study, these tensions are not only produced by the anti-Muslim racism of the society and the discourse on Muslims and the "compatibility" of Islam in the Finnish society or European societies at large but also by the dynamics present within the Muslim community. Involving a discussion on the societal construction of the Tatar Muslims as a "Finnishized" Muslim community in chapter six, and how that is to be understood within the larger context of racialization patterns in the Finnish society and anti-Muslim racism at large, is an integral part of me as a critical researcher highlighting the positionality of my research, i.e., understanding the sociohistorical/political context from which my research is created (Bhavnani et al., 2014).

I have been conducting research for the past six years in politically tense conditions, marked by continued hostility towards Muslims and Islam in Europe and Finland. Throughout this thesis, I offer reflections on my experience during the research work in becoming a target of hate speech and even being suspected of terrorism. My research

has not been without its dangers for my safety and my mental well-being. While I was still in the early stages of my Ph.D. education, I remember how in 2016, I was doing research for the country chapter on Finland for the annual European Islamophobia Report and how I felt so disempowered, tired, and fed-up with the hostility and hate that I was constantly reviewing for my work. I was sitting at my writing desk and loudly complaining about the state of things in Finland when a family member commented: "Well, you can be happy that there is so much Islamophobia in Finland – otherwise, you would not have anything to write about." I laughed it off, but inside I was still feeling uneasy. However, in retrospect, I know this conversation is an example of how many factors can influence our research journey positively and negatively, including conversations, personal memories, fears, and ambitions, as Berry (2011, p. 173) rightfully note. In that sense, this research is an act of resistance and empowerment, a product of "not-giving-up" and retreating to a less "provocative" topic for my Ph.D. thesis.

Part of misrecognizing Muslim identities has long been ignoring the diversity within the Muslim communities and the convert community. In this context, Pauha and Bahmanpour (2022) have importantly pointed out that in socially relevant debates, the diverse voices not only within the Muslim community at large but also, for instance, within the Shia-community, within which both religious and political differences are represented, need to be considered. Thus, in the next chapter, I discuss the "Muslim community" in Finland, answering the question, "Who are Muslim converts?" I will provide an overview of the history of Muslims and Islam in Finland and reflect on central questions of my research context, such as how are Muslim converts different from born Muslims, why I have chosen to use the term anti-Muslim racism instead of Islamophobia, and what do we mean by racialization, especially, when "Muslim" is not a "race"?

CHAPTER III

SETTING THE SCENE

3.1 Introduction

Living abroad, when people hear that I am from Finland, I frequently get asked about the situation of Muslims in my relatively small home country; Are there many Muslims? How many Muslim converts are there? Is there a lot of anti-Muslim racism? These conversations fascinate me, as Finland is generally perceived as one of the most successful social welfare states, with a high-level education system and "the happiest country in the world."[12] However, I explain that just as any other country in Europe, Finland has racism and discrimination, but still, the relatively small Muslim community does not have to struggle with, for instance, legislative restrictions on the practice of religion as is the case with bans on headscarves and burqinis in France (Gohir, 2015; Nielson, 2020) or legislation that otherwise restricts the public expression of Muslim identity (Dodd, 2015). There have been, however, few attempts to criminalize the wearing of the headscarf, primarily by children also in Finland, though these attempts have remained unsuccessful. The annual European Islamophobia Report show, nevertheless, an ongoing anti-Muslim racist bias in media reports and programs, as well as explicitly anti-Muslim racist and xenophobic hate-speech spread by representatives of the right-wing party *Perussuomalaiset* ("True Finns") who hold 38 seats in the parliament (Tessieri, 2022). Moreover, Islam is the biggest bias motivation in all hate crimes related to religion (Rauta, 2021).

For me to discuss the anti-Muslim racism experienced by Finnish Muslim converts within the scope of this thesis, it is necessary to first situate the Muslim converts within the larger Muslim community in Finland. Thus, in this chapter, I will briefly introduce the demographics of the Finnish Muslim community and then discuss why Muslim converts are interested in understanding anti-Muslim racism in the Finnish context. I will explain why I have chosen to use the term *convert* instead of *revert* and why in

[12] https://worldhappiness.report/news/finland-again-is-the-happiest-country-in-the-world/

specific contexts, I see it necessary to orthographically differentiate between the concepts "white" and "White" as well as "whiteness" and "Whiteness." Finally, I will provide a literature review on Muslim converts in Western contexts and, in particular, look into how the question of their belonging has been framed differently, ranging from cultural and racial others to bridge builders between communities, and, finally, what I have called "convert exceptionalism.

3.2 History of Muslims and Islam in Finland

> For some, there is the stereotype that Muslims are Arabs, and, somehow, maybe religions are always so strongly associated with a certain culture … they are seen as such regional things … Islam is also seen as an Arab religion. It was Muhammad who was given that message. But then again, people don't consider that in the same way, Christianity was given to Jesus, who was in the same area [as Muhammed], but still, it has spread throughout the world. (Fatima)

Many who ask me about the composition and history of the Muslim community in Finland are surprised when I explain that the presence of Muslims in Finland goes back over two centuries. This is because, as the above quote from one of my interlocutors, Fatima, shows, Islam is primarily considered in Finland an "immigrant religion" and associated thus mainly with POC Muslims, such as Somalis and Arabs. However, the Tatars, who can be phenotypically considered "white," were the first Muslims to settle in Finland during the 19th century. They immigrated from the Russian Empire as soldiers after Finland was attached to the former as a Grand Duchy in 1809. With the soldiers also came military imams and civilian family members (Hálen & Martikainen, 2016, p. 86). In addition, from the 1870s onwards, Tatar salesmen, mostly Mishars, moved to the Grand Duchy as petty traders from different villages of the Volga River area, Nizhny Novgorod Province (Hálen & Martikainen, 2016, p. 90). Following the fall of the Russian Empire, Finland gained its independence in December 1917, and the Tatars who had settled in the country were allowed to stay instead of being forced to return to Russia (Martikainen, 2008; Pauha & Martikainen, 2014). This political change benefitted them since the annexed Grand Duchy had not accepted others but Christians as citizens. From the 1920s onwards, independent Finland also started granting citizenship to adherents of other religions. In 1923, a year after the Freedom of Religion Act was implemented, Muslims were recognized as an official religious community, and the Tatars established the first Islamic congregation in Helsinki in 1925. Today, the Tatars are a well-established cultural and religious minority with

congregations in Helsinki, Järvenpää, and Tampere, composed of approximately 550 members (Pauha & Konttori, 2020, p. 238).

After the Tatar community had long been the only ethnic Muslim minority in the country, the number of Muslims immigrating to Finland for work, study purposes, and family grounds increased in the second half of the 20th century. This happened within the broader context of Finland's opening to international migration after the Cold War (Martikainen, 2020). In the 1990s, Finland also started to accept refugees according to the UNHCR quotas, which affected immigration from Muslim-majority countries to Finland significantly. Today, the ethnic Muslim communities in Finland are diverse and primarily consist of Somalis, Arabs, Kurds, Turks, Kosovo Albanians, Iranians, Afghans, and Bosniaks (Pauha & Konttori, 2020, p. 348). By the end of 2020, the statistics of Finland reported 19 347 registered individuals in Islamic religious communities. At the same time, most Muslims can be assumed to organize themselves dominantly in the Helsinki metropolitan area, as can be derived from the official registration of associations and religious communities with the keywords "Islam" or "Muslim" in their names[13].

However, due to statistical issues and sociological and religious factors, defining the exact demographic profile of Finland's Muslim community is not a clear-cut task. Official figures regarding the size of the Muslim community are always rough estimates and factual data is challenging to obtain. For two main reasons, the religious affiliation of many Muslim residents remains underrepresented in the national statistics, which are based on registrations in official religious communities or congregations. Firstly, Muslims rarely undertake such registrations (Sakaranaho, 2006, p. 31). Secondly, for instance, all persons residing in the country as asylum seekers are not considered in the population registry (Martikainen, 2020, p. 39). The unofficial figures relating to the number of Muslims in Finland are possibly ten times higher than the official ones (Sakaranaho, 2006, p. 31). By calculations based on country of birth, researchers estimated 2019 the number of Muslims living in Finland to be around 110 000 - 120 000 individuals, i.e., ca. 2 % of the total population (Pauha & Konttori, 2020, p. 238). Such calculations, however, do not account for Muslim

[13] Finnish Patent and Registration Office, "Advanced Association Search," www.yhdistysrekisteri.prh.fi (last accessed 8.12.2021)

children born in Finland to parents with a migratory background nor Muslim converts. Nevertheless, a steady rise in registered Muslims can be observed, as shown in Figure 1 below. According to the Pew Research Center (PEW, 2017), Finland's Muslim population could reach 4,2%-15,0 % by 2050.

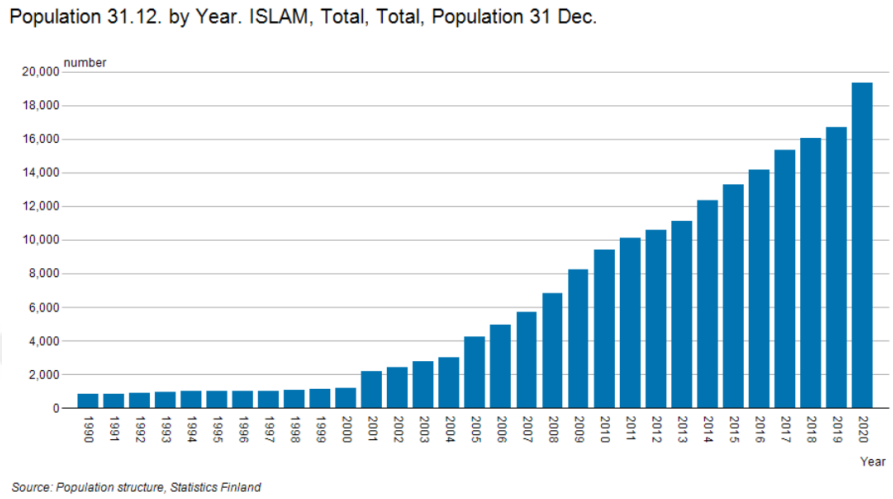

Figure 1 PEW Estimation of the Growth of Finland's Muslim Population

As we attempt to map out the profile of any Muslim community anywhere in the world, it is essential to pause and consider what "Muslim" means in each respective context. A critical reflection of our assumptions related to "Muslimness" is needed. Some individuals might self-identify as a "Muslim" but not refer to their religiosity in terms of beliefs and practice but rather to an ethnic or cultural belonging (Säävälä, 2008), while others bring out their religious identity independently of their national belonging, as will be shown in chapters six and seven through interview data from Finnish convert Muslims.

Shifting points of identification can very well be used interchangeably depending on one hand on one's current self-perception, i.e., how much religion or any other identity marker means for a person at a particular moment, and on the other hand, the social setting. This is shown, for instance, in the example of Tatars and the diverse stages of identity negotiation they have undergone in the past. Researchers have identified different strategies of identity orientation for at least four generations of Tatars living in Finland, including identification guided by "Muslimness," "Turkishness," "Tatar

identity," and lastly, "Finnishness" (Hálen & Martikainen, 2016; Leitzinger, 1999; Martikainen, 2020). However, the Tatars, being also phenotypically white like the converts studied for this thesis, have faced racism, racialization, and othering. Yet today, they are considered "Finnishized Muslims," while the Muslim converts can be said to lose their "Finnishness" by converting to Islam and being visibly Muslim. In chapter six, I will discuss these aspects of Tatar racialization and how it connects to the social construction of the racial concept "Finnish" in more detail.

Debates about to which extent Islam or Muslims belong to Finland, in terms of acknowledging the belonging of Muslims to each nation-state or fostering Islamic culture and traditions as part of the societal life, mirrors a centuries-long struggle of Muslims to receive recognition as equal citizens to others in European nation-states. One example of this is a statement by Teuvo Hakkarainen, a politician of the True Finns Party with a mandate at the European Parliament, who in 2016 wrote on his Facebook page, "Get Muslims out of this country! Not all Muslims are terrorists, but all terrorists are Muslims." Hakkarainen was later charged with incitement to hatred for his statement (Hyökki & Creutz, 2017, p. 174). At the same time, the idea of Europe has, since medieval times, been embedded in Christendom with Christianity as its defining religious identity (Delanty, 1995, pp. 16–17). Islam and Muslims have been its enemy par excellence ever sie – the Other amongst many "others" (Berger, 2014, p. 29). Today, the polarizing thesis of a "Clash of Civilizations" has much affected how Islam as a worldview and religion practiced on an everyday basis is seen as incompatible with "European civilization values" developed between the 15th and the 17th centuries (Delanty, 1995, p. 30). In the debates and investigations into how Muslims are perceived in European societies, how they struggle to be recognized as esteemed and equal citizens instead of "aliens in a Christocentric European environment" (Marranci, 2004), and how they self-identify with their respective religious, cultural, and national backgrounds, converts to Islam are a particular minority that has increased the interest of sociologists and scholars of religious studies. In the next section, I will discuss this specific sociological position of Muslim converts and other particularities attributed to Muslim converts both by converts themselves and by others.

3.3. The Converts At the Crossroads of Race, Religion, and Culture

3.3.1 On Terminology: Convert or Revert?

One of the decisions I had to make while writing my research was whether I should use the word *convert* or *revert*. Previous research is indeterminate on the usage of a single term. Both *convert* and *revert* have been used to denote a person born to Muslim parents who grew up/was raised without Islam being part of their life and became religious later in life (Kaiser, 2018). In such contexts, *reverts* are also called "born-again Muslims" (Thielmann, 2013). The term *convert* again has been used by, for instance, Annabel Inge (2017) in her study on UK Salafis, whereby her interlocutors were individuals who were born to Muslim parents and were raised as Muslims but later in their life they went through a spiritual awakening and decided to "convert" to Salafism. In studies on individuals who were born and raised as non-Muslims but became Muslims later in their life, *convert* is the predominant terminological choice with only a few exceptions (Alam, 2012; Anthony, 2000; Carr & Haynes, 2015; Casey, 2021; Galonnier, 2015; Köse, 1999; McGinty, 2007; Mitchell et al., 2021; Moosavi, 2015; Mossiere, 2016; Özyürek, 2015; Soutar, 2010; Stewart, 2016; K. Turner, 2019; van Nieuwkerk, 2008; Vroon-Najem, 2019; Younis & Hassan, 2017). Interestingly, in Stephenson's study (2011) on Australian indigenous people with their roots in South-East Asia, the term *kinversion* denotes "going back to the roots" as these individuals' forefathers were Muslim immigrants who had married into indigenous families.

The term *revert* is widely used within the Catholic Church to describe persons who have been baptized to Catholicism, later in their life, officially left the Church but then want to be re-baptized[14]. The Christian idea of "returning" to one's original religion, i.e., the faith one was introduced from infancy, is presumably why some Muslims have also chosen to use the term revert. In Brice's study on British converts, the term *revert* was the most preferred among the respondents (Brice, 2010, p. 24). Also, in Bourque's

[14] https://www.kath-kirche-kaernten.at/pfarren/detail/C3273/konversion_und_reversion (last accessed 5.11.2022)
https://www.dioezese-linz.at/institution/8810/erwachsenkatechumenat/grundinformationen/article/102201.html (last accessed 5.11.2022)
https://www.catholiceducation.org/en/controversy/common-misconceptions/the-reverts-catholics-who-left-and-came-back.html (last accessed 5.11.2022)

(2006) study on American female converts, her interlocutors predominantly used the term *revert* in their narratives. This preference is supported by the Islamic theology about every soul's primordial God-consciousness, *fitrah*, and referred to in the Qur'anic verse (7:172)

> "When thy Lord drew forth from the children of Adam from their loins their descendants and made them testify concerning themselves (saying): 'Am I, not your Lord (who cherishes and sustains you)?' They said: 'Yea! we do testify!' (This) lest ye should say on the Day of Judgment: 'of this, we were never mindful.'"[15]

The preference of some converts to use the term *revert* echoes the opinion of Qur'an commentators such as Ibn Kathir, who has explained the testimony mentioned in the above verse as a person's primordial disposition to be a Muslim, after which, however, the parents may raise them into another religion.[16] Other commentators, however, have explained that the verse refers merely to the "(…) universal potential in all human beings for moral and spiritual attainment and the acceptance of religion," without further specifying any pre-determined religious identity to which the concept of *fitrah* might refer (Hossein Nasr et al., 2015, p. 469).

However, reversion does not, in my opinion, describe the process of change well enough while and after a person becomes a religious and practicing Muslim. Moreover, in the context of this thesis, the ways these "new Muslims" manage their everyday lives and identity construction related to the self-and outsider-perception of their cultural and religious identities in non-Muslim societies are more relevant. As a result of this the relationships and mutual recognition between the person and their social environment are of importance, which is why I decided to follow the definition of the conversion provided by Rambo in his seminal study (1993, p. 5) as "a process of religious change that takes place in a dynamic force field of people, events, ideologies, institutions, expectations, and orientations.

3.3.2 Whiteness as a Phenotype and Capital

Throughout my Ph.D. studies, I have been confronted with my own racial identity. The encounter in the pizzeria mentioned at the beginning of this thesis was one of many.

[15] Translation by Yusuf Ali https://quranyusufali.com/7/ (last accessed 5.11.2022)
[16] https://www.alim.org/quran/tafsir/ibn-kathir/surah/7/172/ (last accessed 5.11.2022)

Sometimes my racial background has been visible to others, and sometimes it has not. My fair skin complexion is a marker of "whiteness," but so are the meanings given to it, only that in the latter case, I would instead put an uppercase to it. Thus, even though my whiteness does not change, my Whiteness does according to each situation. The 'cultural capital' invested in my whiteness that I possess has shown sometimes been robbed of me, of which my racialization due to my Muslim identity is the perfect example.

Sometimes, however, it has functioned like a veil between me and others, so much so that I wish I could eliminate it. I remember an incident when I was working as a research associate at the Center for Islam and Global Affairs at the Sabahattin Zaim University in Istanbul. I was responsible for new admissions concerning international students. I was trying to help a young man of Bangladeshi origin who wanted to register for Ph.D. studies and to whom a partial scholarship had already been granted. However, there was an issue with his paperwork, and he was required immediately to pay a certain amount of the semester fees to register. Yet, he could not provide the money as it was too much in his local currency. He was desperate and tried to plea for more time; "My father has already made arrangements to sell our house and the farm so we can pay the fees." I asked him where his family back home would go if their house were sold, and he told me they would try some arrangements, but in fact, they would not even have any more money for rent as they wanted to send all of it for their son's payments. At the end of my workday, I could not convince the admission office, and the young man lost his spot.

I went home and cried out of frustration. I was so ashamed of the privilege I knew I had. In Germany and Finland, I had always studied for free, and in Türkiye, as a student of Ibn Haldun University, all my study fees were covered by a scholarship. It had always been so effortless for me to access education, and my family had not had to sell their home for me to spend numerous years dragging my thesis, which now finally has materialized in these pages. Standing across this young man in the campus courtyard, who had gone to great lengths to obtain a visa and paid a lot of money to arrive in the country from across the globe, I was ashamed. I wish I had not been what my Algerian friend sometimes jokingly called a holder of a "White passport." As much as I

empathized with the young man from Bangladesh, even as his sister in faith, my Finnishness and Whiteness stood between us; I could never feel what he was feeling.

As the current study focuses on Finnish Muslim converts' experiences of racialization, race will be discussed on several occasions. Likewise, I will be problematizing, especially in chapters five, six, and seven, how race is intertwined with culture in Finland and how that leads to the racialization of Muslim converts, similar to the racialization of the ethnic minorities Sámi and the Roma in the past. To tackle the complex sociological position that Finnish Muslim converts in Finland are in, being phenotypically white and thus part of the dominant ethnic composition of the society, but also being otherized due to their religious identity as racial and cultural others, I have made a conscious choice to differentiate between "white" and "White" as well as "whiteness" and "Whiteness."

As I will explain in more detail in chapter four, racialized identity is not only defined by skin color or phenotype. Instead, as Sara Ahmed (2002, p. 46) explains, racialization is a process that takes place in time and space: 'race' is an effect of this process rather than its origin or cause. Similarly, Ruth Frankenberg (1997, p. 1) considers Whiteness as a *process* that emerges in connection to society's socioeconomic and sociocultural relations. It is, for me, in this regard, essential to acknowledge the privilege and cultural capital that is invested in this racial category, which may be constructed by different markers, not just depending on time but also geographical location. For instance, Arab-American Muslims have benefited from what Cainkar and Selod (2018) call "marginal whiteness." Still, because of the War on Terror, they have lost even the "White privileges" connected to it. In the European context, as I will show in chapter five, whiteness has been associated with the European Christian identity differently throughout history.

Moreover, I will discuss in chapter six in more detail how the phenotypically white Tatar Muslims, despite having become a target of racialization in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, today pass as White and as "Finnish" due to their specific lifestyle while white Muslim converts face racialization. Thus, religion is treated differently in both cases as a marker of Otherness. I will also explain in chapter five how white Russian immigrants fall after they immigrate to Finland and consequent unemployment into a

racialized social class, wherein they experience losing their "Whiteness." In their case, economic status and status as immigrants are the markers of a racialized difference.

Thus, I understand Whiteness as a racial construct, while whiteness would refer merely to a person's complexion. I acknowledge that (critical) researchers of race do not all use an "uppercase White." Amongst the literature I cite in this thesis, some do, and some do not. However, having an academic background in Linguistics and Translation Studies, I also acknowledge the power of words and how we write. In this study, I want to emphasize how the racialization of Finnish Muslim converts should be seen as a continuum of constructing a normative "Finnishness" and everything connected to it, including a normative understanding of *how* Finnish people should *look like* and how they should conduct their lives to "fit in." Hence in this thesis and my subsequent discussions on Finnish Muslim converts' experiences, these aspects will be considered as forming a relationship wherein whiteness does not necessarily produce Whiteness, as the latter is a product of a larger structure of racial relations in the society.

3.3.3 Cultural Divergence, Convergence, and "Convert Exceptionalism"

As noted above, Finland's Muslims are ethnically, linguistically, and culturally diverse, as in other European countries. Suppose one asks who Finnish Muslim converts are and their position within the wider Muslim community or Finnish citizenry. In that case, there are two alternative approaches that I see possible. Firstly, one could provide a demographic description of the convert community and examine the gender-balance between male and female converts, their social statuses, their age, and their religious background before they chose Islam as their spiritual path. But, in Finland, where citizens are not required to register their religious affiliation, it is impossible to define the convert community with statistics. The second way of going about the question of who Finnish converts are is to talk to the converts themselves and investigate the issue of their identities from the perspective of subjective experience with a qualitative research approach. By concentrating on the converts' descriptions of who they are and exposing how converts strive to acknowledge their value in society on an equal footing with their non-Muslim peers, a qualitative approach aids in treating Muslim converts as insignificant statistics.

The decision to choose Islam as one's religion seems to symbolize a step away from what modernism, liberalism, and secularism entail. However, it is precisely in this current secular age where conversion to Islam and belief in God is "(…) understood being one option among others" (Taylor, 2007, p. 3). Converts to Islam do not only have to struggle with being "religious" in a society in which religion hardly plays a role, but their choice of religion, Islam, is what causes more hate. When Samira, one of my interlocutors, converted, her friends had difficulty accepting the changes she incorporated into her life. While she was happy about how Islam gave her peace of mind and helped her to move away from a life full of materialism, her friends found that her choice to become a Muslim was the cherry on the top. As Samira accounted, they asked her: "But for this change, why must it be Islam specifically? Can you not come up with anything else?"

This question shows why her spiritual path is problematic for Samira's friends because she chooses Islam, not another religion. It is precisely in these kinds of instances that the alleged cultural incompatibility of Islam with the Finnish society becomes manifest and helps us to draw a connection between the hostility towards religion per se, and the lifestyle of the culture, that this religion is perceived to represent. Following Irfan Ahmed's concept of *domophilia*, Samira becomes the cultural other who threatens the imagined homogenous Finnish cultural identity.

I, too, got to experience how my conversion would be framed in a highly negative way. This was when I had just started my Ph.D. studies and, for the first time, got involved with anti-Muslim racism. One evening in late 2015, I noticed how my email inbox had numerous notifications titled "Someone just searched for you on Google and found your page on 'Academia.edu.'" Like many academics and Ph.D. candidates, I was, and still am, a member of this platform that enables researchers to connect and share their work beyond paywalls. At first, I was thrilled. I naively thought, "How nice, people are looking into my research activities!" and was excited about the visibility I was getting as a young academic. However, when I opened the analytics page of my profile on "Academia.edu," I noticed something was off. The visitors had been forwarded to my profile from one website, meaning the URL had been hyperlinked somewhere else. It was at that moment that my stomach had just turned over. I saw that the forwarding website was a prominent fake-news website, "MV-Lehti," that posted texts spreading

xenophobic and Islamophobic depictions of immigrants or Muslims living in Finland. Its style was openly hostile against politicians, journalists, and civil society actors who engaged in supportive actions of refugees. I clicked on the URL that showed in the analytics table as the forwarding site and found an "article" titled "*Tajukangas: Kuka on Linda Hyökki?*" (eng. "Tajukangas: Who is Linda Hyökki?") posted on "MV-Lehti." I realized that a racist blogger with the alias Paavo Tajukangas had posted a text about me, which had been picked up by "MV-Lehti." It was now clear to me; I had become a target of a smear campaign.

While browsing through the article posted by "MV-Lehti," I understood that the campaign had been sparked due to my previous post in an anti-racist Facebook-group. In the post, I asked other group members to help me identify Finnish websites and Facebook pages that spread materials against Islam. MV-Lehti wrote:

> She is clearly Finnish, but apparently has converted to Islam and followingly deranged and has abandoned "Finnishness." Now she is working against us kuffaar[17] (sic!) in the name of Muslims. (…) Now it is time to ask; why is Linda Hyökki attacking the Finnish people?

The above quote introduced me, for the first time during my years as a Muslim, to a situation in which my religious identity was juxtaposed with my cultural identity, and I was made into a hostile "Other," an enemy of "Finnish people," with a malicious agenda to fight non-Muslims. Being a Muslim convert occasionally includes discussions with peers on how people generally react to your religious identity. This was one of the most radical reactions to my decision to convert that I had experienced. I had joked with other female converts about how strangers sometimes ask us in a random conversation, "How have you learned so well Finnish?" Or when I lived for five years in Germany, how Turkish older women would always come and try to speak with me in Turkish when they needed help in a grocery store. Another German convert sister had described an incident with a Turkish woman who had asked if she was a Muslim and then insisted that she had "turned Turkish." The Muslim convert sister tried vainly to assure, "No, I have not become a Turk; I converted to Islam." The quote from MV-Lehti and these two examples show how Islam and "being Muslim" is disassociated from the local culture, and the Muslim convert is made into a "racial

[17] *kuffaar* in Arabic is the plural form of the word kafir, referring to people who are not Muslim.

other." In all these instances, the misrecognition of our cultural identity occurred because of our outer appearance. The premise was that a woman dressed in "Islamic attire" could not be a German or a Finn who had been born in the country and hence spoke the language fluently, like any other native speaker.

While the centuries-long presence of Islam on the European continent and its influence on the developments of Europe as a civilization might go unnoticed due to the Orientalist framing of Islam as a foreign element to Europe (Berger, 2014, p. 30; Hedges, 2021, p. 130) the role of European converts to Islam in the formation of an Islamicate European heritage is even less talked about. Mass conversions in the Ottoman Balkans, Sicily, and Al-Andalus during the Middle Ages greatly affected the local populations becoming majority Muslim (Berger, 2014). Thus, Muslim converts are historically seen as not a new phenomenon in the European religious landscape, and even today, they are an essential part of making Islam known in Europe. Yet, choosing Islam seems today to represent an oxymoron of what modern Europe claims to represent in values and as an imagined homogenous group of people in racial and cultural terms.

Questions of belonging and un-belonging mark the presence of Muslim converts in European societies. Despite the historical intersections of Islam and Europe's civilizational developments, Islam is still largely considered an immigrant religion in Europe, incompatible with the latter. Amidst these debates, Muslim converts find themselves within a multifaceted debate regarding the question of how their identities as "German," "Danes," "Swedes," "Americans," "Finns," "Irish," and so on can intersect with their new religious identity (Carr & Haynes, 2015; Jensen, 2008; McGinty, 2006; Özyürek, 2015; Roald, 2004; van Nieuwkerk, 2004). I will shortly discuss the three main framings I encountered during my literature review, which are created by non-Muslims and the converts themselves when it comes to situating Muslim converts within the larger socio-political context of their societies.

Firstly, Islam and national cultural identity – or, for instance, belonging to the social category of *Finns* – are juxtaposed within the anti-Muslim racist discourse. This is what I call the cultural and racial divergence framing on Muslim converts, and it is externally produced. It deals with race, cultural practice, and values, as I will show in

chapter six. Even the degree to which Muslim converts practice their religion has a part in this process of othering. It also has gendered aspects, as will be discussed in more detail in chapter seven. In the extreme form of such racial othering, Muslim converts are considered "traitors" and outcasts, as was stated by the shooter of the Christchurch massacre in his manifesto:

> The only Muslim I truly hate is the convert, those from our people that turn their backs on their heritage, turn their backs on their cultures, turn their backs on their traditions, and become blood traitors to their race. These I hate.

The historical, social construction of Finnish society as White and the racial othering of Muslims as non-White, which I discuss more in detail in chapters five and six, serve as a reference point for understanding how Finnish Muslim converts' Whiteness and Finnishness are disassociated from their religious identity. They can even be said to "lose their Finnishness" by becoming Muslims. Moreover, this question of belonging is reinforced by the idea that Muslim converts are radicalized and have a malicious agenda of committing violent attacks against non-Muslims. Such a claim, which also was made of me in the text by MV-Lehti, is reinforced within the general securitization discourse on Muslims. In Germany, the media has played a significant role in spreading a "threat image" referring to converts (Özyürek 2009), and in Finland, a book on jihadism alleged that born Muslims were worried about the radical stances of converts towards religion pictured them as "brainwashed."[18] The question of conversion to Islam allegedly being an issue of brainwashing and coercion, particularly in the case of female converts, is discussed in more detail in chapter seven.

Secondly, as a solid contrast to the polarization and fearmongering above is the idea of convergence between the local and Islamic cultures. Depending on how it is instrumentalized, it can have positive and negative ramifications when positioning Muslim converts as part of the Muslim community. In the case of the former, it can increase awareness of the fact that the religious diversity of Finns is a cultural asset for society at large. The converts are thus seen as able to "break through established social, cultural, and political boundaries" (Özyürek, 2015, p. 5) since these boundaries have existed there to keep the Muslims with migratory backgrounds alienated from the

[18] https://www.iltalehti.fi/uutiset/a/2016101322418828 last accessed 31.10.2022

majority society. Samira talked to me about how she contributes to her working environment in the field of social work with Muslim clients in a very particular way that benefits her colleagues and the work they do at large. Her socio-cultural knowledge as an "insider" in the Muslim community differentiates her from her colleagues.

> How much experience do they get when they have me as a cultural translator? The kinds of observations the head of that department can make ... and take them forward ... from the point of view of civic action when they came through a Muslim. (Samira)

Converts are thus framed as mediators or "bridges between the Muslim community and the majority society" (Duderija & Rane, 2019; Roald, 2004) who can operate beyond the claimed otherness of Islam. As I will show in more detail in chapters six and seven, the converts I interviewed actively perform both identities, fusing religious norms with cultural practices and values. This fusion of identities shows that while they self-identify with the category of Finns, the converts draw from values and practices they consider part of their born culture compatible with their faith's values and norms(Hyökki, 2022). This understanding finds its resonance in the idea that Islam is a religion that can be accommodated in all socio-cultural contexts. At the same time, the religious practice is adapted into the *'urf*, i.e., local customs, of each geographic area if it does not conflict with the Islamic principles of revealed knowledge and God's command (Murad, 2020, pp. 208–209). In chapter six, I discuss the role of 'urf in Muslim converts' counter-narratives in more detail.

However, cultural convergence can also be instrumentalized to otherize Muslims with a migratory background. The framing, then, which I call "convert exceptionalism," forms a very peculiar way of juxtaposing Muslim converts and Muslims with a migratory background to promote the detrimental binary of the "good" and "bad" Muslims." The binary is fundamentally created externally to differentiate Muslims according to the degree of their visible religiosity, ending in conclusions such as "non-practicing: secularized, integrated/assimilated," and "practicing: fundamentalists" Muslims (Akgönül, 2011, p. 36). The political meanings of these labels find use in global discourses surrounding the "War on Terror" and are based mainly on assumptions of Islam as a threat to Western values and followingly stigmatize practicing Muslims as carriers of that threat (Downing, 2019; Mamdani, 2005;

Topolski, 2018). I discuss in chapter six how this binary has been used in the social construction of the Tatar Muslim community as "Finnishized Muslims" and thus "good," leaving all other Muslims in the category of "bad." Within this binary, the convert exceptionalism is constructed two-fold, both by converts themselves and others, such as researchers.

On the one hand, Muslim converts are claimed to contribute to forming particular "European Islam(s)." As one of the Spanish converts interviewed by Rogozen-Soltar (2012, p. 619) expressed, these strivings serve to "make Islam accepted" within the global political era of hostility against Islam and Muslims. While Islam and Muslims are constantly marginalized and demonized, Muslim converts find themselves in a defensive position. In a way, this position translates to the need to distance themselves from the immigrant Muslims to claim their *right to belong* in their born cultural communities despite their new religious identity. Thus, this form of convert exceptionalism occurs when converts position themselves as able to carve out an Islam that is more "palatable." The German converts, for instance, interviewed by Özyürek (2015, pp. 32–33) would try to express their difference from the Muslims with a migratory background by explaining that their way of interpreting and practicing Islam would be closer to the European and German philosophical ideals of Enlightenment of rationalism and tolerance.

On the other hand, convert exceptionalism can also be produced by researchers and other commentators when looking into how converts converge their cultural and religious identities in their everyday life. What concerns me is how researchers might choose to describe this ability with words that I would see as creating more binaries, such as "contributing to the development of Islam(s) in the West that is (are) indigenous rather than imported" (Duderija & Rane, 2019, p. 143). The words *indigenous* and *imported* are problematic for me here, as they put Muslims with a migratory background into a position of the spatial Other, out of which they can never get out. It implies that they, unlike converts, would not possess the skillfulness in living Islam in a "suitable" manner for the local European contexts. This framing of Muslims with a migratory background as perpetual spatial and cultural others contributes to further issues I have observed to emerge from convert exceptionalism.

Lastly, in the attempt to distance themselves from Muslims of Arab, Turkish, etc. backgrounds, some Muslim converts claim that having no influence of family or tradition in Islamicate cultures, they can practice Islam, which is free of any cultural baggage. Striving for "pure Islam" is typical for the converts to Salafism (Inge 2017), who consider their way of practicing Islam as following the Prophetic way and hence transcending any cultural practices that are mixed up with what is regarded as "religion." However, converts who do not self-identify as *Salafis* claim to practice "authentic" Islam (Rogozen-Soltar, 2012; Vroon-Najem, 2019) and hence to be then even "better Muslims than immigrant Muslims" (Özyürek, 2015, p. 25). Such exceptionalism becomes problematic as it reproduces an Orientalist discourse wherein the Occident acts as "dominating, restructuring, and having authority" over the Orient (Said, 1979, p. 3). However, I would argue that these new spaces they create for Islam to exist in various European geographies are not about "freeing" Islam from its association with Arabs or any other "Muslim culture" but rather serve the Islamic concept of '*urf* as described above. There are not many "Islams" to be practiced but a practice of one Islam depending on the local customs within the Islamic framework. Thus, within the critical paradigm of this thesis, I see it necessary to emphasize how researchers should critically investigate any exceptionalism and construction of binaries that serve in the larger context the categorizing of the types of Muslims into "good" and "bad" ones.

As mentioned above, convert Muslims are a specific group whose experiences should be regarded from a particular perspective. On the one hand, their lives are affected by the hostile public and political debates surrounding Islam and Muslims in post-immigration societies. In their foreword of the newly published edited volume on Muslims in Finland, the book editors note that more and more Finnish Muslims have been born and raised in Finland, and there are thus fewer justifications to speak of Islam as the religion of immigrants (Pauha & Konttori, 2022, p. 5). However, such well-meaning acknowledgments do not compensate for the dire need for comprehensive studies on Finnish Muslim converts as part of the Muslim community in Finland. The normalization of Islam as part of Finland's religious landscape must also be connected to studying Muslim converts. Larsson and Račius (2010) have pointed to the fallacy of the history of Muslims and Islam in Europe as only connected to post-second world war migratory trends and call for consideration of the history of

Tatar Muslims in the Baltic. I concur that academic discussions frequently ignore that historical mass conversions to Islam have marked European history. Today, Europe consequently houses Islamicate cultures not only in the Iberian Peninsula and the southeastern part of the continent (Karić, 2002). Still, I would emphasize considering the conversion experience as necessary in the broader understanding of Islam in Europe.

Based on the observations about the sociological positions of Muslim converts, it is essential to note that when examining the experience of Muslim converts in Finland, concepts of "Finnishness" and race must be viewed from a different angle than when examining the experience of born Muslims with a migrant background. Even though the experiences of converts, for instance, on discrimination in the labor market, can overlap with those of born Muslims, as Karhunen (2022) showed, facets of anti-Muslim racism are still different in the everyday lives of converts. This is because, after their conversions, they are often forced to negotiate their and others' ideas of Finnishness – an identity marker with which they have been born. Furthermore, as I will demonstrate in chapters four and five, the past and present position of the Tatars within the Finnish Muslim community is significant when situating the experiences of Finnish Muslim converts within the larger patterns of how race is perceived in Finland as a marker of similarity or difference. To provide a basis for understanding the concepts of anti-Muslim racism and the process of racialization, which is inherently related to it, I will, in the next section, provide the theoretical foundations of these concepts, which shall facilitate the discussions in the further chapters of this thesis.

CHAPTER IV

STUDYING ANTI-MUSLIM RACISM IN THE FINNISH CONTEXT

4.1 Introduction

This Ph.D. thesis delves into the experiences of Finnish Muslim converts on anti-Muslim racism with a focus on how the concept of race and socially constructed Whiteness are intertwined in the idea of Finnishness, juxtaposed with Muslim identity. The Muslim converts I interviewed are all phenotypically white, and the question of the legitimacy of anti-Muslim racism as one of this thesis' central concepts arises. A critical question in this regard is, how can we speak of experiences of racism due to anti-Muslim racism if "Muslim" is not a *race*? This confusion is further compounded by debates on whether Muslims generally experience hostility, violence, and discrimination solely because they are *Muslims*, and the target of hatred thus being their belief. Or are these experiences based on ethnic background and skin color, which would explain why they are targets of racism? In this section, I will explain the interconnectedness of the two most established terms used to describe the hostile sentiments against Muslims and their discrimination globally, Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism. I will argue in the following sections why the latter is conceptually more helpful because Muslim converts are at the center of my investigation. Furthermore, to transcend the issue of "no racism without races," I will explain why the process of racialization, inherent to how anti-Muslim racism is understood mainly in the academic literature today, is a component of Finnish Muslim converts' experiences. I will also highlight that it should not go unnoticed if we want to understand the structures, power dynamics, and meanings associated with Whiteness in modern Finnish society.

4.2 Terminology: Islamophobia vs. Anti-Muslim Racism

The first appearance of the term "Islamophobia" has been traced back to French academic literature between the end of the 19th century and the early 20th century, when it was used to describe earlier Orientalist work on Islam and the Prophet Muhammed. In this context, it was referred to as an "erroneous representation of Islam" and the consequent construction of Islam and Muslims as "implacable, absolute and eternal enemies of Christianity, Christians, Europe, and Europeans." (Bravo López, 2011, p. 568). However, the relevance of the term "Islamophobia" as it is employed today is contested regarding its capacity to fully capture the manifestations of the phenomenon it is supposed to describe. For instance, some criticize it for its linguistic form, arguing that it implies hostile attitudes as a clinical condition (Bangstad, 2016). Nevertheless, in everyday social relations and on the political plane, Islamophobia's deployments range from attacks on persons and properties to acts of intimidation and a public (media) discourse disparaging Muslims or Islam (Sayyid, 2014a, pp. 15–16). Thus, the term has stood its ground, manifested in numerous academic publications on the various manifestations of Islamophobia worldwide.

As a conceptual tool, "Islamophobia" gained popularity, especially after the publication of the famous Runnymede Trust report in 1997 titled "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All" (Runnymede Trust, 1997). However, the report has since then received criticism for its latent way of creating ontological categories of "Islam" and "Muslim" by reducing Islamophobia to "open" or "closed views" on Islam (Hafez, 2018, p. 214). The Runnymede Trust report's focus on how Islamophobia operates through a particular set of "views on Islam" is connected to the study of Islamophobia through an approach "(…) in which Islamophobia is regarded as an expression of mentalities and actions, a form of prejudice." (Hafez, 2018, p. 215) Authors have thus likened Islamophobia to hostile attitudes based on specific stereotypes about Muslims as representatives of the Islamic faith, which lead to resentment, fear, and discriminatory practices (Bravo López, 2015; Hedges, 2021; Taras, 2012).

Due to its connection to social psychology, researchers who follow the prejudice-based approach have also attempted to find ways to "explain" Islamophobia through internal factors in the Islamophobe's life, such as biographical history (Dekker & van der Noll,

2012; Pauha & Ketola, 2015). However, focusing on attitudes and "positive" or "negative" views on Islam falls short of considering the intersectionality in the manifestations of hostility, violence, and discrimination and how these are systematized and structurally anchored in our societies. Furthermore, while such an approach focuses on attitudes and views on Islam and Muslims *per se*, it overlooks the fact how individuals can become targets of anti-Muslim hostility, abuse, discrimination, and hate crimes without being Muslims (Awan & Zempi, 2020; P. Hopkins et al., 2017; Jhutti-Johal & Singh, 2019). This begs the question; how can we then explain the manifestations of Islamophobia even if "no Islam" is at play?

The experiences of non-Muslims of being perceived as Muslims and consequently of becoming victims of anti-Muslim racist acts relate to their outer appearance, language, or possibly "foreign-sounding" name. Thus, we must orient ourselves towards a more comprehensive understanding of Islamophobia and its target. Fred Halliday (1999, p. 898) has thus argued that "(…) Islam as a religion was the enemy in the past: in the crusades or the *Reconquista*. It is not the enemy now. The attack now is not against Islam as a faith but against Muslims as a people, the latter grouping together all, especially immigrants, who the term might cover." The last part of Halliday's statement leads us towards understanding better how not a person's religiosity per se but how they are perceived to be Muslim makes a difference when we look at the manifestations of the hostility and discrimination Muslims experience. What Halliday refers to is defined by Erdenir (Erdenir, 2010, p. 29) as "a sort of 'new racism' which targets cultures, lifestyles, and physical appearances of Muslims." It is in this manner that we can follow the development of the term "anti-Muslim racism" to the phenomenon so far mainly described as "Islamophobia." It is worth noting that in the sequel to its 1997 report, Runnymede Trust provides in its 2017 report "Islamophobia: Still a Challenge for Us All" the definition; "Islamophobia is anti-Muslim racism" (Runnymede Trust, 2017, p. 1). This terminological shift helps us investigate the phenomenon's scope beyond individual actions and the prejudices underlying them, even if they were also recognized as having a racial component, as Hedgeargued (2021, p. 6). Instead, we will be able to disclose the structural aspects of the phenomenon at hand, recognizing it as a form of racism.

4.3 From Race to Culture: Racializing Muslim Identity

Like its predecessor, "Anti-Muslim racism" has also received its fair share of criticism regarding its linguistic form and semantic relevance as a conceptual tool for analysis. The critique has mainly targeted its second component, arguing that since "Muslim" is not a *race*, we could not speak of anti-Muslim *racism* the same way we can, for instance, talk of anti-Black racism. Such arguments are based on a narrow understanding of race, referring to only physically determined characteristics, i.e., the skin color and other features of peoples from diverse shared ancestries. Hence, per the critique, "Muslim" as an identity marker is not to be equated with ethnicity or gender, which are given but considered as a voluntary identity (Meer & Modood, 2009, p. 345). While the authors, in response to this assertion, correctly note that born Muslims did not choose to be raised in Muslim families or in a society that is hostile to Muslims, further justification for the relevance of "Muslimness" as an identity marker in the context of the discussion on racism(s) needs to be provided.

Firstly, "new racism" must be discussed in the conversation about social connections and how they are regulated in contemporary societies. According to Etienne Balibar, "new racism" is not a new form of racism *per se* but

> (…) a tactical adaptation of an ideology into current times. It is not about biological heredity but the insurmountably of cultural difference, a racism which at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of a certain groups or people (…) but 'only' the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of lifestyles and traditions (Balibar, 2018, pp. 83–84).

Thus, in a sense, this "new racism" is unrelated to fear of a phenotypically or "biologically" racial Other but understands itself instead as an opposition to a shift in society's acceptance of lifestyles other than those traditionally linked to any region. Hence, in anti-Muslim racism, the claim of incompatibility of Islam or an imagined "Islamic culture" with "Western culture" is prominent. However, "new racism" is another term used to denote forms of cultural racism, within which I include anti-Muslim racism. Simon Clarke (2003, p. 28) explains that in opposition to biological racism, cultural racism is not about

> "(…) racial stereotypes or typologies but [is] rooted in notions of cultural and ethnic difference. (…) there is a shift in emphasis. Biological racism uses (…) inferiority as a means not only of demonising the subject but also the culture of that subject. Publicly and certainly politically it

> is unacceptable to talk of people as biologically inferior; the emphasis has therefore switched to a discourse of cultural difference in which the Other becomes demonised, a referent in a late twentieth-century political project."

This is seen in legislation that explicitly targets Islam as a practiced religion, such as bans on minarets, which are seen as a visual representation of Islam and its aim to dominate local cultural traditions and symbols (Ayoub & Lohmeier, 2016; Cheng, 2015). The restrictions are tools of anti-Muslim racism as a symptom of what was articulated by Balibar because Islam and the lifestyle motivated by Islamic beliefs, including religious activities, are considered inferior and inconsistent with the "European values" – constructed as "our values" – as explained earlier in this chapter.

Secondly, what Meer and Modood (2009) overlooked in their interpretation of voluntary and involuntary identities is that both those born into non-Muslim and Muslim families (with the latter growing up non-religious but becoming religious later in their lives) have voluntarily chosen to be Muslims. It is crucial, however, to remember that the process of racialization, which in the context of anti-Muslim racism targets Islam as a religion and "Muslim" as an identity marker, is also fundamental to "new racism." Because of this, anti-Muslim racism does not refer to hatred, violence, or discrimination against Muslims based merely on presumptions about their religious views and targeting them as a religious group. Instead, it refers to hatred, violence, or discrimination against Muslims based on a perceived affiliation with an "ethnoreligious" group. Meer and Modood (Meer & Modood, 2010, p. 77) explain the concept of "ethnoreligious" more closely: "What is critical to the racialization of a group is not the invocation of a biology but a radical 'otherness' and the perception and treatment to individuals in terms of physical appearance and descent." Hence, POC from ethnic backgrounds associated with "Muslim background," such as South Asians and Arabs, become victims of anti-Muslim attacks because the perpetrators perceive them as representatives of the Islamic faith. This perception does not consider whether the victim is, in fact, Muslim at all. Furthermore, my interview data in the following chapters will demonstrate how white Muslim converts become targets of anti-Muslim racism when they visibly manifest their religious affiliation and are recognized as Muslims.

In chapter five, I discuss how whiteness and Christian identity have historically been constructed as connected to an idea of a "pure bloodline." However, there are manifestations of anti-Muslim racism in the history of Europe, when links between race, ethnicity, and religious identity have been constructed to otherize population groups according to claims of heritage. When Jews and Muslims were forcibly converted to Christianity during the Reconquista, whiteness and Christianity historically came to be associated with one another in the European context. However, this conversion was only formal because the dominant Christian population still viewed them as having impure blood (Hedges, 2021, pp. 85–87). However, such thinking has led to significant bloodshed in its most extreme ways. In a more contemporary setting than Reconquista, Bosniaks were created as the racial Other based on their Muslim heritage by individuals who shared their phenotype but were also linguistically and culturally related to them. Bosnians were portrayed as "Turkifiers" and descendants of historic Ottoman rulers in this racialization process, according to the genocide expert Hikmet Karčić (Karčić, n.d.). Fundamentally, Bosnian Muslims were accused by Serbs of betraying their Christian faith by converting to Islam, which overlaps with the race traitor narrative frequently used about Western Muslim converts, such as by the perpetrator in the Christchurch Mosque shooting. Finally, statements that characterized Bosnian Muslims' faith as a genetic deformity and served to justify the genocide (Karčić, n.d.) are the most explicit example of racialization and of linking religious identity (actual or perceived) to inheritance.

The racialization of Islam and Muslims should thus be considered from three different aspects but with a slight disclaimer. Firstly, considering the essentialization of certain POC with a disposition associated with dominantly Muslim culture due to their ethnicity or race but also due to other characteristics such as the language they speak (e.g., Arabic), which is stereotyped as a "Muslim language." Secondly, in terms of perceived Muslimness and Otherness. This perception comes to play when, for instance, a white convert is visibly manifesting religious beliefs, such as with a headscarf or with a beard, but also when a non-Muslim white person is perceived as a Muslim due to his beard, as was exemplified in a study on hate crimes carried out by Awan and Zempi (2020). Thirdly, it has been demonstrated through the example of Bosniaks that racialization can occur without the use of apparent indicators and instead

include imprinting race on what were once thought to be non-racial bodies. Another example of a group racialized as "Others" by the intersection of race and religion were Irish catholic immigrants to the US. Paul Hedges (2021, p. 88) has argued that the Irish serfs, before the arrival of enslaved Black people, were socially and materially constructed as "Black" but "made white" when the need for a distinction between them and the enslaved Black people appeared upon the arrival of the latter.

For the disclaimer, it is worth noting that the idea of the racialization of Muslim identity can fall into the pitfall of accepting a specific kind of description of a "Muslim culture." Allen (2010, p. 155) has, in this regard, warned against culturalization: "Solely interpreting Islamophobia in terms of cultural racism, therefore, could be seen to be imposing an essentialized and culturally determined 'Muslim' against which all Muslims would necessarily need to adhere (…). The distinction between Muslim immigration to Finland and many other European nations, as outlined at the beginning of this chapter, is thus crucial when examining anti-Muslim racism and how Muslims in Finland are racialized. At the same time, any discussion on a culturally marked "Islam" such as "Tatar Islam," "Somali Islam," "Arab Islam," or even "convert Islam" should be avoided being taken for granted. Instead, Muslim identity should be considered a sociological category that leaves space for self-definition and the intersection of identity markers (Meer, 2012, pp. 189–190).

Hence, from the critical perspective of my thesis, I want to emphasize that while we as researchers reproduce claims related to the racialization of any person according to what is generally perceived to "look like Muslim," it should be kept in mind that anti-Muslim racism operates differently across geographies. Furthermore, the culturalization of Muslims is also part of the racialization process as it mirrors the attitudes of each society towards how Muslimness is defined by belonging to a group designated as Others. In the British context, Muslims are culturalized according to what is perceived to be determinative of "Muslimness," e.g., having a South Asian heritage. In the Finnish context, the culturalization does not follow the same patterns. For instance, in the post-second world war years, there was no systematic work-based immigration to Finland as was the case, for example, in Germany, where the settling of Turkish guest workers and their descendants has caused Islam to be associated with "being Turkish" (Özyürek, 2015).

In the UK, again, the country's colonial history in South Asia and the subsequent post-colonial immigration of Muslims from countries such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India has led to the racialization of Islam and Muslims as predominantly Asian and "brown" (Amer, 2020; Moosavi, 2015). Thus, research has shown that manifestations of anti-Muslim racism vary depending on the particularities of the given society in which it is analyzed (Taras, 2012).[19] Therefore, as a discourse and ideology, Islamophobia shapes the political, cultural, religious, and societal perceptions of Muslims and Islam but is also conditioned by them (Sayyid, 2014a). Except for one woman who had specifically been referred to as a "f*cking Somali" by a passerby, my interlocutors' experiences with racialization are typically not marked by the association of Islam to any specific ethnic background, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters.

As I have so far established, the concept of anti-Muslim racism is of relevance as an analytical tool in the context of this Ph.D. thesis which focuses on white Muslim converts' experiences of hostility, violence, and discrimination based on their religious identity. Like in other European contexts shown by research on Germany, France, the Netherlands, the UK, and Sweden, anti-Muslim racism instrumentalizes as a form of cultural racism the religious identity of the converts to racialize and exclude them from the in-group of "Finns." However, I want to expand a little bit more on the link between new racism, culture, space, and the danger that follows from "abolishing frontiers," as illustrated in the above definition by Etienne Balibar. With the following discussion, I aim to provide more ground for my forthcoming argument on why the racialization of Muslim converts is ultimately linked to Finland's broader history of racialization, which I discuss in chapter five.

Anti-Muslim racism targets the very presence of Islam and Muslims and their practices in European societies. It is motivated by nativist thinking and aims to categorize people to create boundaries of in- and out-groups within these societies. As part of anti-Muslim racism, racialization creates an image of a "racial Muslim Other." Within this "racial Muslim Other" category, Muslim converts are also included. Theorists Miles

[19] See also the annual comprehensive country reports of the European Islamophobia Report, https://islamophobiareport.com/en/ (last accessed 5.11.2022)

and Brown (2003, p. 102) have defined racialization as a "(…) dialectical process by which meaning is attributed to particular biological features of human beings, as a result of which individuals may be assigned to a general category of persons that reproduces itself biologically". However, within anti-Muslim racism, this "biological" feature is translated to "Muslimness," as explained above relating to the concept of an "ethnoreligious" group (Meer & Modood, 2010, p. 77). A person's factual or perceived "Muslimness" is then treated as an inherent determinator of their behavior, cognition, and lifestyle.

Anti-Muslim racism attacks Muslims as part of the physiology of the European landscape that has developed in response to long-achieved globalization and relatively open borders (Allievi 2012). From a post-colonial perspective to the study of Islamophobia (Hafez, 2018), anti-Muslim racism and the racialization of Muslim bodies are seen as a legacy and continuum of Orientalism (Green 2015; Allen 2010; Jackson 2021; Thobani 2022). Following Edward Said's definition, I understand Orientalism as having emerged as a constitutive aspect of Western colonialism and having formed a distinctive style of thought, discourse, and a corporate institution for dealing with "the Orient" (Said, 1979). However, in difference to Orientalism, whose "target" were people in faraway lands, Islamophobia in the 21st century Europe is used as an instrument to create "Others" from within the society. Hence, the concept of *domophilia* coined by Irfan Ahmad (Ahmad, 2013) demonstrates that while prejudice and hostility towards Muslims predate nationalism, they have a particular meaning in contemporary European nation-states. Thus, Irfan Ahmad (2013, pp. 249–250) defines *domophilia* as a specific discourse on the integration of foreigners – or perceived foreigners – such as Muslims; "The discourse of integration (…) derive [its] power and nourishment from the a priori home which Muslims are invited to/ordered to get integrated into. And this home/nation is enacted, felt, and performed, for instance, in the media, with the reigning binaries of insider/outsider, autochthonous/immigrants, and internal/external." However, an "outsider" must be imagined while defining the geographic and cultural bounds of what is meant by "home" in domophilic discourse. This role of an "outsider" in contemporary Finland and elsewhere in Europe has been imposed on Muslims.

While Muslims and Islam are claimed to be incompatible with European societies, they are still asked to integrate and "change themselves." The assertion that Muslims would never be able to transcend their purported intrinsic difference, regardless of what they achieve or become, has been demonstrated to be symptomatic of anti-Muslim racist speech. Even when Muslims attempt to counter anti-Muslim racism, for instance, by providing counter-narratives to stereotypes or being active in civic participation, these efforts are bunked by allegations that although Muslims might seem "normal" and "peace-loving people," it is a deception to conceal their true violent nature and hate against "the West" (Shooman, 2016). As I have discussed previously in this chapter and more in detail in chapter six, the creation of the "good Muslim" and the "bad Muslim" binary takes place in this context. Some Muslims respond to hostility, violence, and discrimination by opting to stop "looking like a Muslim" (Awan & Zempi, 2020), for this is to be considered an equivalent of passing for "white" (Meer & Modood, 2010, p. 71). In chapter seven, I give examples of how these responses to anti-Muslim racism intersect with its gendered forms and produce strategies employed by Finnish Muslim converts as they struggle for recognition in Finnish society.

It can be thus concluded that anti-Muslim racism and the racialization of Muslim identity impose limitations on the identities of Finnish Muslim converts. Despite my preference against the prejudice-based approach to studying Islamophobia/anti-Muslim racism, I see the construction of an allegedly implacable enemy as relevant in understanding the racialization of Muslim converts in the Finnish context. While converts have freely chosen Islam as their religious affiliation and actively live out the identity buried within, the social critique derived from this Ph.D. thesis emphasizes how society sees this identity and acts on that perception. Bravo Lopez has argued (2011, p. 569): "It is the perception of Islam as a threat that engenders the racialization of the Islamic identity. It is the need to identify the treat, to identity the Islam incarnate in Muslims, that causes the Islamic identity to be transformed into an involuntary identity." Followingly, it can be said that by being Muslims and having a lifestyle that is viewed as incompatible within the "home," Muslim converts are made to be a part of the "threat."

Based on the above, I agree with Allen's (2010, p. 154) definition and conclude that Anti-Muslim racism is thus ultimately about "(…) inclusion and exclusion, specifying who and what may legitimately belong to a particular national, or other community as well as determining what that community's norms were (…). As I will focus in this Ph.D. thesis on Finnish Muslim converts' experiences of how they are otherized in racial and cultural terms, I will, in the next chapter, contribute to the conversation by showing how in Finnish history, other minorities were racialized and consequently defined as not legitimately belonging to the Finnish community. Hence, anti-Muslim racism, as Finnish Muslim converts experience it, is yet another manifestation of cultural racism in Finland.

CHAPTER V

HOMOGENIZING FINLAND – RACE AND CULTURE

5.1 Introduction

It has been about 17 years since my conversion to Islam, and I have become touchy about questions that probe my "Finnishness" in connection with my religious identity. Initially, it did not bother me as much; I suppose there was even a degree of excitement for the novelty of "outing" myself as a Muslim convert, which encouraged me to repeatedly discuss my background with absolute strangers. However, today I know that these kinds of questions, even though on the one hand they might be expressions of genuine interest in my person, are, on the other hand, rooted in precommitments about *who* is considered *Finnish*. With my Finnishness having been contested from time to time, in its most radical forms as online hate speech and smear campaigns, I have asked myself, what exactly makes up this idea of *Finnishness,* and it excludes the Muslim identity? This happens especially in contexts where I must justify how Muslimness and Finnishness can go hand in hand. To be a *Finn* – apart from possessing a Finnish passport – is an identification marker individuals use to describe their cultural and national background. Hence, I always introduce myself as a *Finnish* Muslim convert. *Finnishness,* I maintain, must be constructed by each person claiming it and performed and reproduced as we talk about it and embody it. The concept of *Finnishness* as such is then by no means static; it must be open to change, and it must be negotiable. Me being both Muslim *and* a Finn is not an oxymoron.

In the last chapter, I discussed the relevance of anti-Muslim racism as cultural racism for investigating Finnish Muslim converts' experiences of hostility, violence, and discrimination targeting their religious identity. Having established that racialization is tightly linked to anti-Muslim racism, I will show how Finnishness has been constructed to mean both *whiteness* and *Whiteness*. As discussed in chapter three, I understand the latter as social and cultural capital embedded within the former. I will start by discussing how whiteness was constructed as part and parcel of the European

identity and connected to Christianity. I will then move to the shift from associating race with merely a biological category to associating it with culture, which I already discussed in the previous chapter. This shift is an underpinning development for anti-Muslim racism to emerge as cultural racism in the Finnish context. Hence this chapter contributes to setting the historical and contemporary basis regarding the question of how on the one hand, in Finland, Finnishness and whiteness/Whiteness are intertwined and constructed as normative factors of belonging and how, on the other hand, they are instrumentalized in modern forms of anti-Muslim racism to otherize Finnish Muslim converts. To disclose the historical continuity of seeking to maintain a culturally and ethnically homogenous nation, I will use as an example the racialization of the ethnic minorities Sámi and the Roma as a product of "nation-making" in Finland. Lastly, I will problematize contemporary manifestations of racial exceptionalism and strive to maintain an image of ethno-racial homogeneity amongst the wider public.

5.2. The White Origins of Christianity or the Christian Origins of Whiteness?

While I get upset about other people's stereotyped perceptions of Finnishness and my belonging to the Finnish nation, I am conscious of the ignorance in which I as well lived for much too long until my conversion changed my perspective of things. The fact is, growing up and quite well into my late teens, my social circle was not ethnically diverse, and even my small hometown barely had people of color as residents; my school had no students from ethnic minorities, nor did I have any personal contact with any ethnic minority groups. Because of this social reality and the dominant White cultural representation of the Finnish society where I lived for a long time, I was never physically confronted with racism or oppression in my social environment. This relates to how Whiteness as a raciality functions like an "invisible horizon" (Tyrer, 2013, p. 44). My Whiteness granted me a by-default non-marked, neutral position I had in Finnish society before my conversion.

Until my 20s, when I converted to Islam, I never had to question the racial privilege that surrounded my life. I had been profiting from my "invisible" position in the societal hierarchy without ever becoming aware of how Whiteness is a "structural position of advantage and privilege" (Krivonos, 2020, p. 399). I had, for instance,

never had to be followed by a security guard in a supermarket, only because of my ethnic background, unlike my fellow Roma citizens who, as a group, have been essentialized as untrustworthy and prone to stealing (Anttonen, 2008). However, I was "randomly selected" several times for a security search at the airports since I converted to Islam and started wearing the headscarf. Thus, my conversion to Islam was the first time my Finnishness and Whiteness became questioned. It showed me how my identity had been, as Dyer (2017, p. 2) would call it, "non-raced."

In this context, the trouble with Islam is connected to the collective narrative about Finns, as with many other European societies, about their nation being marked by a white Christian heritage, as I will show later in the chapter. In this sense, Islam and the racialized Muslim identity contrast this collective narrative and make the Finnish identity exclusive regarding religious affiliation. However, within this imagery, the connection of whiteness to Christian identity (Bonnett, 1998) was never given, but it was constructed by instrumentalizing religion. Christian institutions and clerics have played a significant role in this historical manufacturing of whiteness as a defining character of Christian identities and, consequently, as the superior race.

One of the earliest references to the construction of juxtaposed human races within the Christian tradition has been traced back by researchers to the Biblical passage of Genesis 9:18-27[20], which tells the story of how Prophet Noah's son Ham found his

[20] "18 The sons of Noah who came out of the ark were Shem, Ham, and Japheth. (Ham was the father of Canaan.) 19 These were the three sons of Noah, and from them came the people who were scattered over the whole earth.
20 Noah, a man of the soil, proceeded to plant a vineyard. 21 When he drank some of its wine, he became drunk and lay uncovered inside his tent. 22 Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father naked and told his two brothers outside. 23 But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father's naked body. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father naked.
24 When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, 25 he said, "Cursed be Canaan!
The lowest of slaves
will he be to his brothers."
26 He also said,
"Praise be to the LORD, the God of Shem!
May Canaan be the slave of Shem.
27 May God extend Japheth's territory;
may Japheth live in the tents of Shem,
and may Canaan be the slave of Japheth."
https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis%209&version=KJV (last accessed 8.11.2022)

father drunk and naked in his tent. While Ham left the tent without doing anything, his brothers came and covered their father's naked body and avoided looking at it. Following the incident, Noah cursed Ham's son Canaan to be a slave to his brothers and uncles, i.e., "his brethren." While the above passage lacks racial reference, the curse of Noah has been interpreted to partly include Ham's skin turning black (Sollors 1999). Consequently, Canaan's curse has been instrumentalized to justify the Transatlantic slave trade (Park, 2021). Jun et al. (2018, pp. 22–23) have importantly noted that while the passage has been used to justify racially based domination in the 7th century, the exegeses changed during the centuries and were politically instrumentalized. The justification of the slave trade from the 17th century onwards has thus, according to the authors, only been possible because "Ham" had been etymologically misread to refer to "dark" or "black." The new reading of the passage from the 17th century onwards disregarded Canaan while locating his father, Ham, as the receiver of the curse.

Linking Christianity to the roots of racism and white supremacy begs the question of how that might be possible since Jesus, as the incarnation of God, was not a "white" (Aryan) person. The answer to this can be found in Christian color symbolism, which alongside biased Biblical exegeses, is well known to have contributed to the construction of the white race as superior and connected to the Christian identity. In this regard, Roger Bastide (1967, p. 315) has problematized the conscious presentation of Jesus in Western paintings having blonde hair and blue eyes, as what he calls the "Aryanization of Christ." Again, political interests were a significant catalyst for removing the image of Jesus away from anything related to an inferior race. Bastide (1967, pp. 315–316) states that the presentation of Jesus as a white Aryan man started when Christianity spread to Africa. Hence, I argue that this artistic practice can also be regarded, similarly to the interpretations of the Genesis passage above, as an instrumentalization of religion for consciously asserting the dominance of one group over another.

The social construction of the racial hierarchy based on Christian imagery and scriptures during pre-modern times is not equivalent to racism and, followingly, the

concept of "race" as we know it in the 21st century. The above Biblical passage is an excellent example of how political and societal circumstances across time and space have been a catalyst for justifying (racial) oppression based on religion. It should thus find more critical consideration in discussions on world history and civilizational developments from a glocal perspective. For instance, the above-explained "religious roots" of white supremacy and today's instrumentalization of religion for racial hatred in Christian Zionism with the Arab Muslim as the enemy (Spector, 2009) show how racism is not a modern ideology. Instead, while there is a historical continuum of asserting one group's power over the other for political purposes, its manifestations and rationalization have changed over time and space.

For the current discussion of white Finnish Muslim converts' experiences of anti-Muslim racism and the racialization they face, it is necessary to connect the dots between the historical racism based on *lineage* and racism and how we understand it today as *cultural*. Thus, the reference to the story of Ham and Canaan and the juxtaposition of the two "bloodlines" finds significance, especially within interpretations that claim a moral lineage being traceable to this constructed whiteness and non-whiteness (Bonnett, 1998, p. 1038). Through constructing Jews and Muslims as the Other during the Middle Ages, Christianity has demonstrated close links with the production and reproduction of "race" as a biological and cultural category. This was institutionally supported and carried by the Church, which is exemplified in the so-called *Adversus Judaeos* literature written by the Church Fathers (Hedges, 2021, pp. 53–56) as well as in the creation of "Muslim monsters" by Christian clerics in the medieval epistemology (Arjana, 2015, pp. 24–41).

The racialization of Christian identity in the European context as white is also exemplified in how converts to Christianity were treated differently during the centuries. As explained in chapter four, during the Reconquista, the conversions by Jews and Muslims were considered only formal by the ruling Spaniards, and the dominant Christian population viewed the converts as still having impure blood (Hedges, 2021, pp. 85–87). However, Arjana has argued that during the 14th century, Muslim converts to Christianity were described as having changed their skin color from dark to white (2015, p. 29). This is connected to the story of Noah's curse and its exegeses, as black skin was considered a punishment of God (Bastide, 1967, p. 314)

and associated with sin and evil, resulting in white skin being normative and privileged (Arjana, 2015, p. 28). Hence, the conversion to Christianity by the previously "pagan" Muslim Saracens was seen as a "purification" of their blood, and they would be "whitened." In this case, they were deracialized.

The bloodline reference started to give way to the racist hierarchization of people according to the moral characters attributed to them due to their "biological race," such as by the Swedish botanist and zoologist Carl von Linnaeus, whose taxonomy of races I will discuss more in detail below. From the 19th century onwards, as Bastide (1967, p. 325) argues, the symbolism of juxtaposition between white and black was secularized for political means and came to describe "conflicting mentalities." This explanation can be seen as an early theorization of cultural racism, which translates to the cultural juxtaposition of Muslims, as racialized Others, with that of the Christian identity. As Bonnett (1998, p. 1038) has argued, this resulted in Christianity giving "moral, cultural, and territorial content to whiteness," which I see as significant for the construction of minorities, in particular Muslims, as incompatible with what Europe ontologically presents. Thus, whiteness and Christian identity were seen as the epitome of morality, purity, and civilization. They were naturalized and entrusted with the essence of each European nation, while the people were required to embody these virtues (Bonnett, 1998, pp. 1043–1044). This helps us understand how modern nation-states' emergence in the 19th century overlaps with what Bastide (1967, p. 325) explained as the emergence of cultural racism putting the (white) Christian identity on a pedestal of civilization.

It is important to note that even though the "monster-making" of medieval times meant denigrating the Muslim character (Arjana, 2015), this was different from what developed as cultural racism and manifests itself among others today as anti-Muslim racism. Within the racialization of the Other, the white Christianness of the identity is claimed to embody the highest morale. At the same time, non-Christians are ontologically seen as different and inferior. Conversely, racializing Muslim identity means seeing Muslims as moral defects due to their "Muslimness." As discussed in the previous chapter, the nation-making of Europe and European nations was done by constructing them as culturally bound "homes" (*domophilia*). This also impacted how race and culture were instrumentalized in creating a White Finnish nation while ethnic

(and religious) minorities became the target of assimilationist measures and cultural racism. I will discuss this impact in more detail in the next section.

5.3. The Racialization of Mınorities in the Finnish History

5.3.1 Scientific Underpinnings

As I established in the previous section, long before science took an interest in categorizing humans into races, empires, and elites constructed the idea of a superior (European) whiteness and used Christian motifs and scriptures in creating Others against whom oppression and violence were justified. Yet, when we think of racism that draws on physiology and justifies the oppression of one group by another based on an alleged superiority of white people to other "races," we generally attribute the roots of such ideology to Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution. One does not need to delve far into his writings, as the title of his seminal work "On the Origin of the Species by Means of Natural Selection or the Preservation of the Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life" already discloses that not all races are seen equal (Jeynes, 2011, p. 536).

But, before Darwin, it was the Swedish botanist and zoologist Carl von Linnaeus who published already in the 18th century in his *Systema Naturae* four categories of the human species: the white *Europaeus* (albesc.), the red *Americanus* (rubesc.), the dark *Asiaticus* (fuscus), and the black *Afer* (nigr.). While Linnaeus did not list any hierarchization within this tetrad, the fact that he attributed not only physical but also moral and social characteristics to each of the four categories can be seen as an underpinning of scientific racism and how "modern race" was invented (Hoquet, 2014, pp. 24–30). This invention is linked to the emergence of cultural racism as a tool of dominance. The emergence of cultural racism itself, as explained in the previous section, is an ideological shift from the 19th century onward during the formation of modern nation-states that gave birth to the racialization of minorities in the Finnish context. Nevertheless, even within this process, justifications for repressive governance measures draw on biological and cultural aspects, as shown here by the example of Sámi and the Roma.

Finland has been framed as an ethnically homogenous and small country in national and international narratives. While Finland has been a colony of Sweden and the Russian Empire, this history of oppression has led to the impression that Finland could have never been the oppressor. It is this "white-washed" perception of the country's history that shadows the widespread consideration of not only minority histories but also the role that global colonialism has played in the "making of" the Finnish state and nation (Keskinen, 2021). The dominant discourse focuses on the colonial overseas endeavors of Western European countries. Still, the history of Finland is not that innocent. As research has shown, there is no doubt about the colonization of the indigenous Sámi people, repressive policies towards the Roma community as well as "colonial complicity," i.e., how Finland has profited from the economic, cultural, and political relations produced during European colonialism (Keskinen et al., 2019; Vuorela, 2009). For instance, in the 17th and 18th centuries, Finnish enterprises and Finns participated and befitted from colonialism in North America, the Caribbean, and Africa while being part of the Swedish kingdom until 1809 (Keskinen, 2019).

Starting with the Linnaean taxonomy of races, the 18th century was a transforming time of categorizing peoples into racial hierarchies. Yet, the Finns would not be on the same footing as other Nordic nations. Within this hierarchization, Mongols became the lower race compared to the "Caucasian, Aryan" peoples, i.e., the European race. Finns, being Uralic people, were put in the Mongol category by drawing, amongst others, on the argument of physical features. Linguistically, Finns were anyway already "located" in Asia, with Finnish being a Finno-Ugric language of the Uralic language family and thus unrelated to the Indo-European languages, but with the race hierarchy, Finns were now "located in Asia" also physically (Kemiläinen, 1998; Ruuska, 2002, p. 67). Out of all Nordic peoples, Linneaus did not include the Finns in the same group as Swedes, Norwegians, Danes, and the Icelandic, who linguistically and physically belonged to the Germanic branch of Indo-European. Instead, he considered the Finns, with Tatars, Sámi, and Roma in his racial hierarchy, inferior to the other Nordic groups. Likened to Mongolians, Finns were hence classified as non-White, i.e., the "Yellow/Asian" race.

As a reaction and a protest to this classification, Finnish scholars produced counterarguments in the 19th and even the 20th century to show that Finns were not

of the Mongolian race by conducting scientific measurements of over 100 000 Finnish men (Ruuska, 2002, pp. 61–71). Similarly, an example of a visual counter-narrative to the categorization of Finns as Mongols was the figure "Maiden of Finland," a cultural product created as the ultimate symbol of Finnish Whiteness/white Finnish femineity as a response. In contrast, white and blonde women were seen to represent the Scandinavian and Germanic races (Rantala, 2014). Scientific developments supported this race-ing project while race taxonomies evolved during these centuries. Scientists outside of Finland added a new category of "white races," the East Baltic race, and thus Finns gradually "became White." Even if the focus of the Finnish scientists was always on especially criticizing the Mongol theory, the counterarguments and empiric studies in their support always attempted to "whitewash" the Finnish race and included efforts to prove the superiority of Finns compared to the Sámi peoples (Keskinen, 2019, pp. 171–174). It was within this struggle of the Finns to assert their whiteness and to define how that whiteness would give content to Finnishness that the racialization of the Sámi, and the Roma, would evolve from biological difference to cultural Otherness. I see this point in history as the basis for any future racialization of minorities in the Finnish context, particularly for the manifestations of anti-Muslim racism as cultural racism.

During the end of the 19th and early 20th centuries, developments in linguistic knowledge about the Sámi language brought forth the realization that Finnish and the Sámi were related as part of the Uralic languages whose origins are in Asia. Thus, biological race was the only way to mark a difference between the two groups and push the global acceptance of Finns as part of the white races of Europe. As the racially lower category, the Sámi were classified as a threat to the majority society and its development. In the 20th century, this resulted, among other things, in interventions by educational institutions in Sámi pupils' and their families' diets and physical exercises for the Sámi "to develop in the direction needed favorable according to Finnish healthcare and anthropological knowledge" (Pyykkönen, 2015, pp. 51–52). It should be noted, however, that in the first half of the 20th century, questions of racial hygiene and eugenics further influenced the racial improvement of the Finns, even amongst the majority of society. Hietala (2005) has proved how government policies were set to justify forced sterilization of people diagnosed with "hereditary characteristics" such

as alcoholism, mental health issues, or diseases such as epilepsy. The compulsory sterilization law was only nullified in 1970.

However, regarding racial hygiene and government measures towards the Sámi people, these were mixed with cultural-nationalist ideas, as "(…) to be a strong nation-state Finnish society had to become culturally and linguistically homogeneous. Other peoples inhabiting the same territory as Finns, or who were part of the same 'tree of cultures and languages' were differentiated from the Finns by their cultural features revealing their stage of civilization" (Pyykkönen, 2015, p. 49). Even though the discourse on Sámi was first motivated by physiological aspects of "race," it later turned into cultural racism. Importantly, as with anti-Muslim racism, the claim of inferiority drew on the essentialization of the Sámi as a racial group whose moral character was based on belonging to the ethnolinguistic minority group of Sámi. Such *domophilic* characteristics of the Finnish nation-making are still relevant today, especially regarding the anti-immigration debates and the othering of Muslims. At the same time, Islam and the Muslim identity are seen as incompatible with Finland's culture and values as a nation should present.

5.3.2 Cultural Underpinnings

The above-explained construction of Finnishness with its racial components and the struggle to be included in the white-coded map of Europe also involved a cultural struggle. Ethnic minorities were placed in the margins of society and thus not only beyond whiteness but also outside of Whiteness. The latter was determined by social and cultural capital and formed the right to *belong*. Although The Sámi and the Roma had been living for centuries in what geographically was understood as "Finland," they were not considered "Finnish." While in the biological racial construction of Finnishess, the Sámi were the "lower race" against whom the Finns wanted to depict themselves as white Europeans, the Sámi and the Roma were additionally in the 19th and 20th centuries "ethno-culturalized" (Pyykkönen, 2015), i.e., problematized in economic, social, cultural, and security-related terms. Thus, the racism and discrimination faced by the Sámi and the Roma can be seen as part of forming a cultural-racial category, "Finn" as white-Christian.

The intellectually inspired Fennoman movement was, in the 19th century, one of the main drivers in the "making of" the Finnish nation in which the idea of an *ethnos*, instead of a *demos*, was prevalent. The "ethno-culturalization" of the Sámi and the Roma of the time can be seen as an equivalent to how cultural racism has been defined (Meer & Modood, 2010, p. 78) in the context of anti-Muslim racism:

> While biological racism is the antipathy, exclusion, and unequal treatment of people on the basis of their physical appearance or other imputed physical differences (...) cultural racism builds on biological racism a further discourse which evokes cultural differences from (...) a 'civilized' norm to vilify, marginalize or demand cultural assimilation from [otherized] groups."

Notions of race and culture were now intertwined in the racialization of the Sámi and the Roma. The cultural racism followingly meant that their cultural practices were seen as inherent group traits and a threat to Finland's civilization process. The Fennomans, characteristic of many other nationalist movements across Europe, aimed at promoting the historicity and excellence of the Finnish national culture. The Finnish culture was only constructed as "normal" and "original Finnish" by comparison with other cultures that were hierarchically categorized as inferior and abnormal (Pyykkönen, 2015, p. 43). Puuronen (2011, p. 69) has also noted that a shared heritage was, for the Fennomans, a necessary basis of a nation. Hence, while the Fennoman narrative favored the white Christian majority as culturally superior to other groups, this was strongly reflected in the minority governance measures that aimed to assimilate the minorities and "normalize" them culturally (Pyykkönen, 2015, p. 44). This meant, for instance, forced settlement practices by the government, which went hand in hand with colonizing the Sápmi[21] lands. These measures resulted in restrictions on the Sámi people's traditional livelihood practices, i.e., reindeer herding and fishing, which had been primarily connected to their nomadic lifestyle (Keskinen, 2021, p. 80; Lehtola, 2015, p. 25; Puuronen, 2011, pp. 111–119).

Essentialization regarding Roma produced negative stereotypes that formed the basis for stigmatizing Roma and repressive policy measures. Policy recommendations on forced settlement and forced Christianization were set to practice with the justification

[21] For the readers unfamiliar with the Sámi peoples, I would like to note that the word "Sámi" only refers to the peoples but the word "Sápmi" refers to the Arctic region in which the Sámi peoples traditionally have lived.

that the Roma could be turned into "useful workers, docile and virtuous members of the society" (Pyykkönen, 2015, p. 43). The non-Christian community Roma was considered a religious problem and hence forcibly Christianized. They were, however, also considered an economic problem and forcibly settled like the Sámi. Because of the ethnocultural turn in minority governance, the Roma were finally also considered as a cultural problem, which resulted in the forced education of Roma children "for their own sake" so far that they would become alienated from their native cultural practices (Pyykkönen, 2015, pp. 46–47).

The so-called "Gypsy Committee," established at the end of the 19th century, played a significant role as an institution within this "civilizing mission" of the Finnish Roma population. The committee justified governance policies by a "necessity" of protecting the non-Roma population from the dangers allegedly posed by the Roma culture that could corrupt and endanger the decency of the majority society (Pyykkönen, 2015, p. 48). The committee produced policy recommendations based on culturally racist descriptions of the Roma, for instance, as follows:

> The lust for thieving is inborn, which exists already in the Gypsy child as a disposition. One can hardly say that Gypsies have become thieves through the force of conditions, temptation, or example. This characteristic is very much deeper in them; it has run in them from generation to generation and developed further. This lust can be controlled and removed through rigorous education, but it can hardly ever be eradicated completely.[22]

The legacy of this historical racialization manifests itself, for instance, in far-rooted stereotypes and anti-Gypsyism that still hold today in the minds of the majority society. After the end of the second world war, the Roma population was still subjected to oppressive politics, including putting Roma minors in children's homes and controlling Roma families' lives through social services (Keskinen, 2021, p. 82). Similar to how the Roma are seen through the negative stereotypes related to their ethnic background, Finnish Muslim converts face stereotypes based on what Mamdani (2004) has coined "culture talk." "Culture talk" means thinking and speaking about an individual or a group of people whose characteristics and features are attributed to only one aspect of their identity. For instance, Finnish Roma entrepreneurs face discrimination and prejudice based on allegedly not being trustworthy as business

[22] "Committee for studying the Gypsy issue of Finland" As cited in (Pyykkönen, 2015, p. 48).

partners, customer service providers, or even securing bank loans (Anttonen, 2008). Within the framing of culture talk as a legacy of the "Gypsy Committee," the ethnicity of the Roma is still essentialized today. In comparison, Muslims' religious identity is said to define their behavior. At the same time, this denies any other source of agency they might have, which other researchers have also called "religionization" (Gholami, 2021; Sakaranaho, 2008). I will discuss examples of this in more detail in chapters six and seven.

Today, the Finnish notions of national identity and belonging are exclusive and reflect a shared understanding of Finnishness based on whiteness and having one's roots in Finland. This is also reflected in the term *kantasuomalainen*, which describes the white majority population. Translated to English, the first part of the compound *kanta-* means "stem," from which follows that any *kantasuomalainen* individual would be someone who "stems" from Finland, i.e., who does not have any migratory background.[23] The word is widely used when describing white Finns and is often juxtaposed with POC, regardless of whether they would identify as Finnish for being born and raised in Finland. While the racial politics of the late 19th and early 20th centuries targeted the ethnic minorities to assimilate them, the imagery of Finland as a nation consisting of *kantasuomalainen* people was constructed in the cultural arena. Importantly, this knowledge production would imprint the broader public's mindset and collective memory for future generations.

The Finnish writer Zacharias Topelius published in 1875 the original Swedish version of his book "The Book of Our Land," consisting of his observations about the Finnish culture, history, and practices as well as "ethnographic" accounts of different population groups residing in the country. The Finnish translation appeared only a year later and was intended as a school textbook. In the seventh chapter of his book, Topelius describes Finland as follows:

[23] The popular meaning of the word has however been contested. For instance, an article on the website of the Institute for the Languages of Finland that is responsible for research and language planning of both Finnish and Swedish, argues that strictly speaking all Finnish native speakers would have to consider themselves as descendants of immigrants as the ancestors who spoke Proto-Finnic immigrated to the country from elsewhere while the indigenous people Sámi were already living there https://www.kotus.fi/nyt/kotus-blogi/blogiarkisto/lasse_koskela/me_ollaan_maahanmuuttajia_kaikki....6548.blog (last accessed 12.11.2022)

> This country is my homeland. (...) All its sons and daughters form *a people*, whatever language they speak. (...) They have the same Christian faith, the same teaching, the same rights, the same obligations, the same benefit, the same harm, the same freedom, the same love, and the same hope. (...) In this way, all great and mighty nations have been raised by several peoples who, from the beginning, were strangers to each other. The common homeland and the common destinies of long times have made them one. (SKS & SLS, 2018)

Like the Fennomans, also Topelius strove to construct an *ethnos* of Finns that is not only Christian but also unified by commonalities that exclude minority identities based on alternative worldviews. Bauman (1999, p. 31) has explained that nation-making in European countries necessitated overcoming ethnic boundaries and the construction of one super ethnos. Hence, today each country has an imagined super-ethnos, such as "the Germans," "the French," etc. This meant that only certain ethnic groups were included in the super ethnos while others were excluded and officially considered "minorities." Hence, in the above quote, Topelius co-produces the marginalization of the Sámi that already was produced in racial terms. He describes them as one of the kindred nations to the Finns, alongside other smaller peoples who live "poor and half-wild" within the territory of the Russian Empire. As Puuronen notes (2011, p. 126), the Sámi who lived in the northern periphery of the country were also left at the margins of nation-making, which I see manifested in Topelius' writings. Followingly, when Topelius, in a later chapter, describes the diverse population groups that constitute "Finns," neither Sámi nor the Roma is mentioned.

It is precisely Topelius' point about Finns being strangers to each other but still sensing a communion, a sense of belonging which Benedict Anderson underlines in his seminal work on how nations have been formed as imagined communities (Anderson, 2006, p. 6). Interestingly, Topelius, as a member of the Swedish-speaking group in Finland, calls for this unity despite different mother tongues (Finnish vs. Swedish). Tervonen (2014, p. 139) has, in this regard, importantly pointed out that Topelius' approach differed from that of the Finnish-speaking Fennomans, who defined "Finnishness" in a more exclusive manner, emphasizing not only a common ancestry but also a common language. Today, Topelius is still considered a significant contributor to the formation of Finnish culture. Thus, Topelius' work should be considered critically in shaping the imagery of the Finns as an ethnos, which has lasted until today. In the next section, I will discuss how this perpetual normativity of Finnishness as white is manifested in society today.

5.4. Contemporary Normativity of Finnish Whiteness

The imagery of the mythical "ethnically homogenous Finland," whose racist roots date back to the 19th century, started to crumble only from the 1990s onwards when international migration diversified Finland's demographics (Puuronen, 2011, p. 68). Interestingly, according to the Multiculturalism Policy Index, Finland has expanded its official recognition of multiculturalism within the last 40 years from the very bottom of the scale to the high end with a "strong" overall score. In comparison, Australia and Canada have both, during the same period, remained at the higher end of the scale.[24] However, despite such statistics, there is still much work to do to recognize the challenges faced by different minority groups officially. On the one hand, the Finnish Sámi population is still fighting for their linguistic and cultural rights, regardless of agreements between the Finnish Government and the Sámi Parliament (Markelin, 2017). Finland has also yet to ratify the Indigenous and Tribal People Convention ILO 169, which would hold the Government accountable for the Sámi people's rights in Finland.[25] While other Nordic countries had already initiated reconciliation measures with their respective Sámi communities from the 1990s, the Finnish state has been paying no heed to its responsibilitiesor a long time (Lehtola, 2015, p. 22). Only in 2017, the state initiated the process for establishing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Concerning the Sámi People, and in 2021 this commission was finally appointed under the Government program of Prime Minister Sanna Marin.[26] The fact that there has historically not been much official recognition of the trajectory of racism and oppression that national minorities, the Sámi People and the Roma, have suffered shows that the overall readiness to take responsibility for creating racist structures is not high.

[24] https://www.queensu.ca/mcp/ (last accessed 18.4.2022)
[25] https://www.saamicouncil.net/news-archive/finland-must-repair-the-human-rights-violations-and-ratify-ilo-169-convention?rq=Finland (last accessed 13.12.2021)
[26] https://yle.fi/news/3-12167765 (last accessed 7.12.2021). See also the official website of the Prime Minister's Office https://vnk.fi/en/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-concerning-the-sami-people (last accessed 7.12.2021) and the official website of the Sami Parliament of Finland (available in Finnish and Sámi language) https://www.samediggi.fi/saamelaisten-totuus-ja-sovintokomissio/ (last accessed 7.12.2021) for more information on the commission's mandate and work progress.

On the other hand, the Finnish government published the 2021 policy document "An Equal Finland: Government Action Plan for Combating Racism and Promoting Good Relations between Population Groups" (further, "Action Plan"). While the Action Plan was a novel and fundamental approach to tackling racism in Finnish society, the challenges regarding structural discrimination, hate speech, violence, and ethnic profiling of the Muslim communities in Finland, have not been adequately considered in its contents. For instance, the Action Plan mentions in its premise the guide on good practices in anti-racism programs compiled by the European Network Against Racism (ENAR) and its suggestion to include detailed definitions of concepts and an analysis of different forms of racism such as Afrophobia, Islamophobia, antisemitism, etc. However, no definition of Islamophobia has been included in the document. While Islamophobia has been identified in the Action Plan as *a form* of racism, it fails to consider Islamophobia in its structural aspects. One example would be ethnic profiling experienced by Muslims and individuals perceived as Muslims. According to Himanen and Creutz (2022),[27] ethnic profiling has increased feelings of insecurity and a lack of trust in authorities within the Muslim community. Instead, the action plan presents "Islamophobia" as merely an issue relating to online hate speech. It is thus included only in the Action Plan's Objective Nr. 4 under "Raising awareness of racism and its different forms" within the measure to "Promote non-discrimination in law enforcement and reinforce the law enforcement authorities' ability to identify and clamp down on hate crime." Moreover, the Action Plan did not include any voices from the Muslim community, while other minority groups, such as the Roma and the Sámi, have been rightfully considered.

In 2018 the European Fundamental Rights Agency published a report titled "Being Black in Europe," which showcased Finland as the most racist European country (FRA, 2018). Indeed, the lay discourse on multiculturalism is marked by the polarization of the majority society against racialized minorities. Herein, the majority sets the rules of a "good life," and immigration is seen as a cultural threat (Nortio, Renvik and Jasinskaja-Lahti 2020). This is evident in the fact that from the 2011 parliamentary elections onwards, Finland has experienced a rise in explicitly anti-

[27] It should be noted that while the article was published after the action plan, the empirical research which was the basis of the article, drew on two projects that were both conducted between 2015 and 2018, with project reports having been published in 2015 and in 2018.

immigration discourse and populist and nationalist politics. The True Finns Party, whose representatives have been discussed several times in the national chapters on Finland within the European Islamophobia Report for a strong anti-Muslim stance, holds in the Finnish Parliament 38 seats. The general tendency of the party representatives is to defend "Finnishness" (Wahlbeck, 2016). The party rhetoric in this regard consists of arguments that attack people denigrated as non-white and non-Christian, describing lifestyles such as the Islamic one as incompatible with Finnish culture. For instance, Laura Huhtasaari, a member of the party and 2018 presidential elections candidate, stated during her visit to *Mikaelinkirkko*[28], a church located in the city of Turku, that:

> I hope from the church and you [representatives of the Church], even though I repeat the same things a bit, these are important; I really hope that the church boldly defends Christian values, Christians, and Christian tradition, because otherwise, Islam will wipe it out. We need strong Christianity in Finland.

Moreover, the lived reality of racial discrimination, violence, and race-based harassment shows that the idea of a socially cohesive, multiculturalist society is not accepted on the grassroots level. Saukkonen (2013) argues that while on the official level, especially policies towards immigrant minorities, have thrived in Finland, popular discourse has been stuck in creating a Finnish national identity based on racial homogeneity. Everyday microaggressions, such as questions doubting one's "Finnishness," are experienced by young POC Finns, e.g., children from bi-racial parents or adoptees from abroad, must face (Rastas, 2005). There is still a perpetual understanding of "whiteness" being a fixed factor in what makes a Finn in the minds of the wider public.

A recent example of normative whiteness in the Finnish context is depictions of Finnishness in advertisements, bound to the imagery of Finns as persons defined as *kantasuomalainen.* The Finnish food company "Fazer" decided in 2021 to change the package of their famous "Reissumies" (eng. traveler) bread which since 1978 had been a drawing of a white average "Joe." The new brand image of one of Finland's most loved rye bread was now represented by drawings of three public personas, one of

[28] https://tokentube.net/v/2108503266/Perussuomalaiset-Turun-Mikaelin-kirkossa-8-10-2018 last accessed 9.12.2021.

them being the rapper *Pastori Pike*, a Black man. An example of the backlash Fazer received on social media was a Finns Party politician's comment: "So far, *Reissumies* has been good traditional Finnish bread. Now it is related to multiculturalism. I've lost my taste for it now."[29] Another Finnish food company, *Felix*, received a similar backlash in 2016 when a Black woman casually talked about her fishing hobby in their video advertisement. The slogan of the video ad stated, "Felix knows the taste buds of Josephine and those of a million other Finns."

These examples manifest an unwillingness within the right-wing of the Finnish public to relinquish a particular idea of normative Finnishness bound by whiteness. They can be considered representative of what the Swedish critical race theorist Thomas Hübinette has coined "White melancholia," meaning that the presence of non-Whites corresponds to the idealized phantasm of a homogenous (and white) society that is maintained on a psychic and imaginary level. Finnishness is hence experienced to be in a crisis accompanied by feelings of bewilderment and mourning of the loss of Whiteness of the population – Finns are not as White as they used to be (Hübinette, 2016, p. 53). The emotions connected with these everyday products – rye bread being one of the typical Finnish foods that ex-pats like me bring from their holidays back "home" – touch the core of the Finnish culture. They symbolize familiar food habits that every Finn could identify with. If we were to observe the responses to POC Finns in such advertisements, we could conclude that this identification is in crisis. Non-white Finnish consumers are welcome to participate in this culture only on a certain level, that is, in their passive role as consumers of the culture and its images but not as their producers.[30] Advertisements function as cultural images representing what is considered "normal" in society and reproducing this normativity. The dominant

[29] https://twitter.com/ReijoTossavaine/status/1455825239234027527 (last accessed 9.12.2021)

[30] Writer and activist Maryan Abdulkarim and choreographer Sonya Lindfors have furthermore argued that POC actors and artists are only used for roles in which they are reproducing the role of the Other (Abdulkarim & Lindfors, 2016, pp. 22–23). However, white actors have repeatedly personified and ridiculed (cf. black face) ethnic minorities, which has been discussed widely in the media as awareness about the consequences of the past oppression still has for the Sámi. In 2019, a well-known TV-show "Kummeli" was put under the spotlight for its 1980's and early 1990's sketch comedies on the Sámi and Roma. The actors, dressed in imitations of traditional Sámi dress, portrayed Sámi men as drunks. One of the main actors noted in an interview that this portrayal was not meant to ridicule the Sámi as a group of people per se but the very image that the majority holds over the Sámi, but he also officially apologized and noted that he would not anymore engage in producing such sketch comedies as he understands the moral damage they have caused for the Sámi people. https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-11079638 (last accessed 9.12.2021)

representation of white Finns feeds into the understanding of a homogenous racial Finland and the construction of Finnish racial bodies. Here, the red line is drawn in the representation when non-white Finns are put as *the face* of a campaign. As Rantala (2014, pp. 140–141) has explained, "Advertisements support the dominant or the hegemonic way of looking and affect how we want ourselves to be seen. Consumers identity themselves with the performance of the advertisements and consequently with the heteronormative images in them."

One could argue that the problem is in the symbolic identification that advertising generally seeks. The rye bread becomes so essential for the white Finnish average Joe and Jane that when they buy it, wrapped in a package with a Black man on it, the white Finnishness of the bread and that of Joe and Jane is lost. This calls for a critical reading of such advertisements as instances of cultural representation as they show how deeply enrooted images of whiteness are in the understanding of Finnishness and of Finnish bodies amongst the lay people as nationalistic signs. The advertisements "(…) crystallize many problems concerning Finnish notions, negotiations, and struggles concerning multiculturalism. The reactions to the ads can be considered as nationalistic agitation used to justify an imagined homogenous all-white Finland. The 'national' is hence the exclusion of non-white people from the Finnish nation" (Rossi, 2009, pp. 189–190). The *Felix* video clip and its protagonist Josephine were henceforth an attempt towards a representation of Finnish bodies as diverse, constructing the image of Finnishness not as naturalized "white."

Contemporary examples from public attitudes thus show that in a seemingly post-racial world of the 21st century, complexion still makes a difference for some who want to stick to a pure white phenotype when talking about "Finns." At the same time, providing quite a contrasting situation, Daria Krivonos has shown how some Russian immigrants find their "darker" complexion more advantageous than a "fair skin" for racial passing. They feel they pass easier as "White" because they are falsely perceived as Western/Southern European. According to Krivonos (2020, p. 399), this is inconsistent in how Whiteness and white privilege are constructed in the Finnish context.

Thus, it can be said that the feeling of being perceived as "European," in general, grants a person a "White pass" since Europeanness is still associated with (Western) Christian identity and whiteness at large. If we were again to compare this to the racialization experiences of POC Finns, we would see how their dark complexion makes a difference in their belonging to be excluded from the dominant phenotype in society. This leads consequently to their identities as Finns being misrecognized. A study on Finnish international adoptees has, in this regard, shown how their everyday experiences on racialization include "(…) an obvious presumption that because their appearance does not fit into the domain of Whiteness, they don't fundamentally belong to Finnish society" (Koskinen, 2014, p. 177).

In the next chapter, I will further explore the construction of Whiteness in the Finnish context and show how it is negotiated concerning Muslimness. I will argue that a meaning is invested in one's complexion, but there are other markers by which "white people" could pass as White. Whiteness in Finland can namely also be connected to employment and socioeconomic status. Interesting insights are offered in another study on "white" Russian-speaking immigrants' experiences of their societal position as racialized bodies once they are unemployed (Krivonos, 2017). The embodied 'white capital' of Russian-speaking immigrants does not guarantee a structural position of privilege or social mobility, and their precarity in the labor market excludes them from privileged Whiteness connected to middle-class position and considered respectable. As Krivonos shows in her interviews, the Russian-speaking immigrants regret how they were considered White in Russia within the country's racial structures. When they move to Finland, they can be said to lose their Whiteness and take a racialized position as low-skilled workers or unemployed immigrants. Interestingly, however, these immigrants compete for Whiteness with immigrants of color. Krivonos's interviews show how the Russian immigrants see the non-white immigrants as the racial Other by, for instance, categorizing Russian immigrants as more deserving of certain societal privileges and depicting the other immigrants – including Muslims – as lazy, etc.

The history of how "Finnishness" has been constructed in Finland during the last three centuries, involving scientific projects and otherization of ethnic minorities, shows how race is given a different meaning depending on each period's political and social context. Drawing from the discussion in this chapter and circling back to

Frankenberg's (1997, p. 1) assertion about whiteness as a process, I see it translating to the Finnish context with "W/white" identity not having been marked by the same exclusionary characteristics in the past as it is today. When juxtaposed with Muslim bodies, the w/Whiteness of Finns in the past, juxtaposed with the racialized identities of the Sámi and the Roma, differs from the Whiteness of Finns today. Thus, we can see how Muslim (convert) bodies can and should be seen as the racial, non-White Other. If Whiteness is understood as a racial construct, in our context, its construction works by barring Muslim bodies from it.

Even though in the case of the Russian-speaking immigrants, their Finnishness is not at stake, but their Whiteness is, it is crucial to know how w/Whiteness works on different levels as an identity marker. It proves that various aspects of a person's social status, depending on the perspective or the situation, can be "Whiter" than the others. In the next chapter, I will show how Tatar Muslims, as a phenotypically white and economically well-doing minority group, are positioned in Finnish society in a juxtaposition to not only ethnic Muslims but also Muslim converts. I will show how differently "passing as White/Finnish" more emphasis can be depending on the phenotype, cultural closeness, economic status, or religion. This, and the ethnic heterogeneity of Muslims worldwide, responds to the problematic characterization of Muslims as neither Black nor Brown (Tyrer, 2013). If we were to treat anti-Muslim racism in the Finnish context either as *religious hate* and investigate experiences of any Muslim regardless of their ethnic background or as *racial hatred* and study only Muslims of color, we would miss the fact that Muslim identities cannot be assumed as in "either/or" terms neither in Finland nor elsewhere. Hence, because of the normativity of Whiteness, the experience of Finnish converts, as shown in this study, will reveal the construction of a normative Whiteness in Finland from a perspective so-far left undiscussed in Finnish and international studies. In the next chapter, I will discuss narratives by Finnish Muslim converts on racialization and misrecognition of their identities. I will thus reveal the characteristics that determine a person's "Whiteness" in its socio-cultural terms in today's Finland and how these characteristics manifest in Muslim converts' experiences on anti-Muslim racism, racialization, and misrecognition.

CHAPTER VI

FINNISH MUSLIMS – WHITE MUSLIMS? RACIALIZATION AND THE MISRECOGNITION OF MUSLIM IDENTITY

6.1. Introduction

In the previous chapter, I explained the construction of "Finnishness" and how it has been intertwined throughout the last centuries with issues of race and culture. I did this by using the example of how the ethnic minorities Sámi and Roma have been socially constructed to embody the "racial Other" both in phenotypical but also in cultural terms. This parallel example lays a basis for understanding the discussion of the following chapter in a larger historical context. While the different Sámi peoples living in Finland are culturally and linguistically kindred, and the Finnish Roma are ethnically homogenous, the Finnish Muslim community is ethnically, linguistically, and religiously heterogeneous. This heterogeneity, however, gets overlooked when Muslim identity is racialized in a manner that "(…) signs of race, culture and belonging are amalgamated, so that religion is given a new sociological relevance because of how it is tied up with issues of community identity, stereotyping, socio-economic location, political conflict and so forth" (Meer, 2015, p. 104). As illustrated in the previous chapter, Whiteness and the concept of "Finnishness" go hand in hand. Yet, both are modified in their conceptualization according to the socio-political circumstances of the specific times, which in each period are affected not only by a society's internal politics but also by global developments. In this chapter, I will explore how Muslim identity in Finland relates to race and Whiteness and expand my discussion from the racialization of Sámi and the Finnish Roma community. My discussion will contribute to the building of my thesis argument about anti-Muslim racism in Finland being a misrecognition of Muslim identities, in particular in the case of Finnish Muslim converts and their national identities.

Having established in chapter three that Finland's ethnically heterogeneous Muslim community is somewhat unique in its ethnic composition, it can be roughly grouped into four subgroups: the old Tatar minority, the ethnic Muslims with a relatively recent migratory background, their descendants, and the converts. As I introduced them in chapter three, the Tatar Muslims settled in Finland in the late 19th century and form today a small ethnic minority of circa 500 individuals. Since the misrecognition of Muslim converts' national identities is tightly connected to the social construction of "Finnishness" as a racial category, I will start this chapter by presenting the Tatar Muslim case in Finland as a starting point for my further discussion. Like (white) Finnish converts, the Tatars can be regarded as white, but as I will show, they are currently not constructed as racial Others through a racialization process. Instead, they can be said to possess access to sociocultural Whiteness, which Muslims of migratory background or converts largely do not possess.

The societal status of the Tatar community is, for this reason, vis-à-vis the Muslim converts interesting, as it showcases the complex relationships between religion, race, and the question of who deserves or can be considered as "Finnish." I will start by delving into the theory of recognition by Axel Honneth. His ideas will serve as a basis for my subsequent discussion on how misrecognition is connected to the process of racialization and Finnish Muslim converts' experiences of anti-Muslim racism. After this, I will explain how the Tatars during the last two centuries – though not without obstacles – became a "showcase for Muslim integration" and are to some extent described as "Finnishized Muslims," mainly in the statements of politicians and through media, but also at times through self-descriptions.[31] This racialization, I argued, also leads to a specific kind of misrecognition that concerns the Muslim consciousness (Meer, 2012, 2015). Due to their "reputation", the Tatars are frequently juxtaposed with other Muslims regarding how Islam and Muslims fit into Finnish society. Finally, I will support my arguments on the misrecognition of Muslim identities in Finland by analyzing interview excerpts from my fieldwork in Finland

[31] There is a gap in knowledge about the Finnish Tatar community's self-perception as Finns and Muslims since most of the academic studies have so far concentrated on the history writing of the community. More empirical work needs to be done on the issue of Finnishness and how the narratives emerging from within the current Tatar community reflect the juxtaposition with other Muslim communities as is problematized in this Chapter. My analysis is in this sense only based on public descriptions of the community, both by non-Tatars as well as Tatars themselves.

based on how the experiences of Finnish Muslims on anti-Muslim racism can be regarded as experiences of racialization and misrecognition.

6.2 The Theory of Recognition and Anti-Muslim Racism

Conceptually, misrecognition derives from the theory of recognition developed by the Frankfurt School critical theorist Axel Honneth (1995) and is, in the context of this study, understood as a type of moral injury in the third realm of Honneth's tripartite typology of mutual recognition. Much research has acknowledged the usefulness of the concept of misrecognition in this regard in analyzing Muslim minorities' experiences in European contexts (Amer, 2020; Blackwood et al., 2015; da Silva et al., 2022; Dobbernack et al., 2015; N. Hopkins, 2011; P. Hopkins et al., 2017; Jakobsen, 2015; Pilkington & Acik, 2020). Before going into a more in-depth discussion on how misrecognition is interconnected with racialization and Finnish Muslim converts' experiences of identity, I will briefly overview Honneth's tripartite theory and locate the form of misrecognition therein.

According to Honneth, the practical identity formation of an individual presupposes intersubjective relations of recognition. This theorem is based on a more general understanding embedded in the Hegelian philosophy that sees humans as social beings and understands identity construction as a dependent of a dialectical process of our interactions with others. Honneth consequently argues that the mutual relations of recognition are a normative characteristic of post-traditional (Western) societies as they govern the reproduction of the social life and, when violated, function as a motor of social change. In his seminal publication, *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth introduces his tripartite typology of recognition consisting of mutual recognition relationships marked by love, legal equality, and social esteem. The first realm, i.e., the relationships of love, is connected to early childhood and forms one's self-confidence gained from a fulfilling relationship with one's mother. It consequently results in the establishment of independence and autonomy, and later in adult life, self-confidence is projected in other primary interpersonal relationships such as friendships and intimate relations. Consequently, the lack of recognition is manifested, for instance, by acts of violence that violate one's integrity (Honneth, 1995, p. 129).

The second category of recognition is manifested on the socio-political level as legal rights, and the aspect of an individual's relation-to-oneself affected by the fulfillment of these relationships, or their violation, is self-respect. Even though Honneth sees legal relations to a certain degree as an a-cultural universal category, he emphasizes how they are subject to change both in terms of their content and the scope of the application over time (Honneth, 1995, pp. 110–111). As he explains, in modern European societies, reciprocal recognition of individuals must follow post-conventional morality such that the recognition is ascribed to all human beings equally within the socio-political community in question. This is the difference between pre-modern times and corporative societies in which an individual's rights and duties were attached to the role expectations based on the respective social esteem the individual enjoyed within the societal hierarchy. Such a social change is exemplified in European societies whose constitutions ensure equal treatment for all citizens before the law irrespective of their religious or ethnic identity, as well as separate Non-Discrimination Acts and laws that protect the freedom of religion.

Also, with the emergence of modernity, the third realm of mutual recognition relations, that of social esteem, is understood by Honneth to have gone through a change in its composition. Compared to legal recognition, which is cognitively objective, the criteria within social esteem differ according to the respective evaluative frame within which everyone is attributed their "worth" depending on their traits (Honneth, 1995, p. 113). Honneth's understanding of horizontal patterns of social esteem as a historically variable category requires society's ability to pluralize, open up the shared value horizon, and adjust to change. Thus, Honneth argues that if the cultural self-understanding of a society is determined only by the conceptions of the ethical life of one majority group, it leaves little space for valuing different lifestyles (Honneth, 1995, p. 122).

The implications of this theorization we can observe for societies with minorities present are clear; insofar as a society value only a limited kind of realizations of culturally defined values, it becomes inevitably fragmented. The imperative for social progress in terms of social esteem lies in abandoning corporative structures and ways of determining social standing based on "(…) predetermined worth of traits that are attributed as types, to entire groups" (Honneth, 1995, p. 125). Following this, anti-

Muslim racism is a phenomenon that rejects this imperative and produces forms of misrecognition within the third realm of Honneth's typology. Suppose we take recognition as acknowledging one's identity as legitimate and accept that anti-Muslim racism treats all Muslims as a monolithic entity and ascribes to all Muslims particular characteristics. In that case, the racialized or stereotypical identities produced by anti-Muslim racism are a form of misrecognition.

While anti-Muslim racism manifests itself in different societies variably, ranging from physical attacks to state policies, I consider it a symptom of misrecognition of the Muslim identity both as *a group identity* – insofar that they are externally treated as a monolithic, essentialized group – but also as an *individual identity*. However, I acknowledge the warnings by Nancy Fraser about understanding the theory of recognition within a multiculturalist framework, which focus on identity politics insofar that group identities and their recognition would be taken as a desired political goal. In the context of my study, this intervention plays a significant role since, according to Fraser, such an understanding of recognition puts pressure on individuals to conform to a given group culture if the culturalist understanding of recognition produces single reference points for minority identity (Fraser, 2000, p. 112). In that sense, it thus connects to what I have mentioned earlier in chapter three in terms of treating anti-Muslim racism as cultural racism while avoiding culturalization, against which Allen (2010) has warned. Such is the case not only with the above-discussed positioning of the Tatar Muslims in Finnish society but also with any other racialized identities externally ascribed to Muslims, especially when this identity is taken as the point of reference for how Islam should be lived in a particular society. As Fraser argues (2000, p. 112), such group-related identities are vehicles for misrecognition as they impose "a single, drastically simplified group-identity which denies the complexity of people's lives, the multiplicity of their identifications (…) by reifying group identity, it ends by obscuring the politics of cultural identification, the struggles within the group for authority – and the power – to present it."

Echoing the imperative to recognize the agency in self-identification maintained by Nasar Meer, Charles Taylor (1994, p. 25) has also expanded on Honneth's theory. He argues that since individual identities are shaped by recognition or its absence, individuals can suffer real damage from experiences of misrecognition when people

or society create a demeaning picture of them based on their religious, cultural, gender, or any other identity. The harm results in oppression, which Taylor calls "a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being" (ibid.) This reduced mode of being overlaps in my view with the Du Boisian double consciousness, which I will discuss in more detail in chapter seven regarding how it affects Muslim convert women's behavior as they strive to gain recognition and counter their stigmatized identities. In any case, this demeaning picture that Taylor speaks of manifests itself in the case of anti-Muslim racism in the othering of Muslims and ascribing to them racialized identities as non-Finns, as will be discussed further in this current chapter. Hopkins (N. Hopkins, 2011, p. 259) has argued that for such dual identities, "the recognition of different identities cannot be compartmentalized: it is the recognition of a duality that is valued and the prominence of the one identity over the other can violate an individual's self-definition." However, as I will show, Muslim converts in Finland fuse both their Finnish and Muslim identities. For the converts, these two are not exclusionary.

6.3. The "Finnishized White Muslims" – The Tatar Case

6.3.1 "The Good Muslims"

In 2015, the Finnish National Broadcasting Company (YLE) made a report series about different mosques in Helsinki.[32] One of the articles in the series was titled; "Tatar Mosque: The Finnishized Muslim community is not weighed down by money worries." The subtitle further claimed: "Finland's oldest Muslim community in the center of Helsinki on Fredrikinkatu represents the most Finnish Muslim community. Tatars, who came to Finland more than a hundred years ago, say that they have integrated by working."[33] The article title serves as a prime example of how the Tatar

[32] The background to the interest was the then on-going project to build a central mosque in Helsinki, financed by foreign funds. However, the project created disputes amongst the diverse Muslim communities and media's attention was mostly targeting the fact, that the project organizers, consisting of different individuals, were not able to fund the mosque by finances originating from Finland. This created suspicion and "concerns" over the question whether the foreign funders would be able to have political influence regarding the administration and policy of the mosque. Some of the opposing voices represented by media in this regard were from the Shia community who claimed that funds managed by an entity from the Kingdom of Bahrain would increase the threat of political Islam and Salafism being infiltrated into the Finnish landscape of Islamic communities. https://www.hs.fi/kaupunki/art-2000002841900.html (last accessed 8.9.2022)

[33] In Finnish: "Tataarimoskeija: Suomalaistunutta muslimiyhteisöä eivät rahahuolet paina.

community, sometimes also called Finland's "indigenous Muslims" due to their rather long presence and well-established legal status in the country (Skowron-Nalborczyk, 2016), is constructed in the public discourse. A well-known historian, Antero Leitzinger, has argued (Leitzinger, 2015, pp. 284–285) that as a community of the Islamic faith, Tatars feel that they differ from other ethnic communities: "Tatars do not recognize having gone through similar struggles that immigrant Muslims are complaining about. Even immigrant critical and Islamophobic public figures have allowed the Tatars to be described as Muslims without problems." Hence, the word "Finnishized" in the article's title and the subsequent claim about Tatars being "the most Finnish Muslim community" is a strong statement in the larger context of how Muslims in Finland face othering, suspicion, and hostility.

The YLE article provides two interesting points of departure for discussing the social construction of "Finnishness" and how race/Whiteness, culture, and religion are connected. On the one hand, by looking at the broader context of the article and its contents, we can see how it highlights in a positive light a certain "Tatar way" of Muslimness in Finland. This framing is also part of the construction of the Tatars as "good Muslims" and why they, as argued by Leitzinger, are hence regarded even by Islamophobic politicians as less troublesome than other communities of the Islamic faith. To distinguish Muslims according to the level of their outwardly displayed religiosity, the binary is formed externally, leading to conclusions like "non-practicing: secularized, integrated/assimilated" and "practicing: fundamentalists" Muslims (Akgönül, 2011, p. 36). The political connotations of these designations are used in international discourses surrounding the "War on Terror" and are mostly based on presumptions that Islam poses a threat to Western ideals. As a result, practicing Muslims are stigmatized as the source of that threat (Downing, 2019; Mamdani, 2005; Topolski, 2018). This section will discuss this in more detail with statements from far-right politicians and Tatars themselves. On the other hand, we can conclude here to understand how a minority community (ethnic, religious, and linguistic) can, through their economic capital, gain a privileged position that grants them access to the identity

Suomen vanhin muslimiyhteisö Helsingin keskustassa Fredrikinkadulla edustaa kaikkein suomalaisinta muslimiyhteisöä. Yli sata vuotta sitten Suomeen tulleet tataarit kertovat, että työnteko on kotouttanut heidät." URL: https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-8374132 last accessed 23.8.2022.

marker “Finn” and creates an idea that they, in contrast to other Muslim communities, *are* part of *us*. I will shortly expand on that question first.

The YLE article on the Tatar Mosque and the others in the series were published when a mosque construction project in Helsinki[34] was ongoing and widely debated in the media and politics. The article puts the Tatar Mosque in Helsinki into the spotlight by emphasizing that the founders of the Tatar community came to Finland as traders and that the community members have increased the community’s wealth throughout the centuries. The article's title and contents reflect an indirect devaluation of the central mosque project’s funding by finances from abroad and what it is perceived to mean for the planned mosque’s image at large. In contrast to the self-organized community group behind the mosque project, the Tatar community is depicted as self-sufficient, financially stable, and subsequently as “Finnish” or “Finnishized.” The latter description indicates a process, an applaudable achievement of integration and acculturation. Such references to a minority’s economic capital coupled with an implied access to social capital show how the construction of Whiteness depends on different identity markers of an individual or a group.

While in the previous chapter, I discussed the cultural racism towards ethnic minorities and the construction of Finnishness as w/Whiteness, here one’s “passing as White” is not dependent on culture and phenotype only, but on how Whiteness is a process that emerges in connection to the socioeconomic, sociocultural relations in the society (Frankenberg, 1997, p. 1). Interesting insights on the intersections of race and economic status of a person in this process are offered in Krivonos’ studies (2017, 2020) on Russian-speaking immigrants in Finland. These immigrants are phenotypically white, but neither their skin color nor their assumed Whiteness carries value in their experiences of their societal position as racialized bodies in Finland. While they used to hold a respectable middle-class position in their home country, they have, after immigration, either become unemployed or must occupy jobs like those of

[34] It should be noted that there is only one built-for purpose mosque in Finland, i.e., a free-standing building that has a minaret that serves the purpose of a mosque. This mosque, located in the town of Järvenpää somewhat 40 kilometers north from Helsinki, is in fact in the possession of Finland’s Tatar community but is open only sporadically and does not serve the local Muslim community during the five daily prayers. Otherwise, Muslim communities around Finland, Helsinki included, have established prayer rooms converting business facilities and other property into suitable spaces to serve the communities’ needs.

low-skilled workers. This has led them to experience a "loss of their Whiteness." Significantly, these experiences are based on the societal position that these Russian immigrants in this way share with immigrants and refugees from Africa, the Middle East, and other geographies considered as non-white.

As Krivonos (201) argues, the embodied 'white capital' of Russian-speaking immigrants does not guarantee them a structural position of privilege or social mobility. Hence, their precarity in the labor market excludes them from privileged Whiteness. My argument, however, is that while both the Tatars and the Russian immigrants can be regarded as phenotypically white – which should grant them both racial passing – the socio-economic position of the Tatars as an artifact of their long-presence in the country, in contrast to the Russian immigrants, grants them their "Whiteness." This privilege is also opposed to other Muslim communities. Thus, they are also regarded as racially, socio-economically, and culturally embodying what is understood mainly as normative "Finnishness." The question remains whether the Tatar community would be considered "Finnishized Muslims" if their economic status were precarious. However, since they are considered an "example of Muslim immigration" because they have allegedly socio-economically integrated better than Muslims with a recent migratory background, I argue that the Tatars and the Russian immigrants are exemplary for discussing an intersection of race and economic status. They make a good starting point for discussing signifiers of normative Whiteness in Finnish society.

From a larger perspective, the Tatar community's case is also connected to the intersection of religion and culture. Apart from their claim for economic capital[35] and how it has contributed to the Tatar community's becoming "Finnish," the Tatar Muslims are positioned in terms of their religious practice in the public discourse in a juxtaposition to not only ethnic Muslims but also Muslim converts. The YLE article highlights community practices, such as shaking hands with the opposite sex and the Tatars' "attitude towards women based on good manners." While the interviewed

[35] I want to emphasize here that I do not make any claims about the Tatar community's factual economic capital, rather I aim to highlight here the problematic framing of the Tatar community's "economic capital" as something that can be used against the financial situation of other Muslim communities to evaluate the latter as less exemplary Muslims.

representative of the community subsequently mentions that their life is based on "what is lawful and civil" in Finland. Such indications are of importance in the context of the War on Terror, within which the binary between the "good" and the "bad" Muslims is fundamentally created externally to differentiate Muslims according to the degree of their visible religiosity, ending in conclusions such as "non-practicing: secularized, integrated/assimilated," and "practicing: fundamentalists" Muslims (Akgönül, 2011, p. 36). The political meanings of these labels find use when the War on Terror has stigmatized practicing Muslims based on the alleged threat Islam "poses" to Western values (Downing, 2019; Mamdani, 2005; Topolski, 2018).

This contrast between the Tatars and the rest of the Muslim community must be investigated in the larger context of how Muslim religious practices are problematized in the public discourse as incompatible with Finnish culture and an obstacle to integration. I will in chapter seven discuss in this regard the "Muslim Question" in the Finnish context and how, in Finland, Muslim women are framed according to Oriental stereotypes as alien to the Finnish values and culture, especially when it comes to the Islamic practice of the headscarf. In this current chapter, I, however, already argue that this contrast creates an image that the Tatar community, unlike the other communities, is integrated due to their nonobservance of specific practices related to religious dogma. For instance, another article in the YLE series presented a mosque primarily visited by converts titled "The convert-mosque, in Roihuvuori visitors get gifted a black cloak."[36] The article on the Tatar Mosque again highlighted that their mosque visitors are not required to wear the veil.

Following what I have presented above, I would argue that Finland's Tatar community is thus naively framed as a "model of Muslim integration," which puts them into the spotlight as an example of something that could be called "a successful accommodation of Islamic belief in Finland." They are framed as *the point of reference* against which other Muslim's actions are compared and whose way of living and practicing Islam all other Muslims in the country should follow if they wish to be included in the racialized category of "Finns." As illustrations of this framing also serve as statements of politicians, especially those who usually, in their political

[36] In Finnish: "Käännynnäisten moskeija: Roihuvuoressa vieras saa lahjaksi mustan kaavun." URL: https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-8374993 (last accessed 25.11.2022)

activities, show hostility towards Islam and Muslims when accommodation of Islamic belief and political demands of the Muslim community in Finland are discussed. Herein, the Tatar community is always juxtaposed with other Muslims, while the former is depicted as "less troublesome" or moderate in their practice of religion.

An example of such statements is a blog post by the Helsinki city councilor Laura Korpi (2019) from the True Finns Party. In 2019, when the Non-Discrimination Ombudsman supported debates about the usage of *burqinis*[37] in Helsinki City's swimming halls, Korpi argued against the presence of *burqinis* and all other forms of dress worn by Muslim women out of religious convictions. In her text, she referred to the Tatars as a precedent case: "For more than a hundred years, we have had a Muslim minority in our country, the Tatars, without scarves on the streets, let alone Burqinis in swimming halls." Thus, she presents the Tatars as an "invisible" minority, nay "invisible Muslims," to emphasize the argument that *burqinis* – and headscarves – are an unreasonable demand from the "other" Muslims as the Tatars have been "doing just fine" without them.

Another politician of the Finns Party, Jussi Hallo-Aho, well-known for his xenophobic views and anti-Islam attitude, discussed in an article of his blog, the Tatars, in the same context he was discussing Muslim converts in Finland, mostly denigrating the latter for their religious life. While Halla-Aho sees Muslim converts as "overly eager wackos" in terms of spiritual practice, he describes the Tatars followingly:

> I sometimes find it difficult to write about Islam because I sometimes hang out in the playground with a Muslim father from the Tatar community. He is a normal, nice, civilized man in normal clothes who talks about normal things. His wife, also a Tatar, is a normal, nice woman in normal clothes. And they are Muslims. I don't know if they read these posts, but I would like to add anyway that the Islam I am criticizing is not their Islam. It doesn't bother me if someone has a god named Allah if they don't eat pork (neither do I) or want to bow on the prayer mat towards Mecca. I'm not bothered by crescent moons or mosques, either. The Tatars I encountered are a sad reminder of what mainstream Islam could be. (…) If the Tatars were still synonymous with 'Islam in Finland,' as they were just a moment ago, I could sometimes take my children to a mosque and tell them sincerely that Islam is a small but positive part of the diversity of Finnish society. (Halla-aho, 2017)

[37] A *burqini* is a style of modest-swimwear; a swimsuit that covers the whole body while the swimsuit consists usually of two or three parts, including a tunika-like upper part which reaches to the mid-thigh. Muslim women may also use a *hijab* or a turban with a *burqini*, likewise made of swimming suit fabric.

While Halla-aho refers to the Tatar couple he knows with adjectives such as "normal" and "civilized," referring to their outer appearance and behavior, he also takes the whole Tatar community as a reference point for an Islam that *could* be mainstream. He would like to see all Muslims in "normal clothes," "civilized," and talking about "normal things." Without further defining these ideas, he insinuates that in whatever way Muslim converts practice their Islam, especially if they are more visible (e.g., by wearing the headscarf), it is not what he would consider "a positive part of the diversity of Finnish society." Instead, the "Tatar way" of practicing Islam, which according to Halla-aho, has been regrettably overrun by another Islam practiced by immigrants and converts, would deserve to be tolerated.

This approach of juxtaposing the "Tatar way" of practicing Islam with that of other Muslim communities, while the former is constructed as more acceptable and exemplary of the successful integration of Islam, is apart from the non-Muslim community, sometimes used also by the Tatars themselves. For instance, apart from the above-discussed example in the YLE article relating to the practices in the Tatar Mosque, a young Tatar man gave the following description of Tatars and their "successful assimilation" into Finnish society:

> Rahil thinks that the secularized religion has also facilitated integration into Finland. Few Tatars pray five times a day or go on pilgrimage. Religion is more of a private matter. In addition, Tatars dress like other Finns. No robes, no scarves, or veils. And we also know how to drink *kossu*.[38] Some don't even always refuse pork. (Ylioppilaslehti, 2004)[39]

This framing of the Tatar community, as showcased by examples above, feeds into the categorization of Muslims into "good" (i.e., non-practicing, secularized, assimilated) and "bad" (i.e., practicing fundamentalists) Muslims. The emphasis on the nonobservance of religious practice is supported by the article's title, which translates in English to "Run-of-the-mill Muslims," referring to the Tatar community as average Muslims who do not stand out from the usual crowd in any unique way. It thus mirrors also how Jussi Halla-aho frames the Tatar Muslims as "normal" in opposition to the

[38] *Kossu* is a Finnish traditional spirit drink.
[39] *Ylioppilaslehti* was established in 1913 and its distribution reaches all Finnish high schools as well as bachelor's degree students in Finnish universities as they get the printed magazine delivered to their home address. https://ylioppilaslehti.fi/2004/09/tavismuslimit/ (last accessed 26.10.2021)

"abnormal" Muslim converts, whose religious practices, according to him, are "too much."

As explained in chapter three, such categorizations based on religiosity/practice produce political meanings. These political meanings are based mainly on anti-Muslim racist assumptions of Islam as a threat to Western values and followingly stigmatize practicing Muslims as carriers of that threat (Downing, 2019; Topolski, 2018). Like in Finland, Tatars are, in this regard, instrumentalized in the construction of such binaries also in other European countries where Tatars live alongside other Muslim minorities. Examples have been reported from Estonia (Lepa, 2020), Russia (Aitamurto, 2019), and Poland (Pedziwiatr, n.d.). In all these countries, where Muslim communities' struggles for recognition are marked by internal divisions and competition of who deserves to be regarded as the "good Muslim," Tatars have been presented as "indigenous Muslims."

Circling back to my discussion on the concept of *domophilia* in the context of anti-Muslim racist discourses, I would argue that, in these cases, the Tatar community can be regarded as racialized differently. As they are framed as "good Muslims" by non-Muslims and Tatars, they have gained access to socio-cultural Whiteness. Thus, unlike immigrant Muslims and Muslim converts, they are not regarded as an alien body to these national communities. Spielhaus (2010, pp. 21–22) has further argued that in Germany, "(…) the 'good Muslim' is the exception and role model for an integrated immigrant who does not cause any problems." However, in the Tatar case, the "immigrant" status is no longer relevant, but their "Muslimness" is. Followingly, as Spielhaus (ibid.) argues, society oversees hostility towards Islam and Muslims as the cause of problems experienced by Muslim individuals in terms of discrimination in the job market or housing market and instead discriminates Muslims according to their devotion to Islam. Hence, the non-Muslim community ascribes the degree of "acceptable devotion" based on the practical relationship a particular community has with Islam. This ascribed devotion is then taken as a reference point to which all other communities are compared.

Overlapping with the presentation of Muslim converts as a security threat (Özyürek 2009), it is not unusual that born Muslims who do not practice religion might perceive

converts as "overzealous" in their religious practice and in gaining spiritual knowledge (Yazbeck Haddad, 2006). Similarly, Lepa's (2020, p. 78) interviews with Tatars in Estonia show how internal Othering within the Muslim community is related to the regret that the Tatars feel about how immigrants and converts practice Islam visibly, such as by wearing the headscarf. As Lepa's interlocutor claims, this has caused the controversial interest of the public towards Islam, so much so that the converts' "eagerness to stress their 'Muslimness' with special attire" was experienced as intrusive towards how the Tatars practiced their Islam, i.e., instead being an invisible Muslim community.

However, when this differentiation is made from within the Muslim community itself, such as is the case with Tatars in Finland and Estonia, it speaks for an internal power struggle for recognition of belonging, which is a product of what Nasar Meer (Meer, 2012, 2015) calls a misrecognition of Muslim consciousness. He argues that this misrecognition is part of the burden that has been put on Muslims. At the same time, they are pushed to redefine the meaning of Islam and Muslimness in the European national contexts. In contrast, their national identities are contested and contrasted based on the alleged incompatibility of their religious identities with the former. This idea is supported, for instance, by Anya Topolski (2018), who has compared the struggles for recognition by Muslims in Europe today with the assimilationist demands towards Jews in the 19th and 20th centuries. She argues that, like the past strategies applied to the Jewish community, in contemporary European contexts, a certain pressure is created externally (and later internalized by the community) for Muslims to have a certain kind of group as a "representative" of all community members. Topolski (ibid.) states this representation is a version of a "domesticated" Islam marked by internal secularization. It creates conflicts over social capital, such as recognition and economic capital, as in resource distribution by the state. I will discuss the concept of misrecognition related to the treatment of Muslim converts by non-Muslims later in this chapter. However, I want to note that when internal division is created from within the Muslim community itself, as I showed above, it is to be seen as one of the products of an anti-Muslim racist discourse resulting in a power struggle for recognition, acceptance, and societal privilege.

6.3.2 From Racialized Others to the "Model of Muslim Integration"

Even though the Tatars are today perceived mainly as a "Finnishized" Muslim community, their identification with "Finnishness" has not always been straightforward. On the one hand, internal dynamics of identity construction shifting between transnational ties to the old homelands and Türkiye affected how the Tatar community started to self-identify as Finns. The Tatar immigration, which continued after Finland's independence, was restricted by creating new country borders, which previously had not existed. Hence, the Tatars could move freely between the Grand Duchy and Russia. Yet, as Renat Bekkin's research shows, Tatars have continued escaping Soviet Russia to Finland both legally and illegally (Bekkin, 2020a, pp. 58–60). Once in Finland, the transnational connections to the community in St. Petersburg were kept alive for political, religious, and social purposes. However, Bekkin argues that the Finnish Tatar community's path to building a Finnish identity happened only after the 1930s when the communication with St. Petersburg was broken for over half a century, and the Tatar's socio-cultural space was divided (Bekkin, 2020a, p. 67).

Moreover, each generation of Tatars has had its focus in terms of locating their collective self-identification differently. Researchers have identified different strategies of identity orientation outside of Finland for at least four generations (Hálen & Martikainen, 2016; Leitzinger, 1999; Martikainen, 2020). While the first generation organized themselves around the Muslim identity, the second generation was inspired by the ideology of Mustafa Kemal Atatürk that flourished in Türkiye. The Tatars, for instance, identified their own Tatar language as Turkish[40] , and many sought and gained Turkish nationality. The third generation of Tatars orientated themselves towards the Republic of Tatarstan and sought inspiration from the flourishing Tatar ethnonationalism. The fourth generation started in the 1990s to narrow down their ethnolinguistic identity and focus more on their Mishar traditions and heritage.

The path to an "exemplary integration" has not been without obstacles if we look at how the Tatar community has been presented in the eyes of the public, which has not

[40] The Tatar language is classified linguistically as a Turkic language. For a while, the Tatars living in Finland also defined themselves for some time as "*şimal törekläre*" or "Northern Turks" (Hálen & Martikainen, 2016, p. 99)

always been as positive as it is today. The Tatars might be the only Muslim community whose "Finnishness" is not questioned today. Still, they were a target of racialization during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, primarily due to the political atmosphere focused on building the "w/White Finnish nation." Elmgren's (2020) research on stereotypes in Finnish visual culture and stage performance in the early 20th century, pre-independence Finland, shows that the racialization of Tatar bodies served the purpose of the Other whose behavior was juxtaposed with that which was desirable and considered "civil" in Finland of the time.

As discussed in chapter five, Finns had been likened to Mongolians and were hence racially classified as a non-white, i.e., "Yellow/Asian" race. Finnish scholars produced counterarguments in the 19th and even the 20th century as a reaction and a protest to this classification. As part of this political and racial project to convince the world about Finnish people's similarity with the others already as white accepted European nations, the Tatar peddlers were depicted through racialized features such as slanted eyes and a wide mouth; the racial Other. Notably, Elmgren has argued (Elmgren, 2020, p. 36) that this racialization ceased after Finland's independence, for there were then new ways to spread the idealized image of Finns as "tall, blonde sportsmen." There were also beauty queens to support the goal of changing the perception of Finns as a race that would not be "(…) racially and historically destined to remain subjugated to other nations (ibid.)."

Moreover, while the "Tatar way" of practicing Islam and living as a Muslim in Finnish society might be largely framed today as "less troublesome" than the way immigrant Muslims and Muslim converts practice Islam, the Tatars have also experienced otherization regarding religious-cultural practices. The Islamic way of halal slaughter was publicly vilified in the early 20th century in Finland since the method, which consists of slaughtering a conscious animal, had been legally banned in 1902 and substituted with the practice of stunning the animal before slaughter. Hence, as Elmgren (2021, p. 73) has argued, in the process of introducing the new laws and gaining their acceptance in the eyes of the broader public, the Tatars were constructed as the "barbaric Others" whose practices were said to be on the way of the civilizing process of the Finnish nation. In chapter five, I discussed similar interventions and political measures related to the Sámi and the Roma. In chapter seven, I will connect

again to this and discuss such actions of "civilizing" minorities in Finland today as a manifestation of the Orientalist legacy of a more extensive "civilizing process" in European nation-making.

Today, the Tatars identify as an exceptionally separate community from other Muslim communities due to their ethnolinguistic identity and historical minority position (Martikainen, 2020, p. 38). Even though they are pictured as "Finnishized Muslims," one must consider the socio-political circumstances in which the Tatars paved their precise way into the society and the internal identity negotiations within that process. Only by doing so can we shed light on this problematic idealization of the Tatar community's trajectory as a minority in Finland and their "matter of course" integration as Muslims into the society. Keeping in mind that the Finnish Tatars have been forming their identity for more than a century will allow us to revise the expectations put on the new Muslim community and the uncritical endorsement of Tatars as a benchmark example of how to live and practice Islam in Finland. Researchers have argued that the uniqueness of the Tatar community lies in their tendency to keep religion as a "private matter" and not advertise themselves as representatives of Islam (Martikainen 2020, p. 38; Suistola 1995, p. 731). If we are to accept this claim, then the position they take within the larger Muslim community and as a minority group becomes controversial. The contradiction of their role as a "silent and invisible Muslim minority" and "example of Muslim integration" within the Finnish context is, in my view, enforced by the fact that representatives of the Tatar community are, as Martikainen argues (2020, p. 38), respected partners with authorities and decision-makers.

Considering the heterogeneity of the Muslim community in Finland at large, statements such as Tatars being "middlemen between new Muslim immigrants and public administration" (Martikainen, 2020, p. 39) reflect the power relations that are embedded in these categorizations of Muslims as "good" and "bad" at large. The Finnish Tatar community and their categorization as "good Muslims" by the public and themselves are to be regarded in the broader context of struggles for recognition and social capital between different Muslim communities residing in European countries. While in the German context, Spielhaus (2010) analyzed the intra-immigrant-community dynamics, in addition to what has been shown with examples

from Estonia and Finland, Tatars are similarly juxtaposed with other Muslim communities in countries such as Russia and Poland. The researcher of Polish Muslims, Konrad Pędziwiatr (forthcoming), for instance, points out that there is currently a "competition" between the Tatar community and the "new" Muslim community taking place. He argues that the securitization of Islam, the politicization of Muslim presence in Europe, and the growing anti-Muslim racism have created internal Othering within the Muslim community. Herein a polarizing discourse about "us/them" is defined by the Tatars, who racialize the other Muslims and depict themselves as the more deserving community of prioritized resources (both political and material) drawing from their liberal way of life and historical loyalty to the country. Similarly, within the larger project of securitization and domestication of Islam in Russia, the Tatar Islam is considered the "good Islam," i.e., loyal to the state (Bekkin 2020). In Russia, however, the situation is largely politically loaded as the Tatars, whose Islamic practice is seen as more moderate and low-profile, are contrasted with Muslims from the Caucasus, whose political opposition to the state is boosted by their Islamic faith (Aitamurto, 2019, p. 8).

Anti-Muslim racism is fed by bigotry and hostility against Muslims and Islam. It results in Muslims' social exclusion and discrimination based on actual or perceived religious identities. Meer and Modood (2010) use the concept of racialized religion, meaning that the discrimination against Muslims as a religious group is not merely based on faith assumptions but on a perceived membership of an ethnoreligious group. However, as shown above, the phenotypically white Tatar community has not been racialized in their "Muslimness" similarly to the (phenotypically white) Finnish converts. Hence, I argue that the Tatar community and their collective or individual identities as "Muslim" should not be considered a benchmark of Muslim life in Finland. The identities of the Tatar Muslims should be considered in their specific historical context, which is very different from that of the new ethnic Muslim community and even more of the convert community.

Convert Muslims often face social antagonism that manifests itself in questioning or denying their respective national-cultural identity, resulting in "losing their Whiteness" (Moosavi, 2015; Özyürek, 2015). For the context of this study, it follows that being esteemed, as understood in Honneth's terms, should mean the opportunity

of being valued as a fully participating member of society without having one's identity, or parts of it, degraded. The misrecognition, which I understand as part of the racialization process within anti-Muslim racism, is a "(…) denigration of individual forms of life and manners of belief as inferior or deficient" (Honneth, 1995, p. 134). In the next section, I will dwell on how Finnish Muslim converts experience racialization and anti-Muslim racism and how we can analyze these as forms of misrecognition.

6.4 Anti-Muslim Racism and the Misrecognition of Muslim Convert Identities

Finns are among many other Europeans who have been socialized with a collective memory of their civilization being marked by a w/White-Christian heritage, as I have argued in chapter four. In contrast, Islam and Muslims have been portrayed as the ultimate antithesis *par excellence* (Berger, 2014, p. 15). Without a doubt, most of the lay persons I speak with are oblivious to their precommitments based on the socially constructed idea about how Whiteness and Finnishness are connected. For the broader Finnish public, who have had little contact with Muslims, it seems still challenging to grasp Muslims as non-immigrants, non-foreigners, and as phenotypically "white." A report titled "Being Christian in Western Europe," published in 2018 (Pew Research Center, 2018), revealed diverse attitudes of Europeans towards religious minorities. Not surprisingly, after almost two centuries of globalization, international immigration, and the rise of multiculturalism, only roughly a third of Finns (PEW 2018) have had personal contact with a Muslim, as shown in Figure 2 below.

Majorities in nearly every country say they personally know atheists and Muslims, but fewer know Jews

% who say that they personally know someone who is ...

	Atheist	Muslim	Jewish
Austria	71%	62%	42%
Belgium	63	73	30
Denmark	57	68	33
Finland	63	35	19
France	81	79	55
Germany	74	67	39
Ireland	63	59	44
Italy	66	52	41
Netherlands	58	72	40
Norway	70	69	31
Portugal	52	31	18
Spain	73	60	18
Sweden	73	71	39
Switzerland	77	66	50
United Kingdom	76	71	55
MEDIAN	**70**	**67**	**39**

Figure 2 Finns' Personal Contact with Muslims

Despite the presence of Muslims in the country going back over two centuries, Islam has long been perceived in Finland as an "immigrant religion" and is associated mainly with People of Color (POC), such as Arabs and Somalis. Some researchers have explained this association by the Tatars' long-standing tendency to "blend in" to Finnish society so as not to draw attention to their religious background, as discussed in the previous section of this chapter. For instance, Jouni Suistola (1995, p. 731) argues that this has affected Finnish people's limited interaction with Islam. Hence, it could be concluded that the lack of contact has affected how the broader public dominantly perceives Muslims as (non-white) foreigners.

However, I maintain that such explanations are apologetic and do not correctly address the biased idea about normative Finnishness and Whiteness. I also argue that such explanations lead to a misrecognition of the racially/ethnically and culturally heterogeneous identities of Muslims living in Finland. It assumes that for the broader public to "recognize" a Muslim person, they would have to either be phenotypically recognizable "as Muslims," which already racializes Muslims. As discussed in the previous chapter, this bias has been socially constructed in the national narratives throughout the centuries at the cost of ethnic minorities who have been systematically

otherized, racialized, and forced into assimilation to build a homogenous Finnish nation.

Much of the homogenizing of the Muslim community occurs within the structural, cultural, and everyday anti-Muslim racism. It is also marked by misrecognizing the dynamic and varying identities in the Finnish Muslim community. Instead, Muslims are treated as homogenous entities with static, standardized religious and cultural identities. For instance, the juxtaposing of Tatars with all other Muslims homogenizes the latter and misrecognizes any possible identification variation as "Muslim" within the Tatar community. Thus, also the "Tatar way of Islam" is homogenized. In this thesis, I follow Nasar Meer's understanding that within the ethnically, linguistically, and religiously heterogeneous setting of European Muslim communities, Islam should be seen as an instructive part of one's identity, not a determining one in such a sense that no space for other identity layers is given (Meer, 2012, p. 189). According to his definition, the identity marker "Muslim" should be understood as a sociological category that leaves space for self-definition. This flexibility allows one's race, ethnicity, gender, and other identity markers, at the same time with the religious identity of a person shape their overall identity (Meer, 2012, pp. 189–190). This is also why I have pointed out in chapter five the problematic nature of the religionization of Muslim identities, which treat Muslims as having only one source of agency, i.e., their Islamic beliefs. In the next section, I will discuss how these different identity parts of the converts I interviewed interact.

I would argue that being *a Muslim* in Finland should welcome various identities and their expressions. The "Tatar way" should not be taken as the only reference point, risking misrecognizing all other valid identities in the larger Muslim community. For instance, the example from the interview with the young Tatar man Rahil above shows that if a person can talk about one's Muslimness or mobilize their Muslim identity to take part in societal debates while at the same time expressing distance to religious practice is proof that in the Finnish society, "Muslim" is a sociological category and not a religious one. Even though it entails spiritual components as an identity based on one's religious beliefs, and its expression should then be protected under Religious Freedoms, it is fused with many other layers of identities. By taking this premise seriously, the way forward is to analyze the discourse on Muslimness and Islam in

Finland by differentiating between externally imposed and self-ascribed identities and highlighting agency in self-definition.

As I will show through the interview material provided in this chapter and the next one, Finnish Muslim converts actively contest the racialization they experience and the stereotypes they are subjected to within the anti-Muslim racist discourse. Therefore, the concept of misrecognition is a valuable tool in analyzing their experiences of anti-Muslim racism since it "(…) calls for acknowledgment of difference and of what people genuinely feel they are, rather than being (mis)recognized as representatives of all-encompassing categorizations a subordinated status causing experiences of being less valued than other people" (Korkiamäki & Gilligan, 2020, p. 3). Following this premise, Islam is for Finnish convert Muslims, a spiritual component of their identity but does not determine their cultural belonging. Therefore, they can be Muslims while "staying Finnish," in contrast to the allegation that by converting to Islam, they would lose their Finnishness which is per se a misrecognition of their identity.

Finnish Muslim converts are racialized as part of a racial-religious group. They are categorized just in the same way as Muslims of color as the Other and attributed similar characteristics that are used to depict them as inferior in opposition to their non-Muslim fellow citizens. It is to be noted that the concept of "cultural traitor" is in the extreme and far-right nationalist ideology strongly connected to the preservation of the White race. The shooter of the Christchurch massacre wrote a manifesto titled "The Great Replacement," referring to the "Replacement theory," which as a conspiracy theory is adopted mainly by the Identitarian Movement as well as the alt-right across Europe. The theory claims that non-Western peoples are demographically and culturally replacing the indigenous (white) peoples in Europe. Muslim immigrants are currentlyingled out as the biggest scapegoat (Iftikhar, 2021; Walle, 2023).

Several right-wing parties in Europe have also adopted ideas about the Great Replacement. Hence, the ideology of a "white genocide" that scapegoats immigrants and Muslims has become mainstreamed and even, in some respects, normalized and politically acceptable. Examples of a "replacement rhetoric" can be observed, for instance, in several AfD campaign posters. However, for the shooter of Christchurch,

not only immigrant Muslims were a target, but also Muslim converts whom he especially despises. In his manifesto, he wrote about Muslim converts: “The only Muslim I truly hate is the convert, those from our people that turn their backs on their heritage, turn their backs on their cultures, turn their back on their traditions and became blood traitors to their race. These I hate.”

Today, Muslims in Finland are among the groups most targeted for hostility related to racial Othering. To describe this phenomenon, both Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism are widely used terms in international academic discussions. Farid Hafez (2018) categorizes Islamophobia studies according to three general theoretical approaches; prejudice-guided; post-colonial; and decolonial. The latter two strands of studies use *anti-Muslim racism* as their term of choice. At the same time, the former prefers *Islamophobia* (Hafez, 2018), a term that, according to Hedges (2021), manifests religious and racial prejudice. For those academics and activists like me, who prefer the term anti-Muslim racism, racialization plays a role in producing and reproducing racial categories and maintaining power structures in a post-colonial era (Abbasi, 2020). Therefore, in the context of this thesis in which Muslim converts are in focus, racialization explains why we can call out anti-Muslim sentiments as racism, even though *Muslims* are not a race. Instead, *Muslim* is a socially constructed category to which specific content is assigned by categorizing individuals in everyday interactions. To revisit my discussion on the terminological debates relating to Islamophobia and anti-Muslim racism in chapter three, I would, at this point, like to highlight understanding anti-Muslim racism as targeting, in this sense, the lifestyles and physical appearances of Muslim individuals. Importantly, because race is neither an extant biological reality nor a static ideological configuration, Goss and Hughey (Goss & Hughey, 2017, p. 1) point out that the process of racialization reflects the legitimation, rationalization, and justification for racism or the systematic, hierarchical, and unequal distribution of resources and unequal treatment of people once racialized.

White Muslim converts in Finland can be considered phenotypically the same as the majority non-Muslim population. Racializing a marginalized group to justify oppressive actions such as colonization and violence by another group with the same phenotypical features is nothing new. I already discussed the genocidal consequences

of the racialization of Bosniak Muslims in the 1990s. A further example would be the racialization of the Irish people during Ireland's colonization by the English (Garner, 2009). The case of Bosniak Muslims, however, is one of the most blatant manifestations of how the racialization process works in practice and the consequences it may have for society. Fundamentally, overlapping with the race traitor narrative employed generally about Western Muslim converts, the Bosniak Muslims were accused by Serbs of having betrayed their Christian faith by converting to Islam. However, the most explicit forms of this racialization are statements that define the adherence to Islam as a genetic deformation, which also were instrumentalized to justify the genocidal massacres (Karčić, n.d.).

The experiences of anti-Muslim racism by Finnish Muslim converts are racial and constitute a form of misrecognition. I will show in the next section that these misrecognition experiences occur in interactions with others, importantly, with members of the majority society. The construction of social categories and representations within these interactions is interdependent. The image of an ingroup, i.e., "Finns," is created by those counted as belonging to the ingroup. It is a representation of the image one has about oneself in contrast to any member of an outgroup, e.g., Muslims. Thus, misrecognition takes place when the dominant group, i.e., white non-Muslim Finns, defines the identity of Muslim converts as. On the one hand, they are considered non-white, based on the biased association of Islam only with POC, and on the other hand, as not belonging to the realm of what is understood as cultural and religious variables of "Finnish." Muslim converts in Finland then experience misrecognition of their identity as Finns insofar that they are externally categorized as racial and cultural Others, despite their own self-ascribed identity stating otherwise.

6.5 Narratives of Finnish Convert Muslims on Racialization

6.5.1 Racial and Cultural Others

The converts I interviewed for my Ph.D. research experienced that their social environment, family, friends, and even strangers defined their conversion to Islam as a step away from culture, if not a complete rejection of Finnishness. However, converts

to Islam have struggled with being out-grouped as "strangers" or "cultural outcasts" since the early times of Islam. Shaban (1979, p. 24) has pointed out that for converts of the Early Muslim Community (7th century C.E.), accepting Islam meant a loss or a repudiation of their social identities, and its consequence was "(…) cutting oneself off from the other activities of the community. Quraysh described such action as *saba'*, to change from one religion to another, implying that such a person had set himself up as an enemy of his people (…)." Studies that essentially serve as parallel studies to my research have also discovered that converts in Europe (Galonnier, 2015; Jensen, 2008; Moosavi, 2015; Özyürek, 2015), in the USA (McGinty, 2006), and in Australia (Alam, 2012) report how their change of religion affected society's perception of them. After their conversion, they experienced exclusion from the national-cultural community of "Us" and were even labeled "cultural traitors." In the Finnish context, even though the Finnish Muslim converts are natives of the country and of the Finnish culture, their "Finnishness" becomes questioned and contested as it is perceived to not correspond to the normative "White Finnishness."

Mira, one of my respondents, claimed that her mother was upset when she learned about her conversion to Islam. Surprisingly, she attempted to persuade Mira to convert to the Pentecostal Church as an alternative to Islam. Mira's account overlaps with Samira's experiences with her friends' reaction to her conversion, which I discussed in chapter three. Mira's experiences also show that the real issue had not been that she became religious but Islam itself, which echoes the problematic task that Muslim converts face when they must justify their decision to Islam. Finnish converts to Islam do not only have to struggle with being "religious" in a society in which religion hardly plays a role, but they must face the difficult task of justifying their choice of religion in an era of global Islamophobia. For instance, Brice's (2010) survey on British converts to Islam showed that 66 % of his respondents received adverse reactions to their conversion from their families. Mira thought about this and decided that her mother would have been "less embarrassed" if she had at least chosen a branch of Christianity rather than Islam. After Mira's conversion, Mira's mother first felt embarrassed to be seen with her daughter in public:

> Once I was on my way from school, in the subway, when my friend said that 'Hey, your mom is over there,' and I was just like, 'Yeah, let's keep a low profile now,' and she gave me that warning look like 'Dare you to come here…' (Mira)

While European Muslims in the 21st century must negotiate their respective national identities with that of their religious ones, the first Muslims who converted to Islam during Prophet Muhammad's lifetime came from a socio-cultural background that was bound by tribalism. The construction of an individual Muslim's identity shifted in the early Muslim communities from strict and exclusive tribal bonds to the universal bond of the Faith. Moreover, after the hijra of the community from Mecca to Medina, a new concept of belonging, that of the *ummah*, emerged (Hodgson, 1974). Thus, this same transit to a new ingroup occurs for converts today. Similarly, as Tariq Ramadan has noted, a person who makes the shahada and professes his faith in God and his last Messenger enters a community of believers who effectively agree on their shared identity based on this one utterance (Ramadan, 1999, p. 153). However, as I have previously introduced my understanding of "Muslim identity" as a sociological category, I would put a disclaimer on Ramadan's statement to avoid any static reproducing static identities. I thus maintain that this declaration of faith, as in its meaning of the words "Ashadu an laa ilaaha illallaah wa ashadu anna muhammadan rasul ullah" forms a common identity on the acknowledgment that there is only *one* God, and Muhammad *is* his messenger. This would be leaving out discussion on the diverse theological interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence and any "Muslim identity" constructed in intersection with ethnic, racial, gender, sexual, and other identities.

Nasar Meer's definition of Muslim identity as a sociological category instructing one's identity as a whole and leaving space for other identification supports the opposition expressed by Muslim converts to the misrecognition of their national identity. Mira's response to the claims that Muslims do not fit into Finnish society is particularly strong. Importantly she also notes the contradictions in the anti-Muslim racist discourse: on the one hand, while she is actively pursuing both her Finnish and Muslim identities, she is accused of having given up her Finnishness, which takes away her right to self-determination about her identity and voice. Muslims like herself are rejected and otherized both culturally and racially.

> This is my home country, and this is my only home country. I do not have anywhere else to go when they tell me to go where I came from. I am very much insulted by the fact that they are trying to take Finland and Finnishness away from me, even though the allegation always is that I would have abandoned them [Finland and Finnishness], and that is not the case. (Mira)

I will discuss in chapter seven in detail how Finnish Muslim convert women face stereotypes relating to the Orientalist framing of Muslim women as lacking agency and being oppressed by their male relatives. Still, it is necessary to emphasize that the meanings ascribed to "Finnishness" are mirrored in Mira's statement as being connected with the idea of Finnishness as a racial identity marked by w/Whiteness, and subsequently the racialization of Muslims as foreigners and racial Others. Earlier in this chapter, I argued how the Tatar Muslims, who are phenotypically white, still gain access to socially constructed Whiteness. This access is granted to them because their "Muslimness," as the majority society perceives, does not correspond to the "Muslimness" of the ethnic Muslim community. This shows how Islam and Muslims are racialized in the Finnish context.

Echoing the findings of Amina Amer's (2020) research on British white Muslim converts, Finnish Muslim converts whom I interviewed reported experiences of misrecognition of their cultural identity after conversion. Amer's interlocutors revealed the salience of Muslim converts being racialized as mostly South-Asian. The "Asian cultural identity" was projected onto Amer's interlocutors along with what was perceived as expectations to "act like an Asian" in terms of food and dress. However, Amer defines this as *nonrecognition* instead of *misrecognition*, denoting an active and conscious process of denying one's cultural background. At the same time, the latter would be rather an interaction or encounter in which a person's identity is misrecognized due to racialized or stereotyped assumptions of social identities (Amer, 2020, p. 7). Among my interlocutors, Hanna reflected upon a similar incident. When she told her family about her conversion, her grandmother asked her: "Why do you have to leave your culture?"

At this time, Hanna stated that while she had abandoned traditions associated with her former lifestyle, which Christianity and its traditions defined, she did not believe that her identity as a Finn had altered. She remarked on the significance of such occasions to Finns, noting that there was no longer much religious substance in such celebrations. Regardless, her grandmother's inquiry indicates a deep link between Christian identity and Finnishness as a cultural identity. Hanna believes her grandma meant this by "leaving the culture," as religion-based customs like celebrating Christmas have

become cultural. An example of this "culturalization" of Christianity in terms of "Finnishness" is offered by Teemu Taira (2019), who notes that the practice of singing the religious hymn "Suvivirsi" during the festivities at the end of every school year has been part of the civic education of a "unified culture." He further argues that this "unified culture" has formed a strong bond with Christianity which manifests itself, for instance, during important yearly events and dates where such hymns are sung. However, the singing of the hymn has, with other practices traditionally considered religious, as Taira argues, become part of the "Finnish culture and tradition." Thus, the underlying idea that Hanna would have to participate in these festivities and other practices to be considered a Finn demonstrates how the concept of "Finnishness" is connected to the normative religion of Christianity.

One of my male interlocutors, Lauri, also felt that his friends and family expected a conflict between his Finnish identity as well as his new religion:

> I've managed to connect them quite well ... many expected a bigger change from that ... what kind of Lauri will return from there ... it must have surprised quite a few that it's the same guy; he even looks the same. (Lauri)

Lauri had worn a *kufi* and a beard for the first two years, but he abandoned both when he started to feel that his religious identity was not something he would have to show to the outside. These expectations experienced by Lauri echo the findings of Amer (2020) on British Muslim converts who were expected to start "acting Asian" in terms of their attire and other daily habits. Since Islam is a racialized religion (Meer and Modood, 2010), one's outer appearance is expected to change to reflect this racial and cultural Otherness. However, it is also without a doubt that there is a gendered aspect of anti-Muslim racist stereotypes embedded within this statement. As a male Finnish convert, Lauri might still "pass" as Finnish with his "Western" clothes, fair skin tone, blonde hair, and blue eyes. This being said, Lauri's "invisibility" is more straight-forward than that of female converts who choose to wear the *hijab*.

Moreover, Lauri also mentioned how he thinks non-Muslims might easily mix a kufi with a small traditional crocheted Finnish summer hat ("mansikkahattu"). He went on to explain that even the beard he has cannot be taken as a visible feature of his Muslim identity since beards have instead been in fashion (as the so-called "hipster-beard")

during the last decade. Thus, he is aware of his "invisibility" as a male white Muslim convert in Finnish society, where his outer appearance does not stand out. Finally, he raised the issue of intersectionality in anti-Muslim racism and the fact that his "passing" as a Finn needs to be distinguished from the experiences of POC who identify as Muslims:

> Maybe it's because if I were dark-skinned, would it attract more attention? There are a lot of those Somali guys who get so much hatred. There's that thing with three aspects here; if you are from an immigrant background, you are dark-skinned and a Muslim, so I think they probably suffer the most. (Lauri)

Nevertheless, I reflected on Lauri's statements since I had seen some convert brothers in the streets of Helsinki, especially during *dawa*-events, being dressed more distinctly. Like the women who wear abayas and other long dresses customary for Muslim-majority countries in the Middle East, Lauri could wear men's clothes typical for the Muslim-majority cultures from Asia or the Middle East, such as the *shalwar-kameez*. In this regard, Abdulhakim Murad (2020, 208) has problematized the habit of European Muslims wearing clothing associated with "Islamic culture." He notes (ibid.) that these clothes are only a cultural aspect and that "A man walking the cold and rainy streets of Frankfurt in desert clothes is inviting all who see him to the (…) conclusion that the ways of Islam do not belong." Murad's statement could easily be interpreted as an attempt to blame Muslims, or even individuals who are perceived as such, for the hostility they receive since their Muslim identity is visible from their "exotic" dress style. However, I would instead assert that Murad argues for the flexibility that Islam gives for Muslims to dress in alignment with Islamic principles of what parts of the body need to be covered. This does not have to be, in terms of religious obligation, done by adapting traditional practices of Muslim communities of the Middle East, Africa, or Asia. Moreover, since these regions also display a variety of attire worn by Muslims, it only speaks for the universal nature of Islam and the flexibility of its practice according to '*urf*. I will discuss the role of 'urf in Finnish Muslim converts' strategies while negotiating their Finnish and Muslim identities later in this chapter.

Lauri's choice of wearing "Western" clothing and the expectations he experienced from his social environment shows how the putative "leaving one's culture" is based on stereotypical and racialized ideas of Muslims as outsiders of the Finnish culture.

Departing from Amer's (Amer, 2020) categorization of *nonrecognition*, I argue that experiences such as those of Hanna and Lauri should be regarded as *misrecognition.* I analyze them as racially grounded in the more extensive understanding of what being "Finnish" means regarding racial and cultural embodiment. Da Silva et al. (2022) have categorized such experiences as "membership misrecognition." This is to say that a person is not accepted as a group member because one aspect of their identity is seen as exclusionary, with other markers associated with the in-group identity. I opt for the concept of misrecognition because it emphasizes the role of one's religious identity in the interaction in which this misrecognition occurs. Nonrecognition would denote more of a permanent stripping off of one's identity. Still, with misrecognition, we can see how a person's different identity markers intersect in determining how a person is considered "Finnish" and create a fluidity of "Finnishness."

My interlocutors reported experiences of being misrecognized as an ethnic Finn by strangers in encounters that ranged from veiled remarks to explicit slurs. Noora, for example, informed me about an incident at her house. She and her Arab husband welcomed as guests her husband's football friend and wife. The teammate was a native Finn in Noora's high school class. However, Noora was shocked to learn that her old school classmate didn't know her name or face and instead merely asked, "Where are you from?" Noora believed that wearing a *hijab* significantly impacted the scenario since she felt for the first time that her Finnishness was misrecognized in such a manner. A similar case of a hidden remark was reported by Hanna, who had been working as a private language tutor for a little girl. When she, for the first time, went for the lessons at the little girl's home, she was not explicitly confronted by the girl's parents about her religious identity. Since she was wearing the *hijab*, she could not determine whether they recognized her as a Finnish convert or considered her a Muslim with a migratory background. But the girl's grandmother asked her:

> Have you been here in Finland for a long time already so that you have gotten used to this weather? (Hanna)

Generally, Muslim women whose religious identity is visible, for instance, by dress, are easily victimized to hate incidents (Zempi & Chakraborti, 2014). Susanna, for example, told me how she had several times been the target of hate speech and received slurs such as due to her *hijab*:

F*ing Somali, go back to where you came from! (Susanna)

It is to be noted that how the racial category "Muslim" is associated with a particular ethnicity differs from country to country. It is safe to argue that this is affected by the demographic profile of each respective Muslim community. In Finland, from the 1990s onwards, the community has been dominantly represented by refugees from Somalia and their descendants. This again supports the argument that "Muslim" as a sociological category is highly racialized in Finland. Even the long-standing presence of the Tatars in the country has not affected this racialization. Instead, the idea of a "Finnishized" Tatar community has even enforced the racialization of other Muslims. Comparatively, considering the large community of Muslims with a South-Asian background, Moosavi (2015) argues that in the UK, converts are associated with Pakistanis and are sometimes called by the highly derogatory term "Pakis." In Germany again, where the Muslim community is marked mainly by the history of Turkish guest workers, German women are often misrecognized as Turkish women (Özyürek, 2015). In the past, the skinhead movement primarily targeted the Somali community residing in Finland(Puuronen, 2001). However, the intersection of religion and race/ethnicity is important for recognizing the slur as a manifestation of anti-Muslim racism. It is at this point safe to argue that the racialized category "Muslim" associated with a Somali background marks the moment of racialization in this incident.

6.5.2 The Role of 'Urf in the Struggle for Recognition

In his seminal book, "To be a European Muslim" (1999), Tariq Ramadan discussed the sense of belonging and the identity of Muslims residing in Europe. He posed in the book relatively central questions such as what is the primary group identity of European Muslims; is the identity religious or cultural; or do they feel a connectedness to a European nation-state through their citizenship? While Tariq Ramadan's book addresses European Muslims as a critical self-reflection, this study does not aim to prove any priority of a particular identity layer over the others. Still, Nasar Meer's imperative to consider Islam an instructive part of a Muslim's identity holds its ground. Yet, within the anti-Muslim racist discourse, Muslim converts' cultural and national

belonging to their respective "homes," i.e., within the nation-states, is still contested. Similarly, Muslims with a migratory background are accused of being unable to comply with the values of their respective societies and having multiple loyalties (Kalin, 2011). These accusations pertain to issues of culture and politics relating to the country of their origin or that of their parents. These "wrong" loyalties are, in turn – particularly in the current political atmosphere marked by the War on Terror – translated into potential security threats, for which the online hate campaign against my person that I discussed in chapter three serves as an example.

Notably, Muslim converts would contest their racialization and respond to an experience of misrecognition by redefining what "Finnish" means to them personally. These identity negotiation strategies usually occur when a person perceives one identity as superordinate and another subordinate but wishes to receive simultaneous recognition for both (N. Hopkins, 2011). While contemplating on her grandmother's reaction to her conversion, Hanna said that changing her religion had not altered the way she saw herself as a member of society and that she still felt deeply rooted in her native land and its way of life:

> I am a very Finnish Muslim. I am a very patriotic person. I do feel that I belong here in Finland. (Hanna)

Hanna identifies herself here both as Finnish and Muslim, while the former identity marker specifies that the latter is the superordinate identity marker. Responses to these accusations are what Hopkins calls "inter-identity synergies" (N. Hopkins, 2011). Therein Muslim converts try to reconcile the alleged incompatibility of their different identity layers and find ways of being "Muslim in a Finnish way" or Finnish in a Muslim way." Previous empirical studies have highlighted other narratives regarding how converts perceive themselves as situated between their Muslim identity and the cultural identity they have been socialized in. In several studies, the accounts and opinions expressed by the interlocutors are, however, diverse. No specific general pattern to the attitudes of converts towards their identity has surfaced so far, even though research has been done globally from Australia (Stephenson, 2011) to Nigeria (Anthony, 2000) and Europe (Moosavi, 2012; Rogozen-Soltar, 2012). This shows the diversity in how Muslim converts approach the life changes they face after their

conversion. They speak for considering all Muslim identities as individually constructed and the space for each person's agency in self-definition.

In alignment with the argument on the dangers of misrecognizing Muslim consciousness (Meer 2015; 2012), we must thus also recognize thathere are various ways in which Muslims self-identify not only within the Muslim community but also within the convert community. This became clear during my fieldwork as my interlocutors' narratives regarding how they saw their identities as Finns and Muslims as hierarchically ordered or equal would vary. In this case, however, when the Muslim identity was experienced as superordinate, the narratives of my interlocutors emphasized it as only related to the religion itself and not mixed with the culture of any specific country or ethnicity:

> If you must use the word culture, Islam is my culture, which has Finnish influences. (…) from cultures, no matter what it is, you can take anything if it does not contradict Islam. If you think about Egyptian culture, which I am familiar with, there is a lot of superstition, which is completely haram. (...) it is our advantage, those of us who have returned, that there has been no Islam in our culture. (Mira)

For Mira, the word culture means the worldview and values encompassed in the Islamic tradition and how Islam is implemented in everyday life practices. However, it is interesting here how Mira refers to born Muslims and what she thinks of how they mix their respective national cultures with religion and turn certain practices that have not emerged from the dogma into religious ones. Other studies have also documented this kind of criticism by Muslim converts toward other Muslims. Often, converts tend to argue that in comparison to born Muslims, they are more "authentic" and able to practice Islam without "baggage" so that is not tinted by cultural manifestations, as they claim is done by ethnic Muslim groups (Özyürek, 2015; Rogozen-Soltar, 2012). Such an attitude would be a manifestation of what I have discussed as "convert exceptionalism" in chapter three.

However, when converts report about fusing cultural practices such as using a children's "Ramadan calendar" inspired by the Christmas calendar (Özyürek, 2015) or serving dishes and sweets traditional for a Danish Christmas table after *iftar* in Ramadan (Jensen, 2008) into their lives, and at the same time claim to practice a "non-cultural" Islam this should be considered critically by researchers. I have not seen these

critical analyses so far in my literature review. I would, thus, in this respect, highlight the importance of introducing the concept of *'urf* into the investigations of Muslim converts' Islamic practice. This would give space in the analysis to consider practices implemented from one's national culture and modified to comply with Islamic principles. In this regard, Abdulhakim Murad (Murad, 2020, pp. 208–209), a well-known British convert to Islam and a scholar at Cambridge Muslim College, criticizes the "mimetic aspect of ethnic inheritance" regarding Muslims of immigrant background. He argues that "(…) incorporating *urf*, local customary norms, into our lived Muslim experience, wherever and whenever this does not challenge a revealed requirement" (ibid.) is a solution for the many struggles of Muslim minorities in European societies. Thus, as Mira clearly states that her identity is influenced by her "Finnishness," I see her as considering the aspects of '*urf* in her life.

However, the Islamic concept of *'urf* is not to be confused with practicing religion in a manner that would be more "palatable" to non-Muslim society. It is rather about the flexibility of being Muslim in different geographical contexts without compromising one's religious identity or becoming an outcast. Like in Mira's comparison of her culture with Egyptian Muslims, Esra Özyürek (2015, p. 29) has argued that German converts consciously put effort into developing a German (convert) Muslim identity. This is so they would be recognized as separate from Arab or Turkish Muslims in their social environment and beyond. For Mira as well, her Finnish cultural background is meaningful in differentiating herself from born Muslims:

> It does not mean we would give up on our language or our [Finnish] culture. Yeah, alright, for me also, the Islamic identity comes first; I am always a Muslim in the first place, and only secondarily Finnish, a mother, and so on. My first culture is Islam, so to speak, but a good second place is given to Finnishness. That is, I am not an Arab. I am still Finnish, and that does not disappear anywhere. So, I am insulted when I am told that Muslims do not belong in Finland. (Mira)

This synergy of religious practice with a "cultural twist" so that it is more fitting to the local customs reflects the way how Muslim converts can understand Islam as a universal religion, suitable to be lived and practiced in all environments (Boz, 2012; Galonnier, 2015; Jensen, 2008; Özyürek, 2015; Rogozen-Soltar, 2012; Stephenson, 2011). This happens while simultaneously seeking cultural convergence, as discussed in chapter three. It allows for carving a unique space in the intersections of religious practice and *urf*. It follows, then, that since individuals from any ethnic or cultural

background may embrace the religion Islam, it offers opportunities to separate the spiritual identity from the cultural one. Hence, Muslim converts account for not feeling the need to dress in attire generally typical for a particular ethnic Muslim group.

Frequently, especially female converts, translate this into a wish to follow the fundamental idea of covering themselves with a *hijab*, yet in such a manner that is more customary in terms of general attire in the society they are living in. Miriam preferred to wear clothes sold in the regular clothing shops - instead of what we in Finnish would call "ethnic shops," i.e., shops that sell Islamic attire and other accessories for both men and women (often run by Somalis, Arabs, or Kurds). She mentioned these clothes as a better alternative as long as they cover what she considers is according to the rules of *hijab*. Miriam thinks that it is vital in her case that she doesn't use "ethnic" clothes that affect the public's reactions in terms of stares etc., towards her:

> I remember there were more reactions when I wore more *khimars*[41] and black *abayas*[42]. For once in the summer, it was hot, I had a black abaya on, and there was a group of girls…they must have thought that I didn't understand Finnish when they talked so loudly that 'Oh, I feel sorry for those [Muslim women]' (...) then I think people also were staring. It depends a lot on the clothes, what kind of clothes you wear and how you appear to others. And that's exactly all these abayas and these clothes from the Somali shops; since I'm not a Somali, I'm not an Arab, so I don't feel those clothes suit me. I prefer - it's just wonderful when you can find long clothes now [in other stores], so you can go shopping. (Miriam)

Like Miriam and Mira, Tiina reflected on how '*urf* is part of her identity as a Muslim. She had observed that many Muslim (convert) sisters adapt to the visible cultural elements of their foreign spouses, to what is generally understood as "Muslim culture" regarding cultural artifacts, food habits, and so on. She laughed when she remembered the day when she took her *shahada* in a house of a couple where the wife was a Finnish convert, and the husband was a foreigner, and they had no furniture, or only a little of it, such as pillows on the floor, that this was the way how "Muslims should live." When I asked her whether she felt that she was more Finnish or more Muslim:

> Primarily Muslim. It is always in everything I do; I think about it then from the point of view of Islam. And, of course, Finnishness affects me; I've noticed that when we've lived abroad, in England and Morocco, how our own culture affects us and how being Muslim doesn't mean we're made of the same wood after I have met Muslims from around the world. At some point,

[41] *Khimar* is a style of *hijab*; a larger one-piece scarf that covers usually the area from the top of the head to the wrists.
[42] *Abaya* is a long dress, inspired by the dressed worn by women in the Gulf, that covers the body from the neck to the ankles.

> perhaps when I was younger, I thought I must learn a new way of life, what food to eat, and how to decorate the house. I somehow thought that if I were a Muslim, I would have to have exotic things at home and oriental carpets and exotic curtains, and the children would have very exotic names. They have to look exotic, and the food has to be like this and that. Somehow, when I looked around, that's what it looked like. But then I married this Moroccan man who loves Marimekko and Scandinavian interior design. (Tiina)

I also asked her if she had had any situations to navigate between these two identities regarding possible conflicts of cultural practice (‘*urf*) and her religion (*din*). She told me how she had recently started to think about how, in the beginning, she had felt nostalgic about Christmas and Finnish festivals. Many converts she knew had difficulty accepting that they must abandon these cultural practices from their lives as they collide with Islamic beliefs. She then suddenly felt that she wanted to celebrate with her children the same things she had experienced in her childhood, traditions, food, etc. And she was surprised that this kind of stuff came to her mind now after so many years. She had started to miss those traditions and feel sad in a certain way. Her solution was incorporating a traditional Finnish Christmas dessert (*sekametelisoppa*) into her Ramadan menu. She described this dish as well-suited for the occasion since it is made of dried fruits such as dates, a significant part of every Iftar meal.

6.5.3 Counter-Narrative: Values as a Commonality

Tiina’s and Miriam’s strategies of cultural convergence relate to the material manifestations of a culture, which can be applied in the realm of ‘*urf*, but another common narrative among the converts is to refer to the convergence between Islamic values and the values of the culture of origin. Several interlocutors associated Finnishness with certain values, such as respect and love for nature. This stands in stark contrast again with research findings on young Muslims with a migratory background, for whom, for instance, heavy drinking of alcohol is dominantly representative of the Finnish culture, so much so that if their peers adopt these habits, they would be considered as “converting to a Finn” (Pauha & Jasinskaja-Lahti, 2013). This is the case for female converts, particularly in terms of family values, following traditional gender roles, and focusing more on community life rather than individualism.

Convert American women interviewed by Anway accounted that Islamic values overlap with “traditional American values” (Anway, 2002, p. 151). Some of the most

interesting accounts have been those from the Stephenson (2011) study among indigenous Australian converts. His interlocutors find Islam, its values, and practices almost as a continuation of their indigenous culture as they find similarities in practices, values, and beliefs with which they identify more than those influenced by Christianity. Thus, Christianity represents for them a white-washing project of Indigenous people that aims at creating a rupture from traditional ways of life. I would hence argue that conversion to Islam is, for these indigenous people, a form of empowerment and decolonization of their spiritual identity.

The converts' attitude towards Islamic values and practices is hence, on the one hand, a convergence that allows space for universalism and does not attempt to uniformize. Highlighting the commonalities between one's national and religious groups is a common strategy in asserting one's belonging, especially to the former, when this membership is externally misrecognized, and one is seeking recognition (Hopkins, 2011, p. 259). For instance, Hanna thought Islamic values and behavior codes were very compatible with life in Finland. She gave an example of the Islamic imperative of being friendly to neighbors. She then concluded that hostility towards Islam does not have to do with such aspects of the religion. Still, it is more about the visibleness of faith in the public space that creates negative attitudes. When I asked Tiina how she partners her Finnish background with her Muslim identity, she emphasized commonalities in behavioral patterns and fundamental values:

> Finnish culture overlaps in many aspects with Islam. For instance, the imperative of respecting other people and giving space. Yes, that kind of Finnish shyness is, perhaps, in my opinion, the kind that suits Islam. Maybe it's that kind of - I don't like to say that Finns are honest. It creates an image that others would not - but more like that Finnish way of standing behind what one says and promises, that kind of Finnish punctuality and sticking to what has been agreed upon. (Tiina)

However, my interlocutors also emphasized the possibility of differences in practice when respecting Finnish traditions or the '*urf* and still complying with Islamic beliefs. Here, the recognition is sought for the multiple ways of being a member or a national group:

> Well, for example, I truly appreciate these Finnish values, which are related to honesty, nature, the love of the forest and everything like that ..., which are kind of self-evident to us Finns, but maybe not as much self-evident abroad. I feel that I can be both a Finn and a Muslim. For example, someone might want to wear one of the Finnish national costumes but adds a headscarf to it. Somehow, Islam gives space to the fact that you can practice your own culture, but then by the rules of Islam, according to Islam. (Minna)

These examples show how one's value for society is denigrated on several levels. My findings correspond with Axel Honneth's third realm of mutual recognition (social esteem), which is fulfilled if individuals are not denigrated but given a chance to experience themselves being recognized according to their abilities and the degree of their value for society. Examples such as the above show how the racialization of Muslims presents a form of misrecognition that "(…) robs the subject in the question of every opportunity to attribute social values to their abilities (Honneth, 1995, p. 134). I will explore the experiences of misrecognition and racialization in the professional realm more in the next chapter.

By drawing an analogy with historical racism and racialization in Finland from the previous chapter, I have, in this chapter, argued how the conceptual tool of racialization could be used to analyze Finnish converts' experiences of anti-Muslim racism. Identifying racialization and understanding Islamophobia as anti-Muslim racism in studying Finnish convert Muslims' experiences creates a space for conversations about "race" to move beyond the Black/White paradigm. The examples from my interlocutor's accounts pinpoint the porous boundaries of Finnishness and Whiteness as it is produced and reproduced in narratives of "Us" and "Them." It also allows us to investigate the fluctuating meanings given to "Finnishness" As the interviews show, Muslim converts instead see it as an instructive part of their identities, just like they see Islam. Thus, both can be used as agency sources in their everyday lives. In the next chapter, I will delve deeper into the concept of agency as it is central to Muslim convert women's narratives about their conversion stories. Part of today's anti-Muslim racist discourse is the stereotype of Muslim women as oppressed, following old Orientalist framings. I will show how these stereotypes are manifested in the Finnish political rhetoric and the so-called "Muslim Question." I will give examples from my interlocutors' narratives on how they reflect on the alleged lack of agency in their conversion and their being as Muslim women. At the same time, these experiences simultaneously have put them into a condition of a Du Boisian double consciousness.

CHAPTER VII

ANTI-MUSLIM RACISM AND GENDER: AGENCY, VOICE, AND DOUBLE CONSCIOUSNESS

7.1 Introduction

"So, tell me about your conversion. Are you a Muslim because of your husband?" I have heard this question a myriad of times. Once people have accepted that a white Finnish girl from a non-Muslim family is a Muslim, the attention is shifted from the how's of my background to its why's. I am not saying that this question as such is not legitimate. While it is true that I was married to a Muslim during my conversion, the marriage was dysfunctional and ended in a divorce. Thus, when I was, after the divorce, able to say that I was *still* a Muslim, I felt empowered to confirm to those who had doubted my motivations behind the conversion. While he had prompted my interest in Islam, I had also gone through six months of research and conversations with female converts whom I knew from the local mosque before my shahada. I knew, however, that my decision would be questioned, and my conversion could become a source of conflict between me and those around me. I remember stressing about how people would think that I had converted because of pressure and being "brainwashed," which was a usual stereotype about female converts that I had come across. I remember going through conversations in my head where I pretended to argue against someone and going through different scenarios where I was being convinced against becoming a Muslim. However, there was always a voice that gave me a logical answer about the Islamic principles relating to God's existence.

Having had the genuineness of my conversion doubted by many, I have been conscious of how Muslim women are viewed through a dominant anti-Muslim racist lens as oppressed, without a voice about their matters. Followingly female Muslim converts are seen as having been coerced by their foreign Muslim husbands into Islam. For sure, my then-husband was the catalyst for my conversion. By all honesty, he was the first Muslim with whom I had conversations about religion and God. However, at the same

time, he was not the *reason* for my conversion. The reason for my conversion was the conviction I gained after discovering Islam and its tenets. The first thing that the questions such as the one above implies are assumptions of me as a convert Muslim woman who became a Muslim because her husband wanted it. This also implies that there had to be a husband to bring me to it as if I could not come up with the idea and a will to convert to Islam without a strong influence of a "male authority." For me, such questions undermine the agency I had during my conversion process.

To critically discuss this gendered stereotype that finds resonance in anti-Muslim racist discourse, I will in this chapter offer some insights into how the stereotypical image of Muslim women as "oppressed" came to be as an instrument of Orientalist ideology colonial strategies. I see the anti-Muslim racist stereotypes about Muslim women and how they are imposed on female converts as one manifestation of the racialization of minorities in Finnish society for political purposes in the past and today. As I have established in chapter three, converts are often treated within a cultural and racial divergence discourse. As their religious identity becomes racialized, they lose their "Finnishness," for which I provided examples in the previous chapter. In this chapter, I will continue to discuss these examples of othering with the concept of agency. I will discuss how the agency is experienced by female Muslim converts in the moment of conversion and during the time following this life change when they "out" themselves as Muslims and present their new religious identity to their friends, family, and society at large. As I will show, Muslim converts are very conscious of the stereotype of an "oppressed woman" and offer counter-narratives about their conversion process as an intellectual journey.

Moreover, as the narratives will show, the stereotype of an oppressed woman and culturally deviant from Finnish society is also reflected in how the female converts perform their identities as Muslim women in public. I will argue that the narratives of the converts I interviewed can be analyzed as manifestations of Du Boisian double-consciousness, which is a reaction to the anti-Muslim racist discourse that imposes a stigma on them they seek to counter. This chapter aims to show how gendered stereotypes in anti-Muslim racism hold power in denying recognition to Finnish female converts as they are excluded from social esteem due to the stigma. I thus aim

to connect the following discussion to my argument about anti-Muslim racism as a form of misrecognition.

7.2 Orientalism in Finnish Anti-Muslim Racism: Constructing the "Oppressed Muslim Woman"

7.2.1 The Colonial Being of Finnish Female Converts

I was standing in a pound shop in the center of Karlsruhe city in Germany. It must have been a relatively warm day because the shop doors were wide open. It was only about five meters from where I stood to the busy street outside the shop. I was there to kill some time before meeting a friend and was amusing myself with cheap fake jewelry pieces. As I tried one ring on my finger, I suddenly heard someone yell at me, "Yeah, you must be trying that on because they forced you to marriage!" I glanced toward where the voice had come and saw a middle-aged white German lady staring at me from the street with this furious impression on her face. She shook her head and paced away, perplexing me about what had happened. I looked around to see if anyone had witnessed the incident, but everyone else in the shop seemed to go about their own business. Afterward, when I met my friend, I told her what had happened. We laughed at the woman's behavior, brushing it off as "one more amongst many" instances that a stranger had felt entitled to express their anxiety about Muslims and Islam in such a manner. A possible bad mental state could have explained her outburst, or maybe she was drunk, someone would say, and thus I should not take it personally. But it reflected how she saw the constructed stereotypical Muslim woman in me, and I could not help but feel attacked. I would not subscribe to the stereotype. However, it was more how she expressed herself so violently in public, putting me into the spotlight and leaving me there as she walked away from the stage, most probably satisfied that she had been able to say what she wanted. I wondered whether it would have made a difference to me if she had stayed, and I had had a chance to challenge her words and to "talk back"; would she have apologized and realized that her behavior had been rude? Would I have had the possibility to change her mind about Muslim women by opening a "civilized" conversation? I doubt it.

It was not the first time that I had become a target of verbal abuse in a public place; as I wear the *hijab*, I am easily recognizable as a Muslim, which increases the chance of me becoming victimized by anti-Muslim racist hate (Chakraborti & Zempi, 2012). Every time I have been left analyzing the situation and looking at myself through the lens of the Other. On the one hand, in retrospect, I know that in this situation, there was no reason for me to take it personally; what she saw in me was not me *as a person.* Instead, for her, I was the embodiment of religion that she holds accountable for women's oppression, and thus she essentialized my being to the veil (Allen, 2015, p. 297). This was enough for her to see me as a legitimate object of her anti-Muslim racist anxieties. However, on the other hand, when we get reduced to the stereotypes people have about us, we feel immobile in our society. We do not function fully, the denigrated image of ourselves, which we are fully aware of, affects how we walk, talk, and dress because we wish for others to see that the stereotype is not who we are. Thus, we pay the price of the "veil" of double consciousness, which stands between us and the rest of society, hindering the recognition of our true human selves (Itzigsohn & Brown, 2015, p. 238).

Stereotypes as manifestations of gendered forms of anti-Muslim racism emerged in the 19th and late 20th centuries. The imperative to fight repressive traditions of Islam towards women, who are stereotypically depicted as being under the influence of their male relatives, and the patriarchy of "Muslim culture" has its roots in the colonial era. As Leila Ahmed (1992, p. 150) has argued, in service of colonial domination, the issue of women was added to the existing narrative about Muslim societies as backward, uncivilized, and inferior compared to the civilized, cultured, and enlightened Europe. In the center of Ahmed's argument stands essentially the contradictory way in which advocates of the colonial measures applied an apparent feminist language while treating the question of Muslim women. As she explains (L. Ahmed, 1992, p. 151), Lord Cromer and other Empire agents would oppose women's suffrage while they were in England, but they "caught the language of feminism and redirected it, in the service of colonialism, onto Other men and the cultures of Other men."

The colonial legacy of Orientalism as a discourse, as outlined by Said (1979), is thus observable in the anti-Muslim racist discourses today. While Orientalism was an ideology behind colonial governance, it differs from today's anti-Muslim racism as

cultural racism within state systems that govern minorities within their borders. Since my study focuses on Finnish Muslim converts, I find it necessary to explain the connection of colonialism to my subject of inquiry. Critiques might, at this point, note that as part of the white majority in a country that never colonized Muslim lands, Finnish Muslim converts are not to be equated with POC Muslims with a migratory background in former European colonies. However, as I have noted previously, my approach to studying anti-Muslim racism in Finland is inspired by the decolonial approach to Islamophobia studies, as outlined by Hafez (2018). As I discussed in the previous chapters, racialization affects Muslim converts so that their religious identity is used to racialize them to become the same cultural and spatial Other as POC-born Muslims.

The key word for my current investigation regarding the gendered forms of anti-Muslim racism and how its manifestations in Finnish society are mirrored in Finnish converts' narratives is *coloniality*. Keskinen, Mkwesha, and Seikkula (2021, p. 49) defined coloniality as a global system of power whose fundaments were laid during the colonial period and still affects how the world is divided according to the perpetual economic, cultural, and intellectual hierarchies. However, Abbasi (2020) has criticized the lack of consideration of coloniality in decolonial literature. Similarly, a knowledge gap exists in Finnish academia. The most recent seminal work addressing race, power, and coloniality in Finland (Keskinen, Seikkula, et al., 2021) has no chapters or discussions relating to Muslims. Muslims are barely mentioned except as a sidenote concerning ethnic profiling, which in Himanen's chapter (2021) is studied from the perspective of "securitization of immigration."[43] While differences in the experience remain, such as the "losing one's Whiteness," as I discussed in the previous chapter, it is the same Orientalist imagery, in particular of Muslim women, that characterizes today the "colonial being" (Abbasi, 2020) or "colonial condition" (Brayson, 2019) of Muslim women in European contexts, be they POC or white converts. In this regard, my research aims to contribute to breaking thinking structures about Muslim women and, consequently, Muslim convert women that are Eurocentric due to the legacy of colonial thinking.

[43] It should be mentioned however, that Markus Himanen co-authored a chapter on ethnic profiling problematizing its connection to institutional Islamophobia in another recent publication which solely concentrates on Muslim life in Finland. For more information, See Himanen and Creutz (2022).

I discussed the historical continuum for the emergence of the Muslim enemy already in part in chapter five and how it was connected to the invocations of whiteness as a superior race within the construction of European Christian identity. While early Islam posed a theological problem for the Byzantines and became a military threat after the conquest of Jerusalem, the situation was reversed in the Iberian Peninsula, where only after the military conquest of al-Andalus the mass conversions pose a religious challenge (Orakzai, 2016, p. 120). However, images produced of Muslims and Islam during the Crusades also informed the instrumentalization of what Arias has coined "latent Islamophobia" (2016, pp. 87–88). As I have noted in chapter five, while Jews and Muslims were constructed as the Other from the Middle Ages and onward, the conception of "race" played a central role as a signifier of culture while within the emergence of cultural racism, the (white) Christian identity became to embody the norm of *civilization*. An essential aspect in understanding anti-Muslim racism as an ideology that draws from Orientalist framings is thus the transformation of the Muslim enemy from a religious one to a civilizational one. Orakzai (2016, p. 124) has, in this regard, pointed out the Orientalist knowledge production, which constructed, on the one hand, hostile attitudes towards Islam and the prophet Muhammed but also positioned Muslims "near the bottom of the European ladder of civilization."

Europe's self-described role as the highest morale of civilization also gave birth to the long-standing "unveiling" of Muslim women as part of the Western mission to civilize Muslims in the colonized lands. Muslim women became thus a focus in the production of hostile attitudes and governance measures as part of what Norbert Elias (2000, p. 43) has called a civilizing process, wherein "(…) nations came to see themselves as bearers of an existing or finished civilization to others as standard-bearers of expanding civilization." During this process, the feminity of Muslim women under the veil became the target of Western desire (Thobani, 2022). This reflects the idea of women as child-bearers being central to the progress of a civilization which was during the colonial rule spread by missionary women who shared the Orientalist views about Muslim women, as Leila Ahmed (1992, p. 154) argues:

> One [missionary] wrote that Muslim women needed to be rescued by their Christian sisters from the 'ignorance and degradation' in which they existed and converted to Christianity. (…) a Muslim wife, 'buried alive behind the veil,' was regarded as 'prisoner and slave rather than

> companion and helpmeet.' One missionary openly advocated targeting women, because women molded children.

In this section, I have argued for constructing a specific imaginary about Muslim women as oppressed and lacking agency within the Orientalist discourse underlying colonial measures. In the next section, I will delve into the manifestations of these constructed forms of gendered anti-Muslim racism as a discursive tool in the so-called "Muslim Question" that informs the political and public debates on Islam in European nations today. While colonial measures targeted the colonized far-away lands and the subjects therein, I want to recall the concept of *domophilia* (Ahmad, 2013) concerning the nation-making of European nations as culturally bound "homes." The anti-Muslim racist discourse and the political measures drawing from it are thus now more spatially bound when the alleged "oppression of Muslim women" is juxtaposed with national and regional values. Headscarf bans can, as such, be considered modern forms of the colonial "unveiling" of Muslim women. As I will show by the example of arguments for legally banning forms of Islamic dress in Finland, the "Muslim Question" in Finnish debates frequently refers to the agency and freedom of Muslim women similarly to colonial rhetoric.

7.2.2 The (Veiled) Muslim Woman and The "Muslim Question" in Finland

The image of an oppressed Muslim woman stuck in Islamic patriarchy has been constructed throughout history, from the imperial politics of European colonial powers to modern-day political and public debates. The role played by Orientalism and colonialism was explained in the previous section. Still, in terms of more recent political dynamics between "the West" and "the Orient," gendered aspects of anti-Muslim racism can be in part traced to arguments made by the U.S. author Bernard Lewis (A. Ahmed, 2020, p. 251). Lewis explained the roots of the "Muslim rage" towards the West are partly embedded in the threat that the "Muslim world" felt it was facing regarding women's emancipation through the influence of Western culture or values. Followingly it can be said that, for Lewis, whose ideas have been together with Samuel Huntington's thesis on "Clash of Civilizations" for constructing the idea of incompatibility of Islam and the "West," Muslim life and Islam were marked by female oppression with women's rights being alien to what Western world claims to represent. Consequently, I argue that the image of a "Muslim woman in need of saving" (Abu-

Lughod, 2013; Kumar, 2012) defines the *being* of Muslim women in modern European societies by positioning them into the center of the so-called "Muslim Question," which is characterized by Salman Sayyid (2014b, p. 3) as:

> (…) a series of interrogations and speculations in which Islam and/or Muslims exist as a difficulty that needs to be addressed. Thus, the Muslim question is a mode of inquiry that opens a space for interventions: cultural, governmental, and epistemological. The Muslim question encompasses the difficulties associated with the emergence of a distinct political identity that appears to be transgressive of the norms, conventions and structures that underpin the contemporary world.

While the "Muslim Question" concerns the governance of Islam and Muslims at large, in recent years, the global War on Terror and the discourse on the threat of terrorism at home used by politicians and media have produced gendered forms of anti-Muslim racism. As argued by van den Brandt (2019, p. 287), the interventions constructed by the "Muslim Question" are justified by presumed difficulties in adjusting to liberal and secular societies and have recently shifted to dealing with Islam and Muslims as a security problem. For instance, the smear campaign against me did not only consist of hateful speech against my person, describing me as "brainwashed" and as a "convert fanatic." It also resulted in a false accusation of terrorism after someone gave a "warning" about me as a potential suicide bomber to the Turkish embassy in Helsinki. I was forced to spend one Sunday interrogated by the Police Counter Terrorism Department in Istanbul. Of course, I was cleared of any accusations. I remember, though, how the police officer in Istanbul's anti-terrorism department explained to me, in a slightly apologetic manner, that they would have to take all reports on potential terrorists seriously since so many European Muslims were traveling through Türkiye to join the ISIS.

As I was depicted by my "haters" as the usual terrorist suspect, the "convert fanatic," the global anti-Muslim racist discourse intertwined here with the domestic security politics of a country where I had so far lived as one Muslim citizen amongst many others. The securitization lens through which Muslims and Islam are viewed mainly in the post-9/11 era depicts Muslim women as vulnerable to "grooming," i.e., to become targets of recruiters working with terrorist organizations. Leonie B. Jackson's (2021) scrutinized analysis of media representation of British "jihadi brides" shows, in this regard, how Muslim women are presented in a binary position of, on the one

hand, a security threat to the nation but also, on the other hand, following an Orientalist frame of the "damsel in distress." The gendered forms of anti-Muslim racism and stereotypes are present in these depictions. Muslim women lack agency, autonomy, and responsibility for self-governance due to their "Muslim femineity," which is seen as their inherent character for their "Muslimness."

Most frequently, though, as in Finland, the interventions invoked by the "Muslim Question" are connected to the Islamic veil, claiming the necessity of governance measures regarding its regulation in the public sphere, such as the so-called *hijab* bans. Even though statistically, during the past years, immigrants to Finland who have submitted citizenship applications have usually been from Russia, until Iraqis started to submit more applications in 2020 (Finnish Immigration Service, 2022). Martikainen (2013, p. 10) has also noted that even though most immigrants to Finland have been Christians, the demographic change and the visibility of Islam in the public sphere have put Muslims into the spotlight along with challenges to the governance of minority rights (Sakaranaho, 2010, p. 230). The headscarf as a sartorial practice of Muslim women has become one of the most disputed manifestations of the visible Muslim presence in Finland and European societies. In the public discourse, it is often negatively associated with conceptions about Islam's inherent inclination towards terrorism, violence, backwardness, and fundamentalism (Bullock 2002), and it has been made the definite symbol of women's oppression; a piece of cloth that is being forced upon the women by their male relatives (Amir-Moazimi, 2007; Bullock, 2002). This was thus also the stereotyped image mirrored in the German woman's behavior towards me outside the pound shop when she saw me as someone who had been forced into marriage and lacking any agency in deciding, as an adult, about the matters of my own life.

Since the headscarf is at the center of public debates and policy-making that concentrate on Muslim integration, the narratives tend to picture the headscarf as a hindrance to Muslim women's integration in Finland and a general disturbance to public peace (Keskinen, 2014, p. 62). In this sense, the "Muslim Question" can be said to be "gendered" (van den Brandt, 2019). This is reflected in the fact that it is not just that the headscarf should be removed from the alleged secular public sphere. Still, these governance measures are also seen by many politicians in their argumentation as

a necessity to fight against the oppression of Muslim women and thus to "save them" from the oppressive Islamic tradition by which they are alleged to be imprisoned. An example is a statement by the chairwoman of the Finns Party, Riikka Purra, during the 2021 political debates regarding the possibility of Muslim women being allowed to wear a scarf as part of their uniform in the Finnish army. She argued against this legislative proposal by the Greens. She claimed that the headscarf is an "instrument for women's oppression" and that "Men and women living according to the Islamic belief are not in any aspect equal if we are to understand equality as it is usually understood in the Western countries."[44]

When the headscarf as a religious practice visible in the public space is otherized, it reflects in a more general sense those values that the Finnish society wants to claim to be presenting. These are values upon which the members of society might construct their social identities, implying that this practice is not one of them. As Martikainen and Tiilikainen (2014, p. 10) have argued, Islam and Islamic practices are frequently spotlighted when speaking of national unity. Similarly, Bilge (2010, p. 10) describes the alienation of veiled Muslim women as "civilizational boundary-drawing ventures." I argue thus that, ultimately, the issue of the veil reflects the question of who can be part of Finnish society and what does Finnish society mean in its visible and invisible cultural aspects? This also overlaps with Ahmad's concept of *domophilia* and the trajectory of anti-Muslim hostility developing from a purely religious threat image into a civilizational project, as I explained above. I have also received negative responses to my conversion from my friends, who claimed I would have given up my "freedoms by becoming Muslim." The prejudice holds that as a covered Muslim woman, I would be restricted from certain areas of a "good life" due to my headscarf, which would hinder me from enjoying a free life. Spoliar and Van den Brandt (2021) have analyzed documentaries about converted women, in which the converts are juxtaposed with "free" Western, non-Muslim women who can wear "what they want." However, my friends and many others overlook that my headscarf is no obstacle to anything I would cherish in my active lifestyle. Instead, legal restrictions on my religious freedom, regarding where I am allowed to wear the headscarf, are such an obstacle.

[44] https://www.iltalehti.fi/politiikka/a/1e90a0ff-14be-4d2a-81fc-e4127f9a1635

While there have been no general bans on Islamic dress in Finland[45], there have been numerous attempts to pass such bills. During the 2018 presidential elections, the Finns Party candidate, Laura Huhtasaari, stated in her campaign that she would advocate for a blanket face veil ban in Finland[46]. She argued that "Women of the Nordic countries are free," and while she claimed that the face veil was in no way a free choice of a woman, in her view, true freedom would be when she "as a woman from a Nordic country, can decide in the morning whether to wear a pair of jeans or a skirt." For van den Brandt (2019, p. 288), this depiction of Muslim women as "essentially 'different' from so-called Western culture and society is what constitutes the "Muslim Question."

Moreover, the emphasis on Huhtasaari's construction of her identity as inherently bound in cultural and geographical terms (Nordic – non-Muslim – free) implies a rejection of the identities of any Muslim woman living in Finland or other Nordic countries as belonging to the same cultural group, i.e., "free Nordic women." Instead, it racializes Muslim women as the Other who belong to another geography and not within the civilizational boundaries that Huhtasaari claims to dominate by claiming her cultural identity as a "Nordic woman." Thus, such alienation of Muslim bodies from the nation represents, according to Bracke and Hernandéz Aguilar (2020, 16), the "Muslim Question" as a demographic and biopolitical issue. I thus contend that it is an issue of inclusion and preserving an imagined ethnic-cultural homogeneity of the nation, of the *domos*.

In attempting to "save Muslim women" with legislative bans on religious clothing, the agency is a central argument in political debates on Muslim girls and women in Finland. In 2013 and 2016, the MP Vesa-Matti Saarakkala from the True Finns Party argued in his legislative proposals on face veil bans, which both failed, that they were necessary "because there were reasonable grounds to believe that Muslim women in Finland or elsewhere in Europe in principle do not wear the face veil out of their own will." The True Finns Party is amongst many other currently solid right-wing parties in Europe, who frequently, in their anti-immigration agendas, refer to the questions of women's rights, women's autonomy, and freedom of choice while making a case

[45] As reported by the Open Society Foundation[45], over 20 EU countries have already been affected by legal discussions regarding banning the headscarf in its one form or the other.
[46] https://www.facebook.com/watch/live/?ref=watch_permalink&v=1422726727855461

against Islam and argue for its incompatibility with the respective national cultures (Akkerman, 2015, p. 40). However, European Muslim women's experiences regarding their choices regarding wearing the headscarf do not mirror these arguments by politicians. It has been established that Muslim women choose, for instance, to cover themselves according to the rules they find to be descriptive of a pious Islamic dress, be it the face veil (Moors, 2014) or the headscarf (Abu-Lughod, 2013), even if their families were against their decision. I would thus argue that in European contexts, they debunk two stereotypes at once; firstly, they lack agency due to the oppressive Islamic tradition, and secondly, they are oppressed by their husbands, fathers, brothers, or any male relatives.

In the post-colonial era, Muslim women are still impacted by coloniality in terms of how this power knowledge once produced dominates in today's politics, informing the "Muslim Question" as what I would see being the legacy of colonialist governance. Being a Muslim in Europe and Finland means always being considered "the monolithic Other" within a narrative of an inculcated difference between "us and them" (Sofos & Tsagarousianou, 2013, p. 52). While the headscarf debates, which stand at the center of the "Muslim Question," and the Muslim convert women choosing to veil can reflect the role of Islam in Finnish society and Europe (Valenta, 2006, p. 457), they embed stereotypical presentations of Muslim women based on gendered forms of anti-Muslim racism. When the headscarf is considered the symbol of oppression, the image is translated to encompass all Muslim women's bodies – often carrying the headscarf – as oppressed. Conversion to Islam also implies that these women become oppressed. The conversion itself is seen as leaving one's freedom and rights, as these are associated with non-Muslim, "Nordic," or "Western" women and lacking agency.

The imperative for "unveiling" Muslim women as a part of a civilizing process allegedly grants Muslim women their agency back and thus reduces the agency of Muslim women to the mere sartorial practice of veiling. Apart from the fact that such narratives disregard any possible forms of oppression that Muslim women experience as *women*, as well as in intersectional aspects of discrimination based on gender, social class, or ethnicity, it also means that any agency claimed by Muslim women which draws from a moral framework is disregarded as a legitimate moral choice. Bracke (2008, p. 63), following Saba Mahmood's (2005) discussion of pious agency, has

pointed out the importance of critically regarding secular theories. She claims that for their epistemological bias, such theories cannot, or willfully do not, consider subjectivity driven by a person's desire to submit to God.

While this desire for a divine authority can be the source of Muslim women's agency in wearing the headscarf as an act of resistance to dominating stereotypes about what a veiled woman "can be and can do" (Shaker et al., 2022; Wagner et al., 2012; Zempi, 2016) it also represents their efforts to seek social esteem and recognition for the value invested in their difference (Fraser, 2000). I would argue, however, that investigations into the impact of Orientalist framings about Muslim women as oppressed by the anti-Muslim racist discourse today should go beyond the practice of *hijab*. Instead, to disclose the misrecognition of other decisions based on one's agency, such investigations should start from the ontological understanding of Islamic femineity. For female converts in Finland and elsewhere, the claims of the lacking agency are manifested in how their conversion to Islam is seen as an act of oppression and coercion. This claim is based on the idea that a woman can't consciously choose a religion stigmatized as oppressive. Notably, Thobani (2022, p. 25) has argued that any such "colonial invocation of an abject Islamic 'femineity'" should be considered as such and not as an "innate Muslim 'femineity.'" Considering Thobani's argument, I argue that what follows in the next section is yet another manifestation of how Finnish female Muslim converts are affected by coloniality without ever being subjects of colonization *per se*.

I will argue in the next section how choosing a religion or being *religious* and *practicing* in a pluralistic society with a market of options is an act of agency. As Muslims *qua* Muslims, Finnish female converts face not only the same otherization as their POC sisters in faith. Still, they are also regarded as "cultural traitors," as I have argued. In framing female Muslim converts as cultural traitors, the concept of agency comes in a very different light. At the same time, the life changes the converts seek are seen as not fitting into the cultural environment of their native societies. The "leaving of one's own culture behind and taking someone else's" (Özyürek, 2015, p. 27) implies the general stereotype of female Muslim converts being directed by their spouses and converting *for* them. As the agency is widely understood as humans' capacity to make choices and act in the world, I will, in the next section, look closer

into how it is coupled with the decision to convert to Islam. I will also discuss how Finnish female converts reflect their agency in their narratives as they counter the stereotype of female oppression in Islam.

7.3 Narratives of Finnish Muslim Converts on Conversion and Agency

7.3.1 "This is What I Have been Longing and Looking for in my Life."

Conversion to Islam in European contexts is not a new phenomenon. Ever since Islam and Muslim empires started to spread their political and economic influence and power from the Arabian Peninsula towards Italy and Spain, and later from the early Ottoman lands towards the Balkans, becoming Muslim was, in many aspects, regarded as a practical decision. In these contexts, the decision-making process had been influenced by circumstances in which "becoming Muslim" brought more significant socio-economic advantages than keeping one's "born" religion, Christianity. The conversion would mean financial benefits such as avoiding poll taxes or receiving high positions in administration and better trade partnerships with Muslims (Berger, 2014; Hodgson, 1974). However, today, conversion to Islam can barely be seen to be framed by similar trajectories, and becoming Muslim, especially for women, brings with it rather social disadvantages.

If being a Muslim is hardly considered an advantage in today's European societies, it begs why anybody would willfully want to give up their privileged position in society. The conversion would also subjugate them to experiences of anti-Muslim racism. If we consider the act of conversion as a type of moral choice (Taylor, 2007), the motivations for this decision are marked by an interest in the Islamic faith, its value system, and theology. Reasons for religious conversions have been studied within the psychology of religion. Lofland and Skonovd (1981, pp. 376–377) have identified six conversion motifs in their seminal work: "intellectual," "mystical," "experimental," "affectional," "revivalist," and "coercive." They furthermore characterized the motifs depending on how much social pressure each entail. In my interviews with Finnish Muslim converts, I found the intellectual motif as the only one among my interlocutors in their narratives on how they discovered Islam. Lofland and Skonovd (ibid.) describe an agentive act of conversion in which there is no pressure from the convert's social

environment. The convert goes through a period of research and reflection in search of "truth, community, identity, salvation, etc." However, the narratives of my interlocutors varied in how they developed an interest in Islam, as some had been inspired by their friends, by their husbands or started the research without knowing any practicing Muslims.

For the Finnish female converts to Islam, the search for truth was the case for many who considered themselves religious but who were not satisfied with the religious dogma of their "born religion" and found Islam after searching for a religion that would reflect their worldview. An example of my interlocutors would be Samira, who already had trouble understanding the concept of the Holy Trinity as a young girl. As she told me, she went to Sunday school but found herself criticizing the Christian teachings, which made no sense to her, so she challenged the Sunday School priest about them. Yet, despite her critical stance towards Christianity, she perceived herself to be a spiritual person, and she was constantly in touch with religion through her grandmother as well who was a very religious person:

> I had the seed of faith and all that closeness to God, but I just didn't understand the doctrine of the Trinity; it doesn't fit. It's never been my thing at any point. I have actually always thought that there is only one God; nothing else can exist but one God. (Samira)

She then told me the story of how she, as an adult, had been traveling in Spain but, for some reason, felt drawn to visit the Muslim-majority country on the other side of Gibraltar, Morocco. But she had never seen it, as her then non-Muslim and Finnish husband was somewhat hostile towards Muslim cultures, and her kids were not interested, so she let it go. However, after her divorce, she was finally able to go with a friend, and she explained to me how she was drawn by the *adhan*, which gave her shivers. During her short visit, she met her future husband, who was a local, and as she expressed her "hunger" for knowledge about Islam, he told her to take it easy. Also, he was not very well able to give her the answers she needed. So, after her return to Finland, as she had developed a curiosity and will to learn about Islam, she contacted another Finnish convert woman and was invited to an *iftar* meal. She told me about her trust issues with searching for knowledge on the internet and that she had already been thinking about where to find the information she would need.

I see her proactiveness in getting in touch with others who could help her gain knowledge as an agentive act, as it also emphasizes her consciousness about gaining knowledge. She would evaluate the *right* kind to help intellectually discover Islam as a religion. As she described, the other woman was "able to ask the right questions," i.e., about Samira's God-image, which stimulated Samira's self-reflection. After that encounter, it was easy for her to continue exploring the religion more in-depth.

> But I did not have that epiphany before I started dismantling my conception of God when we talked about it, and then I realized that I've always thought like this. (...) After that, everything felt very natural, and everything seemed very simple. (Samira)

The intellectual and conscious, goal-driven approach to conversion has been neglected in some researchers' descriptions of conversion trajectories to Islam. Allievi (2002), for instance, describes the intellectual trajectory initiated by a random encounter with Islamic textual resources, such as receiving the Qur'an as a gift from someone, which according to him, functions as a prompt for the individual to research further. However, Samira's curiosity for the religion and the feeling of needing to get acquainted with the country that, at the time for her, presented a reference to the Muslim world finds no resonance in Allievi's description. Importantly, as I have previously mentioned my conversion, I now, as a Muslim, see my path to Islam as a manifestation of divine destiny, *qadr*. There was a specific path that God had chosen for me to give me the *hidaya*, His guidance. Samira felt this *hidaya* in a very spiritual way. She mentioned that before she visited Morocco, she started to have dreams that she interpreted to be "someone trying to talk to me from above with a loud voice," referring to God's guidance. In her dreams, she was always in a traffic circle, but even though she was in a foreign environment where she did not understand the language or the traffic signs, she ended up helping the others to get through the traffic.

The stereotype mentioned above of female Muslim converts being directed by their spouses in the decision to convert and finally converting *for* their spouses is an extension of the stereotypical Muslim woman lacking agency and being oppressed by the Islamic tradition. Another female convert, whose narrative reflected an intellectual motif, was Tiina, who converted two weeks after turning eighteen and was neither married nor in a relationship with a Muslim man. Like Samira, she perceived herself as a spiritual person before her conversion. She had always been enchanted by the

Sacred and wanted to belong to religion even though she was from an atheist family. She was a bookworm who was always very interested in cultures and beliefs and was attracted to Muslim cultures because of their religious practices. In high school, she started reading books about Islam written by non-Muslims but then changed to books written by Muslim authors. She also consulted a Finnish website by two other Muslim convert women from Finland. Through the website, she got into contact with the other female converts. They took her to the mosque, and she started to learn about Islam in a manner that satisfied her thirst for answers:

> And somehow, it started to get like that. The interest just grew, and the knowledge increased, and then just when I learned what everything in Islam is about, when before I had just focused on things like the *hijab* and things like that, and then when I read just, for example...I was impressed when I read about all the prophets and that a messenger had been sent to all nations. It was like that for me. In a way, I felt like the pieces started to fall into place, or everything made sense in the way that I had always thought that if only one religion is the only and right one, then how could you know it, and why would God have made it so that only one is right and wouldn't have told everyone about it. Then when I read about those prophets, I realized that God has always told [us] and sent a messenger to all nations. At that point, I felt that this was what I had been longing and looking for. (Tiina)

Before my conversion, I had also previously been interested in religion, although our family had less to do with practicing. But somehow, religion and the concept of God had always appealed to me. In my childhood, I owned a beautiful children's bible with animated stories and would sometimes pray in the evenings. Being religious, however, was to me like one of those Hop-on-Hop-off tourist buses, and I never made my relationship with God steady, and we never spoke about it in the family. I did not even get confirmed in my 16th year of life. I thought all the materialism surrounding this sacred ritual had ruined its meaning. All my friends who had been confirmed only babbled about the presents they would get, and no one talked about the spiritual aspects of the different confirmation camps that the youth spent their summer vacations on. And in any case, I wanted to instead spend my summer vacations at our summer house with my grandparents.

After I had turned 18 and was thus legally an "adult," I could officially unregister myself as a member of the Church. It was an easy procedure, only a few clicks on the WWW, and it was done. I could no longer be officially considered a godmother to newborn babies during their baptism, nor could I marry in a church or get a religious burial. Having arrived in my 20s, none of those things mattered to me. However, amidst my busy student life, I remember that now and then, I googled different

religions such as Buddhism and even Wiccanism. One of my old classmates had turned to paganism in high school and told me about her new spiritual life. The latter felt close to my values because the relationship to nature was much appreciated in Wicca practices. Still, neither of those two appealed to me strongly enough. Moreover, I could not fully grasp the Wiccan beliefs' concept of spirits and deities, so I let it go.

Until I got married and got to know a Muslim person for the first time, anything I knew about Islam was only based on orientalist accounts from books such as “Princess” by Jean P. Sasson. My belief in Jesus’ role as the son of God had already crumbled. However, I remember having mentioned in conversations that “I would never reject his existence and all the wonderful things he did for humankind; I just don’t believe he was a son of God, or God himself.” So, after hearing from the Islamic creed and *tawhid*, about Jesus’ position as a Prophet and a Messenger of God and Muhammad’s role as the last Messenger, I wanted to learn more. It slowly became more evident that Islam answered all my spiritual needs.

However, the path to conversion is sometimes also marked by an intellectual discovery despite a person being non-religious. This was the case with Noora, who converted to Islam after living abroad. She had been keen to explore other lifestyles than her usual one in Finland, so she spent some time in England before visiting Jordan with her husband. In Jordan, she remembered seeing how people visited the mosque, and she heard the *adhan* for the first time. For her, the change of environment, seeing the multicultural life in England, and finally, the everyday religious practice in a Muslim majority society in Jordan made a difference in how she perceived Islam. As she put it, “It opened her eyes.” She recalls that she developed a serious interest in Islam when she noticed in the example of her husband how a greater power, such as God, can motivate people to action. She remembered one night in Jordan, having woken up and seen her husband praying the early morning prayers, *fajr*. She was impressed by how something could move a man to get out of bed, do his prayers, and then go back to sleep. She had not been spiritual before, but at that point, she felt something divine must be behind this motivation, so she investigated its reasons further. Even though she had studied Islam before visiting Jordan, seeing Islam practiced in everyday life made a difference in her decision to convert.

Mira was also non-religious and talked about her family background as an "atheist." Even though she did have Muslim friends who were children of Muslim immigrant parents, she was against religion and thought that religious people were, as she called them, "wackos." Despite her atheist background, she went to be baptized and attended the obligatory summer program because her Christian friends did so. However, she officially left the Church when she was 16. Like Noora, Mira was also impressed by how Islam impacted the values and lifestyle of the people around her; she felt that Muslims took their faith more seriously and respected a certain ethical behavior. Thus, she asked her friends questions about religion and asked for books to read. She was given a booklet on Qur'an and Science, which she was impressed by and prompted to read more. Slowly, Islam started to make sense to her, and finally, after she read about Jesus' role in Islam as a Prophet and a Messenger, she found it more rational than the concept of the Holy Trinity. After about one year of researching Islam and confirming that the Islamic God image complies with her understanding of science, she was convinced about the religion's suitability for her:

> It was the first religion I could really understand...if I hadn't been introduced to Islam, I would still be an atheist. (Mira)

Indeed, for many female Muslim converts, the path of choosing Islam is a conscious choice that includes weighing the religion and its tenets as meaningful for one's values. Some converts have hence argued that Islam is an answer to many pathologies of non-Islamic societies in the West, for instance, those of materialism and capitalism (Kaiser, 2018; Rogozen-Soltar, 2012; Stephenson, 2011). Islam is a solution that focuses on life, swaying away from destructive "false Gods" as the religious practice functions as an orientation in a world without none (E. King, 2017; Köse, 1999). Karin van Nieuwkerk (2008) has analyzed conversion as a rational choice and stressed female Dutch converts as active agents going for the "sensible bet," treating Islam as the best choice amongst many regarding how it responds to their spiritual demands.

7.3.2 "Men Come, And Men Go, But God Is and Remains."

In Finland, individuals are not bound to a State religion since Freedom of Religion is granted to every citizen. However, just as other "Western" converts to Islam, they struggle with the social consequences of their conversion. While female Muslim

converts in the early days of the *umma*, the community of Believers struggled with issues related to their conversion, jeopardizing their socio-economic status within the patriarchal norms of 7th-century Arabia (Simonsohn, 2020). The contemporary cultural issues regarding female Muslim converts' new religious identity are not as connected to patronage as such. However, the "male authority" still exists in the external narratives and gendered forms of Islamophobic stereotypes. The conversion of "Western" non-Muslim women to Islam is often seen through the lens of a stereotypical image of a Muslim woman who is oppressed and without agency under the influence of her male relatives. In the case of conversion, this would be her "foreign Muslim husband." The salience of these stereotypes was described to me by Minna, who, during her conversion period, was married to a Muslim man:

> Well, it is pretty much meat and potatoes that you always first get the question whether your husband is a foreigner, and in the case that they already know, they ask whether he has forced you to [convert] or something like that. It feels like everyone I ask about this. They have had similar experiences with folks asking about the husband. (Minna)

Another interlocutor, Hanna, experienced similar stereotypes about conversion being connected to a marriage with a Muslim man. While she was researching Islam and still in the process of thinking about converting, she asked her mother what she would think about such a decision. Her mother's reaction was an immediate rejection, and it was clear that she would not be happy with Hanna becoming Muslim. However, she said that one of her friends supported her greatly and recognized, as Hanna explained, that the idea to convert was "coming from me." After she finally converted, she did not tell her mother immediately but did so only after a couple of months, just before the month of Ramadan, because she also wanted to start wearing the headscarf;

> It went down really badly. She was like, 'Why?!' and said I had let myself be brainwashed. But she was worried because she had a friend who had at some point converted to Islam because of her husband and then, after divorce, again abandoned Islam, after which the ex-husband's family started to harass her. (Hanna)

Hanna's mother's reaction reflects well the idea that female Muslim converts do not make decisions out of their moral agency. Hence, their conversion motif would not be intellectual but coercive, as outlined by Lofland and Skonovd. Even though, at first glance, the example of Hanna's mother's friend confirms the stereotype that women convert for the sake of their husbands, it is difficult to make any conclusions about the woman's motivations without further knowledge of the circumstances. Drawing from

the concept of pious agency, Ansor and Amri (2016) have argued that women who convert either to Catholicism or to Islam for their marriage commit to their new religion out of a genuine belief in its tenets. They report that the women only see a change in the form of worship while perceiving the idea of God as staying the same. The authors emphasize the commitment because of the legal restrictions on inter-faith marriages in the Indonesian Aceh region, obliging either spouse to choose the other one's religion. However, I do not know how pious Hanna's mother's friend was in her life. Thus, I cannot say whether her conversion was a moral choice. Nor can I define whether her "abandoning Islam" was motivated by pious reasons such as no longer agreeing with religious ideas.

Yet, the significance of this quote lies in Hanna's mother's worry over her daughter because, by default, she does not believe that Hanna made her choice out of genuine belief in the religion but has been "brainwashed." Thus, should Hanna divorce her Muslim spouse, her mother expects her to bear the same consequences as her friend. This is to say that the mother expected her daughter to abandon the religion as soon as the husband would not be anymore in the picture. Samira, too was confronted by her Muslim friends about the possibility of a divorce and the question, "What then?" But she has a solid sense of how Islam is part and parcel of her identity, and so she regards her spirituality to be separate from her husband's "Muslimness":

> Faith and men don't go hand in hand for me like that, and they don't cancel each other out (...) A few sisters also asked, 'What if XYZ leaves?'. I said that men come, and men go, but God is and remains. (Samira)

The women's intellectual conversion journey often starts without any inspiration from a significant Muslim, be it a husband or a friend, as I have shown in the interview excerpts above. While Tiina, who converted after turning 18, was not even in a close relationship with a Muslim man during her intellectual exploration of Islam, an influential male figure was also missing during Miriam's conversion period. She converted at 25 years of age after she got in touch with Islam through the Ahmadiyya Translation of the Qur'an, which she found among her mother's books. While she only read the Qur'an halfway through, she complemented her investigation of Islam with several discussions with her Moroccan co-worker. After taking her shahada, she did not tell her mother or anyone else except the co-worker. Karin van Nieuwkerk (2004)

has demonstrated how relatives of Dutch female converts perceived the new Muslimas as subordinate and submissive to their spouses, utterly contradictory to how the women described themselves. As van Nieuwkerk (2004, p. 241) puts it: "Regardless of the converts' behavior, the Dutch environment will interpret [it] as submissive because they are Muslim now." The core idea in the reported narratives in van Nieuwkerk's research is the alleged imposed identity as oppressed women, while the Muslimas' self-perception was the opposite. It was a similar situation for Miriam. Even though she had been during that time in a relationship with a Bosniak man (Muslim from Bosnia and Herzegovina), she did not consider him to have had any influence on her conversion as he was not particularly religious. Afterward, Miriam ended up breaking up her relationship with him as she wished to live a life of a practicing Muslim, and the man's lifestyle did not match Miriam's ideas of a good life. Only later would she marry her future husband:

> I probably never told my family, 'Hey, I'm a Muslim now.' After all, my father is quite anti-religious, so it took a while, and probably for a long time, everyone thought it was because of my husband and everything. And I didn't meet him until a year after I became a Muslim. (Miriam)

Miriam's example shows that women can choose Islam independently without being influenced by a "foreign Muslim spouse." Furthermore, their conversion might even negatively affect their romantic relationships as the women might consider their significant other, in *their lack of religiosity*, a hindrance to their lifestyle as practicing Muslims. This is important to consider while discussing the agency of Muslim convert women regarding their moral choices. Miriam told me how before taking her *shahada*, she had felt that she believed in the Qur'an and was ready to decide about converting based on that belief. She then gradually started to live as a Muslim and practice and implement changes in her lifestyle. Still, as her lifestyle changed, she did not wish to continue the relationship with the Muslim man because his lack of Islamic practice no longer fit her ideas of how she wanted to live.

Another female convert, Minna, told about her intellectual journey to the discovery of Islam during her marriage with her Muslim husband, while in the beginning remaining Evangelic-Lutheran herself. While her husband had no issues with her not being a Muslim, Minna stated that she knew little about Islam except what she had been taught in school. Consequently, she started to research Islam first without telling her husband.

Google brought her to a Finnish website discussing Islam and Muslim life in Finland. There, she found basic information and felt that much of Islam's theological aspects overlapped with Christianity, including recognizing Jesus and Moses as prophets of God. However, she also learned the Islamic teaching of God's Oneness and that prophets are only humans. Despite her history as an active churchgoer, this concept sat well with her as she had never fully understood the idea of the Trinity. She researched further details about fasting and other religious practices. After a research period, Minna felt like she had an epiphany and became more and more convinced about Islam. When she communicated her thoughts about conversion with her husband, he was stunned and was worried that she would be doing it for his sake, to which she had answered:

> Well, I am not doing it because of you, silly. It has been alright that I have been Christian, but I actually want to be a Muslim. (Minna)

Her husband, however, seemed to need some time to adjust and internalize the change in Minna's spirituality. Minna analyzed this as him being conscious of her conversion's implications regarding how others perceive his role in the process. Thus, Minna, admitting to the possibility of some female converts not being genuinely committed to the religion, thought that her husband did not want the reality to be twisted in her case:

> And my husband, like I felt that he did not want to be like my teacher because then it can affect […] I don't know. I felt like he thought I saw it somehow as an obligation to be a Muslim. I told him from the start that 'you are not affecting this in any way. You are a nice add-on to this because I have someone to ask about Islam, ha-ha, just kidding. Maybe he wanted that I would find my way by myself. Well, it is true that some [women] only convert because of their husbands, so I kind of also understand where my husband was coming from. (Minna)

In her interview, Minna emphasized how she had informed herself about Islam from literary sources and by listening to lectures on YouTube. She said she usually gets very involved with a topic she is interested in and dwells on it entirely. This seemed to be an essential factor in her biography as it confirmed that she did not convert without knowing what she would face regarding religious teachings and practices. She also pointed out the lack of influence in her decision to convert from her husband's side and in her further intellectual journey of learning to "be a Muslim." She said she did not need to depend on him to learn about Islam. She could independently "find her way."

A third female convert, Susanna, started thinking actively about religion when she was baptized, which is traditionally done for Finnish Evangelic-Lutheran teenagers when they are 16 years old. Like Minna, Susanna also had trouble internalizing the concept of the Trinity, which they discussed during the pre-baptism classes. Thus, she started informing herself about other religions, such as Hinduism and Judaism, in search of a better fit for her God-image. In this "search for truth," Susanna also read about Islam which caught her interest and made her want to gain more knowledge of its tenets. When she was 19, she traveled to Egypt and married an Egyptian Muslim man. While in Egypt, she recalls feeling very much at peace when she heard the call to prayers from the mosques, which echoes the experience of Samira in Morocco. However, Susanna did not dare to declare her faith yet because she thought she would have to start wearing the scarf immediately after becoming a Muslim. She did not believe she was ready to take that step. But Susanna continued her quest for knowledge and told me that she continuously asked her husband about Islam. Finally, after she had returned to Finland, she took the *shahada* online via Skype with her two friends and an imam present.

Nevertheless, although her immediate family had supported her decision and her mother responded to her choice to wear the scarf by telling her to do what makes her happy, Susanna too had to experience becoming the embodiment of an abject Islamic femineity. She told me about a time when she was interviewed by a Finnish daily about being Muslim in Finland. The interview's online version was open for public comments filled with hate speech. She recalled that the statements were about claiming her to be an oppressed woman.

> So, I would not be the first to describe myself as an oppressed woman. But yeah, those comments are quite basic, like 'you are so oppressed' and 'it is clear that this comes from the mouth of an oppressed woman,' and you know things like this. I find them a bit funny because I would say Islam is a good religion for women, and I see that it gives me a lot of rights, and fundamentally, religion ensures my rights already, and I do not have to do anything to gain them. There is still always some man who says, 'Here we go, an oppressed woman. You have been forced to say this'. (Susanna)

At this point, I want to highlight the agentive choices during Susanna's conversion journey and careful moral consideration of what ramifications converting to Islam would bring for her everyday life. Thus, I see a manifestation of a pious agency (Mahmood, 2005) in how she navigated her conversion until she felt completely ready

to commit to the obligations she saw embedded in her desire to submit to God. Thus, a further important aspect of gendered anti-Muslim racism and the concept of agency is present in Susanna's account about how Muslim women are seen not only as oppressed but also as mouthpieces of their oppressors. This is also clear in the comment about her having been "forced to" present Islam in a positive light, insinuating that *because of* her oppression, Susanna can only say this.

In the next section, I will discuss how these stereotypes that impose a stigma on Muslims are reflected in Finnish Muslim converts' self-presentation. I will investigate their narratives reflecting these stereotypes that influence their behavior as they attempt to resist this racialization while being "trapped" in what I argue corresponds to the Du Boisian concept of double consciousness. The following discussion will further contribute to understanding anti-Muslim racism as a form of misrecognition and exclusion from social esteem. At the same time, the condition of double consciousness is defined by the colonial legacy of Orientalist claims of Muslim women's oppression.

7.3.3 Stigma and Double-Consciousness "Behind The Veil"

I was sitting in the Helsinki subway on my way home from one of the interviews I had conducted as part of my thesis research. It was late in the evening, one of the weekdays, and the subway was empty. In fact, it was just another woman sitting opposite me in our compartment. As it is common in Finland's public transportation, there is no reason to talk to your fellow passengers. Chatting with strangers is just not what we do. However, for the first few minutes of our ride, I wondered whether she would be one of those angry middle-aged women who might want to express her entitled opinion about my Muslimness, my scarf, or any other issues she might have with my personal choices. This had happened before in similar situations where I would find myself alone with an older woman at a bus stop, ending up answering accusations about being a terrorist and worshipper of the Devil. However, the woman in the subway remained silent and seemed unconcerned about me. I felt funny for being so self-conscious and tried to continue minding my own business. As we entered a tunnel, we suddenly heard a loud explosion, a kind of sound, and the subway lights went out. This glitch lasted only two seconds, and I reflexively resorted to loudly shouting, "Bismillah!" The

second I did it, and the next second the lights came back on, I immediately regretted my reaction. The woman across the aisle looked at me with an impression on her face, of which I was unsure whether it was fear or surprise. So, my heart still pounding, with my hand on my chest, I smiled at her faintly, chuckled, and mumbled something about the jump scare we had both got. We continued to sit silently for the rest of the journey, but there was an added awkwardness this time.

I have often thought about this incident and joked about it with my friends. I used to say how I felt bad for the "poor woman"; how she might have, in that second, seen her life ending on that lonely subway ride, becoming a victim of an Islamist terrorist attack, and ending up in the headlines for a week. The fear of such attacks was, at the time, freshly brewed in Finnish society; just a couple of months before, a self-claimed ISIS terrorist had in the bright daylight stabbed two to death and injured eight on the market square in the city of Turku. Thus, all eyes were on Muslims while our community organizations had written several statements distancing ourselves from such acts of violence. Indeed, my invocation of God's name at the second of the explosion sound was not making things any better for the woman. The awkwardness that lasted for the rest of our subway ride was thus marked by me glancing now and then nervously at her to see if she was giving me stares. At the same time, I tried to assure myself that she had registered me also getting scared, so any suspicion towards me would not be logical.

As I later, in retrospect, processed the incident, I figured that the words I had uttered had just been the cherry on top. My visible Muslimness marked my presence in the situation, and I would not have been able to change the fact that I was the person who carried the stigma and suspicion as a perpetrator that has been cast upon Muslims by securitizing Islam and Muslim identities. However, the more I thought about what happened and the fact that I afterward consciously tried to minimize the effect of my words by presenting myself as an equal potential victim, that *I* got scared *as well*, has led me to change my perspective. Now, I feel for myself instead of the "poor woman." I realize that my reactions in the situation paired up with the current socio-political circumstances dictated the double consciousness I had come to inhibit as part of a racialized community and a Muslim woman. I was thus conditioned to see myself in interaction with others through their eyes, continuously asking myself how a non-

Muslim would interpret what had happened and how they would see *me* in that situation. The incident in the subway was one of the times when I was conscious of others' gazes and tried to navigate the situation in a manner that would challenge the dominant perceptions that I assumed they had about me. Possibly, there have been many other times that I have acted so without even noticing my entrapment in my double consciousness. However, I will never know whether the woman ever saw a threat in me or just another fellow passenger with whom she shared a moment of a scare.

In line with other studies on Muslim women in European contexts (Chapman 2016; Ryan, Kofman, and Aaron 2011), my interviews with Finnish Muslim converts suggest that their experiences of anti-Muslim racism and the stereotype of an "oppressed Muslim woman" affect how these converts strive to assert their belonging to their native society. An individual's self-image is based mainly on their "reflexive activity of self-categorization" related to the various group memberships they subscribe to (Stets & Burke, 2000, pp. 225–226). However, it is not only relevant how an individual perceives themselves as a member of an in-group but also how one's in-group is compared against an out-group, responding to the question of *who we are* and *who we are not*. The self-presentations of Muslim convert women in the Finnish context I will discuss below are how they fight against the stigmatization of Muslim women as alien bodies to their respective communities and the exclusion from the collective "Us."

Having established one of the prominent arguments of this thesis being that Orientalist framings remain in present-day anti-Muslim racism and the "Muslim Question" in Finland, the women I interviewed responded to the stereotype about Muslim women as "oppressed" and lacking agency differently. For instance, Mira, who told me about her reactions to verbal harassment in public, expressed her frustration in her struggle to receive recognition as someone with agency:

> As a Muslim woman, you must prove that you are not oppressed, which is ridiculous. But I have noticed that the other person has become speechless if I haven't become upset but given some smart answer. They have even run away from the situation. (...) The basic idea is that we are weak, spineless, have low self-esteem, and are poor women' (...) I'm so annoyed that I must prove to myself that I have my will, good self-esteem, and so on. (Mira)

Mira describes the condition of double consciousness in Du Boisian terms. It is through double consciousness through the power of stereotypes on Muslim women and the effects of practical anti-Muslim racism in Finnish society come to light and Muslims as a racialized community are hindered from having their full humanity recognized (Dickson D., 1992; Itzigsohn & Brown, 2015). W.E.B. DuBois coined the term in 1903 in his seminal work, "Souls of Black Folk." In it, he problematized the perpetual condition that Black Americans were experiencing as a racialized community:

> (…) the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness: an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two un-reconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn. (Du Bois, 2007, p. 7)

Translated into the context of this thesis, borrowing from Itzigsohn and Brown's (2015, pp. 235–241) analysis of DuBois' reflections regarding the double consciousness of Black Americans, I argue that the lived experience of Muslim convert women is conditioned by the "veil" which structures the perception of the world both for them and the non-Muslim others. In anti-Muslim racism, the stereotypes about Muslim women as oppressed, lacking agency, irritational, and so forth are projected onto this "veil" by the racializing subjects, i.e., the non-Muslim Finnish society. While society only sees the reality defined by what is projected onto the "veil," the double-consciousness of Muslim women implies that they must contend with these stereotypes and process them in their self-formation. The sense of two-ness results when Muslim women internalize the implications the stereotypes have on their identity and take the position of the two different worlds, one marked by their Muslim identity and the other characterized by Finnishness. Notably, the contours of the latter have been defined by the "veil" as well, actively excluding Muslim subjects from it. However, as the Muslim identity is racialized by the anti-Muslim racist discourse and Muslim women are depicted as alien bodies to the Finnish society, Muslim women use their second sight in their attempts to neutralize this effect of the "veil" by striving for recognition.

As Mira describes in the above quote the effects of the "veil" regarding the "basic ideas" about Muslim women, her sense of two-ness is manifested in her consciousness about needing to prove herself to others and challenge these conceptions constantly.

Her strategies of challenging the idea of "poor women" by talking back in the case of verbal harassment constitute her second sight in the attempts to neutralize the effect of the "veil" and strive for recognition as "not oppressed." This second sight, as a coping strategy to a threatened social identity, sometimes manifests in what Tajfel and Turner (1979) have identified as attempts to "pass" as a member of a social group considered socially higher in status. In the context of this study, this is the collective non-racialized Finnish "Us." To reject the stigma of racialization and disassociation from the threatened group membership, Muslim convert women like Miriam would sometimes wear the turban as a style of her head covering. This modification of her dress would function as a strategy to "pass" and go "unnoticed."

> Well, I did not wear it [turban] that often (…), but I have felt that people do not necessarily assume that you are a Muslim because other women wear turbans as well. But then again, it disturbs me; why I would hide my Muslim identity. It is a little bit difficult. I believe that it depends on whether you are directly visible that they are like, 'Aha, she is a Muslim.' (Miriam)

As I discussed earlier in this chapter, the Islamic veil has been reduced to signify the oppression of women. Followingly, the Muslim woman wearing the veil becomes an embodiment of that oppression. Nasar Meer (2019, p. 52) has argued in this regard that the double consciousness is predicated on a relationship of domination; it is in the refusal of the Finnish society to acknowledge the humanity of Muslim women, which produces a sense of alienation. To lift the "veil" by modifying it, Muslim women strive to respond to this sense of alienation and the misrecognition of their identity. Readjustments of one's clothing practices to manage stigma have been defined as a micro-practice of invisibility to "(…) look less Muslim, be incognito, inconspicuous, unprovoking (…)" (Shaker et al., 2022, pp. 33–35)

Interestingly, the interlocutor in Shaker et al.'s study opted for a completely different style of dress than Miriam, choosing to wear black abayas instead of colorful scarves, which she saw far more prone to drawing attention. The authors (ibid.) analyzed this as "a freedom tied to invisibility," however, as Miriam notes, she doubts these readjustments of her clothing practices not to stand out and hide her Muslim identity. Thus, as double consciousness was not considered in the above study as an analytical concept, I would argue that any "freedom" achieved by such practices, also considering Miriam's example, should be understood as forced only by the power of the "veil."

Importantly, as a product of a racialized social structure, the "veil" produces the opposite of freedom, oppression. Therefore, I argue that the concept of double consciousness helps us to analyze the experiences of Finnish Muslim (female) converts. It also helps to understand how those experiences of anti-Muslim racism and the gendered stereotypes embedded within it affect their sense of self which is "constructed in social contexts that are embedded in and subject to implicit and explicit power relations" (Islam, 2020, p. 6). The social contexts in this regard are such everyday encounters in which the Muslim converts "act Muslim," yet through the implications of a threatened identity as explained above, they are aware of the associations connected to how Muslim women stereotypically behave or hold themselves. In this regard, many of my interlocutors, such as Mira, mentioned a constant need to act in a manner that counters stereotypes. For Noora, it took a while to gather the courage to wear the headscarf on the streets of her small hometown. When she spoke to me about how she experiences the perception of others about her as a veiled Muslim woman, she explained how her behavior in social interactions plays a crucial role:

> For many years, I had to walk head-up-high and with a firm attitude even though (…) I mean I was strong, but at the same time, I was not. Sure, I had to act extra strong because if you walk with your head up high, no one questions your scarf, while if I had walked around looking sad, your body language tells so much. When you wear a scarf, you should wear it with a straight back. As soon as you truckle (…), I have noticed that some stranger has told me something when I have somehow shown a little bit of an unhappy face. (Noora)

The convert women manifest thus a conscious behavior, such as by Noora's account, "walking with your head up high" to counteract the stereotypes and to avoid being judged in a way that, for them, would be a misrecognition of their identities. Like Noora, also Miriam has a second sight through which she is attempting to minimize the effects of the "veil" by consciously paying attention to her body language while she is outside:

> So, I believe it is because of how you hold yourself. If you walk like this hunched over, scared, people will react in a completely different way ... then [if you walk] with a straight back and a determined look on your face. Yes, I believe there is a difference. (Miriam)

Here the effects of coloniality, as discussed earlier in this chapter, in constructing the condition of double consciousness are manifested. Finnish female converts are, as Hatem Bazian has illustrated, "[i]n acting Muslim, (…) preoccupied with answering

and resolving the racialization and otherization central to Eurocentric discourses and coloniality" (Bazian, 2013). The "veil," an outcome of racializing, posits Muslim women in perpetual alleged oppression, and thus, the society on the other side can only see them through this lens. Followingly, Muslim women are expected to respond to that imagery and act like an "oppressed woman," like Miriam said, "hunched over." Miriam's coping strategy is to modify her behavior to counter these expectations and the ramifications of such stereotypes. This coping strategy constitutes the two-ness in Miriam's double consciousness, as she internalizes these expectations against which she constantly fights by paying attention to her body language.

I see the trap of double consciousness in the way how the "second sight" dictates the "acting Muslim" by Finnish Muslim converts as they attempt to neutralize the effects of the "veil" by adjusting their self-presentation. For instance, Chapman (2016) found in her study that Muslim women employ oppositional strategies to "reject and revise" the stereotypical representations of the Islamic veil. While some refashion the looks of their headscarf, for instance, by choosing colors that they assume are more palatable to the non-Muslims, others prefer the face veil over the headscarf to reinforce their agency and freedom of choice. Importantly, these strategies are used to either counter the stigma of a threat and thus opt not to wear black not to appear "fundamentalist" or the stigma of an "oppressed woman" and reinforce the Islamically founded freedom of women to choose any head covering. Even though she is conflicted about wearing the turban, Miriam still connects it to her choice of head-covering stereotypes playing a significant role in her self-presentation. Her sense of two-ness makes Miriam want to be identified as a Muslim on the one hand. Still, on the other hand, she is also very concerned that people conceive her as the "stereotypical" Muslim woman, which affects her attitude towards wearing the scarf:

> And there is that, as I have worn the turban a couple of times, there is also that fact that I have not been somehow assaulted physically. Instead, it is about that when you wear something; you represent your identity through those clothes. I always somehow feel that if people see a Muslim woman, they imagine a woman who is only bound to her kitchen, cooking for 24 hours, having like 50 kids, and so on. This has always been there in my thoughts when I have been thinking about the scarf. I feel like I am showing the wrong picture of myself because most people think that I am someone who is just in the kitchen if you know what I mean. (Miriam)

However, as Itzigsohn and Brown (2015, p. 238) have noted, the racializing subjects on the other side of the "veil" either do not hear or completely misrecognize the

attempts at self-presentation by the racialized subjects. Hence, whenever Muslim women try to assert their agency, even if it is by the "playbook" of the other side of the "veil," i.e., presenting themselves as the opposite of the stereotypes, as they are expected to be to "integrate," these attempts to gain no recognition on the other side of the "veil." Nevertheless, Miriam remains hopeful about how she is in her everyday life striving to gain recognition:

> I hope that with my person and being, I can contest that misunderstanding that many have. Because it would be somehow nice to raise more understanding because I am very far from a typical Muslim woman in my own opinion, I do not know anyone who would fit that stereotype. (Miriam)

Since Miriam had problematized wearing a turban instead of another style of head covering, I asked her whether she had noticed that wearing the turban instead of another sort of head covering would help her transmit the "right kind of an impression" of herself. She then raised an issue I consider an essential fallacy of "second sight." She mentioned that, in the end, she could not say what people think about her and whether these self-representation attempts have successfully changed people's perceptions of Muslim women.

As shown through my interlocutors' accounts, stereotypes threaten our social identities, and hence their power lies in their capacity to affect us even before we have been confronted with them in an interaction. In practice, this means being aware that a judgment or a treatment motivated by a particular stereotype is possible in any given situation, which I argue to result from the condition of double consciousness and especially the sense of two-ness. A study on faculty of color in community colleges (Levin et al., 2013) found how teachers employ strategies of depersonalization to shift the focus from their racial(ized) identities onto their professional capacities to retain their self-esteem and fight against misrecognition. Similarly, the women in my research feared being misjudged by their social environment based on their Muslim identity. Thus, as a form of self-presentation, they consciously performed what Steele, Spencer, and Aronson (Steele et al., 2002, p. 389) call "counter-stereotypical characteristics" to avoid the application of the stereotype to themselves. An example is Minna's reflection on the pressure she feels in vocational school about needing to prove her intellectual capacities and professionalism:

> You must prove your worth … you must always work a little harder to be accepted as a smart person. Somehow, I feel my whole class knows I'm Muslim. And sometimes I feel like I must work extra hard so that I'm taken seriously, or I must do it somehow, maybe not because I'm not treated equally, but because I want people to see that I'm still a normal person. (Minna)

Minna feels that her Muslim identity is instrumentalized to the extent that she must re-humanize her identity in the eyes of her colleagues. The "veil" of double consciousness thus also affects this aspect of her identity, as she feels that if she did not go the extra mile regarding her professional efforts, it would hinder the recognition of hers*elf* at large. It is, however, essential to note here that Minna does not wear the headscarf. Thus, her two-ness is not affected by how her outer appearance might "give her away" as a Muslim in any social interaction. Still, she is conscious of the stigma imposed on Muslim women *qua* Muslims and what is essential is that her Muslim identity is known to others by other means. Thus, she has internalized these stereotypes and expects them to be applied to her because her Muslim identity is known to her colleagues. Similarly, Sealy's study on British converts shows how a white convert man, who, due to his "Western" clothing style, would generally pass as white, receives anti-Muslim slurs while entering a mosque because the particular location is what signifies to others that he *is* a Muslim (Sealy, 2021, p. 6).

The pressure Minna feels mirrors the acknowledgment that individual identities are not formed in a monologue but in a dialogue, if not even in struggle-like processes against what our "significant others"[47] want to define us to be (Taylor, 1994, p. 32). Like Minna, also Susanna reflected on her professional career concerning the stereotype of being an oppressed Muslim woman. When she told me about the hate comments she received after her interview about her life as a Muslim in Finland, she referred to her professional background as a counterargument to statements such as: "Here we go, an oppressed woman, you have been forced to say so." For Susanna, the job she had been doing for six years after her conversion, traditionally seen as very masculine, is proof of her freedom to make her own choices and not have to comply with traditional gender roles. In this regard, Susanna's counterargument about her professional identity primarily manifests the urge to assert her *difference* from other Muslim women. She does not want to be judged by the stereotypes she thinks other

[47] In the context of this article, *significant others* do not mean the partner or spouse of an individual but in a sociological sense a person to whose opinions about us we pay attention.

Muslim women are judged by. She also challenges the stigma that has been imposed on her. Although Susanna had chosen not to respond to the comments and the hate speech she received, her reflection during our interview echoes the recognition and the social esteem she seeks.

Susanna was married at the time of our interview but had no children. Thus, her emphasis on work reflects this struggle for recognition as an agentive and independent woman. She wants to show how she can prove her worth as a professional in a male-dominated space but also defies the negatively valued stereotype of a Muslim woman who only stays home cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children. Interestingly, by referring to the rights granted to her by Islam as a religion, she does not only position herself against the Western feminist discourse, which sees the Muslim woman as lacking these rights. She also asserts her difference from all non-Muslim women who must struggle for their rights regarding gender equality in non-Muslim European societies. Susanna's emphasis on her career can also be seen as a reaction to establish her credibility in the light of having experienced what Grosfoguel (2010) has termed "epistemic Islamophobia," i.e., denial and disregard of Muslim women's voices when they critically challenge dominant western representations of Islam and Muslims. This also echoes the findings by Wagner et al. (2012, p. 534) about Muslim women in India who, by choosing to veil, were robbed of their social standing in the eyes of the majority. Followingly, they felt the need to establish their "credibility" by resorting to diverse strategies regarding self-representation.

I want to restate in this context the legacy of Orientalism and colonialism manifested in the perpetual stereotypical image of a Muslim woman as a victim, as oppressed, as submissive, and without a voice regarding the matters of her own life. As already discussed in chapter four, the prejudiced approach to Islamophobia studies (Hafez, 2018) deals with the stereotypes about Islam and the actions following, by which Islamophobia should be "measured" (Ernst & Bornstein, 2012). In the Finnish context, Pauha and Ketola (2015) have argued that opposition towards Islam is affected by ideological factors such as political preferences; Finns with stronger right-wing tendencies are more prone to have negative attitudes toward Muslims and Islam. However, I want to highlight that to understand the role of stereotypes in the context of anti-Muslim racism, we must focus on the ramifications they bring for Finnish

Muslim converts' self-representation and how the converts counter them in their everyday lives.

The Du Boisian "veil," informed by anti-Muslim racist discourse, the "Muslim Question," and Orientalist framings underlying both, positions the Muslim convert women on a different side of the racial line. On the side of the racializing subjects, the "veil" thus defines who the Finns *are* and who they *are not*. The misrecognition that Finnish Muslim convert women experience is not only about their racialization as cultural others. It is also about misrecognizing their femineity, which intersects with the religious identity claimed to rob them of their agency. This oppressed Muslim woman becomes thus an alien body to the Finnish in-group, which as a non-Muslim community, claim to present precisely what Muslim women as Muslims are perpetuated to lack. By the nature of the "veil" in the theory of double consciousness, Finnish Muslim converted women may attempt any strategies to counter this stigma. Yet, it is a condition they cannot escape until the structures of racial categories in Finnish society are deconstructed.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

This thesis questioned how Finnish Muslim converts experience anti-Muslim racism and the subsequent othering. I have aimed to situate these experiences within the broader racialization of minorities in Finland, considering it at the same time a historical continuum. I have also shown how the racialization of Muslim converts in Finland is a misrecognition of their identities. I have, in this regard, primarily challenged meanings given to whiteness as a phenotype and Whiteness as a socially constructed racial category as their meaning in constructing "Finnishness." Muslims living in Finland are mostly researched from the perspective of immigration. The scholarship also lacks critical views on "born" Muslims' and Muslim converts' experience of anti-Muslim racism. My thesis adds thus to the larger corpus of literature on converts in Western contexts, establishing that also in the Finnish context, anti-Muslim racism leads to the racialization of Muslim converts and the consequent "stripping of their Finnishness."

Along with contributing to the immediate literature gap, I have written this thesis with the moral and political objective of contributing to social change. My autoethnographic approach has been complemented with ethnographic methods in the thesis' knowledge construction, and I have embedded the entire research endeavor into the critical paradigm. As a scholar-activist, I have thus not only written a thesis but taken my work beyond my writing desk. My methodological discussion reflects on my accountability, partiality, and positionality throughout the research, starting from my own experiences with anti-Muslim racism and how I have used them as a springboard for the thesis writing and during and after the fieldwork. However, part of my autoethnographic journey has also been the field that does not just locate itself in a distant geographical area but shadows my journey continuously, as my experiences with anti-Muslim racism do not cease. Having followed the lack of recognition and the misrecognition that Finnish Muslim converts, especially women, face daily in Finland, I have aimed to disclose the structural patterns of racism and their connection to societal power relations. I have acknowledged that anti-Muslim racism is not a separate phenomenon,

though it deserves to be researched in its specifics; it is a continuum of other forms of racism and racialization in Finnish society. In this regard, my thesis critically discusses the socio-historical and cultural context of my native country.

The main data of my thesis was formed from my own experiences and the accounts of my interlocutors during the semi-structured interviews I conducted in Finland in the fall of 2017. I interviewed 20 female converts and seven male converts, but the analysis is focused on the experiences of the female converts. The conversations I had with male converts helped me to understand from an alternative point of view how the female experiences were strongly gendered, as many of the anti-Muslim racist incidents that the women went through or their reflections on their identity were marked by their visibility as Muslims due to the Islamic dress code. I reached out to my interlocutors through social media, existing networks that I had as a Muslim community member, and through snowballing. The latter was useful for contacting male converts with whom I had previously not established connections privately.

The interviews concentrated on themes I had developed based on my literature review of previous studies on Muslim converts in Western contexts. The themes included the conversion process, identity as Muslims and Finns, anti-Muslim racist hate speech and violence, and anti-Muslim racist structural discrimination. The purpose of my data collection was from a feminist standpoint theory perspective to reveal the voice of the marginalized and oppressed as an illuminating source of knowledge. At the same time, I followed the principle of hermeneutic phenomenology, which is to disclose multiple realities through the narratives by acknowledging that every individual's – also mine – historicity and locality affect their experiences and the process of knowledge production, including the interview situation. Thus the data collected for this study can only represent one part of the bigger picture.

In this thesis, I have argued for the Muslim identity as a sociological category and that we cannot position "Muslim" as a single defined racial category. My findings have supported the definition of anti-Muslim racism as a form of cultural racism which targets Muslims *as* Muslims. Herein, Finnish converts embody a threat imagined by those who hold on to the idea of a culturally and racially homogenous Finland. Those who associate Finnishness with w/Whiteness and a Finnish culture defined by it see

converts as disrupting that image as converts are seen as incompatible with Finnish culture and values. Finnishness has been historically constructed to include both whiteness as a phenotype and Whiteness as a social construct (racialization of Roma and Sámi. Today's anti-Muslim racism is thus a continuum of the historical racialization of the Sámi and the Roma. Followingly, the experience of Finnish Muslim converts on racialization and misrecognition of their identities make "Whiteness" in Finland visible in a manner left undiscussed in academic studies so far.

Therefore, I maintain that anti-Muslim racism is a legacy of the past nation-making of Finland as exclusively white and culturally homogenous, within which the ethnic minorities Sámi and the Roma were racialized but also defined as problematic. My analysis has also discussed how because of racialization, Muslim female converts in Finland experience misrecognition in the realm of social esteem occurs when Muslim converts are seen as the Other and anti-Muslim racist stereotypes hinder the recognition of their Finnish identity – as defined by others based on the socially constructed ideas of a normative Finnishness – due to stigma that is attached to the identity marker "Muslim." Furthermore, I argue that "Finnishness" excludes certain religious identities. Hence why I also argue that the Finnish Muslim consciousness is misrecognized in the manner that only a certain type of "Muslim" is accepted within the socially constructed idea of normative Finnishness. I have shown in this regard the Tatar Muslims have been constructed as the white – and White – "Finnishized" Muslim community. The discussion on how the Tatar community is perceived vis-à-vis the POC Muslims and the Muslim converts shows why it is necessary for researchers to critically investigate any socially constructed binaries of "good" and "bad" Muslims in Finland to disclose social critique of current racial hierarchies.

My findings have further supported the understanding of stereotypes related to Muslim women as an Orientalist legacy. However, the accounts of my interlocutors show how Finnish female Muslim converts carve a space in which they can counter the racial/cultural divergence discourse and converge Finnish identity with the Muslim identity by implementing *'urf*, the local culture, into their life as long as it complies to Islamic principles. They also emphasize common values between what they perceive as "Finnish" culture and their religion to counter the divergence discourse. As a form of struggle for recognition, the narratives of Finnish female Muslim converts speak for

considering all Muslim identities as individually constructed. Emphasis is laid on the agency in self-definition. In this regard, Finnish Muslim converts' accounts about their conversion process are marked by the "intellectual motif," which shows how Finnish female converts are countering the stereotyped image of a Muslim woman as "oppressed" in line with Orientalist depictions of Muslim women lacking agency.

However, my interviews have also revealed the problem of double consciousness as a condition of Finnish Muslim converts and thus offer a new perspective on understanding how racial structures affect the lives and identities of marginalized groups in today's Finland. The gendered stereotypes hold power in denying recognition to the female converts by excluding them from social esteem due to the stigma associated with the cultural divergence discourse. The female converts struggle to find recognition and "belonging" by countering the alleged "abject Islamic femininity" ascribed to them. Their narratives manifest the DuBoisian double-consciousness whereby they are conditioned by what society sees in them. I argue that the racializing "veil" of the double-consciousness then posits Muslim convert women in quasi-perpetual oppression and in coloniality.

However, there are certain limitations to my thesis. The theories on conversion, as Western social scientists refer to them, are dominantly based on secular epistemologies. An Islamic epistemology and the concept, which by closer look is indicated in several of my interlocutor's accounts, cannot be located within these theories. Thus, I think more research on conversions to Islam should be conducted considering the Islamic worldview, as converts employ such reflection in their narratives. Therefore, in my future academic works, I intend to bridge this gap between the two and find a way to integrate both streams of knowledge to analyze conversion to Islam in-depth. Having conducted seven interviews with male converts, I also have realized that they are the most underrepresented group in the research on Muslims in Finland. Within the limitations of this thesis, however, I could not include a proper analysis of these interviews. My preliminary findings show that male converts' experiences of anti-Muslim racism, racialization, and misrecognition differ from those of female converts. However, I intend to expand my research after the Ph.D. Moreover, more research can be done by looking into Finnish converts' experiences who identify as POC. Finally, my interviews with male converts showed that a more comprehensive

study into their experiences with (in)visibility as a Muslim and "losing one's Finnishness" is needed, as there has been no work done specifically on male converts and the gendered aspects of anti-Muslim racism in the Finnish contexts.

This thesis has been a product of a very long journey. When I accepted Islam in my early 20s, I would have never thought that almost two decades later, I would be able to use my experiences to earn a doctorate. I started my Ph.D. journey in 2014 after being accepted to the Alliance of Civilizations Institute as a scholarship student. I had initially proposed a thesis topic focusing on an ethnolinguistic study of Qur'an translations among Finnish converts, as I had done my Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Linguistics and Translation. My biography as a convert had already influenced my research interests back then. I just wanted to write about my community, which had been largely neglected in studies on Islam and Muslims in Europe.

Nevertheless 2015, while I was in my coursework year, I responded to an open call for contributors to the first European Islamophobia Report. I was chosen to author a country report on Finland by God's grace. As I was researching for the report, I noticed very little written about Islamophobia, or anti-Muslim racism, in the Finnish context, except for rare articles relating to the media representation of Muslims. However, I also noticed that there would have – (un)fortunately – been enough material to write double the number of pages for the report. It was during the research period for this first country chapter of the European Islamophobia Report that I also fell victim to the online hate campaign and was framed as a potential suicide bomber and "reported" to the Turkish authorities by "a concerned citizen."

Even though "haters" tried to silence my voice and harass me into a corner, I stayed authoring the country reports on Finland for three years. I also decided that this experience would be my ultimate motivation to write my Ph.D. about anti-Muslim racism, as it was clear to me that it posed a big issue in Finnish society. However, as life usually takes its course, I ended up writing this thesis for six whole years and have thus not maybe been the ideal Ph.D. candidate in terms of graduation time. Yet, these six years were formative for me as an expert on my topic since I have spent them being connected to anti-Muslim racism professionally, academically, and as an activist. In 2017, when I embarked on fieldwork in Finland, I planned to write this thesis entirely

from the perspective of recognition theory. However, these plans changed as I continued my literature reviews and noticed that there was something bigger behind my research question. In the summer of 2021, I read a book that gave me an epiphany; I finally saw my research as part of a more considerable discussion on racism in Finland. This inspiration helped me to connect all the dots related to the keywords of my thesis, i.e., race, culture, misrecognition, racialization, and gendered anti-Muslim racism.

My positionality as a "peer researcher" has had its implications on the analysis and write-up part of this thesis. At times, I have felt anxious about how I present the experiences reported by my interlocutors and have strived to frame their voice within the more extensive academic discussion on racism and anti-Muslim racism in Finland in the most accurate way. These "methodological panics" Miled (2019) are also connected to the fact that my Ph.D. journey has takelonger than I expected. As I conducted the interviews in 2017, it is only five years later that I am finally writing up the thesis. I have feared that my interlocutors thought I would never finish the thesis, and I have feared letting them down in this way. I have asked myself whether my choice of methodology is fully grounded. Hence, my analysis and the theoretical discussion in which I have embedded my arguments have concentrated on fulfilling critical ethnography's "four promises"(Gunzenhauser, 2004, p. 77). On a personal level, this accountability has, however, played a significant role throughout my Ph.D. journey. I am friends with many of my interlocutors, and with some, the relationship is closer than with others. They have been a part of my research journey even after I conducted the interviews. I have had conversations with them relating to my Ph.D., in particular, my anxieties and fears of not being able to finish the project I started but also in terms of constant information exchange about the current political and social challenges of the community in Finland.

During the years of my Ph.D. studies, it became more and more clear to me how I was doing this research from "a double position." I was located at the center of "knowledge production" and epistemic hierarchy because I have a background in Western education and have enjoyed the privilege of numerous scholarships, which have given me the privilege of studying in costly programs. Moreover, having the privilege of mobility as an EU passport holder has given me more access to travel and conduct

fieldwork outside of the country of my then residence and studies, which for most of my Ph.D. years was Türkiye. Yet, simultaneously, I am speaking from the margins as I am a Muslim woman and a convert. This position has sometimes given me "white capital," yet in quite an unwelcoming manner. This has, for instance, been especially the case when my "whiteness" has been (ab)used in connection with my Muslim identity by most probably good-meaning people, who, however, tend to romanticize stories of conversion.

As a new ex-pat in Türkiye, I attended a couple of TV appearances to tell my conversion story. However, after a while, I started to reject invitations to interviews or projects about converts and their "conversion stories." The reason was my uneasiness about how I had already frequently encountered a kind of admiration. I do not mean the genuine "MashaAllah" or "Allahu Akbar" that Muslims utter when they hear of a person's conversion/reversion contributing this life change to God's will, but rather an art of seeing converts as "better Muslims" than the born Muslims. The assumption seems to be that converts would be "stronger in their belief" or "free of cultural influence," hence "practicing the pure Islam." In my early years as a convert, these comments were positive feedback for my choice. However, I later realized how dangerous this view was. It did not acknowledge that Muslim converts struggle with faith, questions of practice, dogma, and identity issues just as much as born Muslims do. Hence, I did not feel like I could present myself in this romanticized light anymore. Regarding invitations for talks or TV appearances, I would only accept them if I could speak about the anti-Muslim racism that converts experience instead of my journey to becoming a Muslim.

At times, I wanted to give up on the Ph.D. and doubted myself and the credibility of my work for several months. However, what has motivated me to continue has been my connection to the topic and to my community and the fact that I have been conscious of the marginality of my "double position." A particular privilege is attached to it, as I have had to gain this voice for speaking on issues relating to Muslims and Islam in Finland. So far, it has been chiefly non-Muslim researchers who do (ethnographic) research on Muslims from an outsider's perspective. In the most recent edited volume on Islam and Muslims in Finland, only a few of the 17 contributors are of Muslim background (Pauha & Konttori, 2022). Hence, studying the Muslim

convert community is not *just a research project* for me. Still, it is also *about me*, my life history, my community, and the life experiences I share with those I interviewed.

Beyond answering my research question, this thesis shall give my interlocutors their due voice about their stories and experiences. As Maurits Berger notes (2014, 16), historical narratives have meanings anchored in certain epochs and the audiences of the time they were produced. Consequently, I contend that these narratives can be brought up to date, rewritten, and revised, considering all the marginal voices that have until now been ignored. As a scholar-activist, I hope our generation can produce a new collective memory because of growing awareness about the whitewashing of Finland's history. This unique, decolonized collective memory would recognize minorities as fully equal citizens and grant them their social esteem, including Muslims and their diversity. It is time to give them their due value as equal makers of past and present-day European societies. This thesis is a small part of such an endeavor, and it brings forth a critical perspective from within the Muslim experience on race, Whiteness, and normative Finnishness for the first time.

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Experience:

2021- **European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR), Heidelberg, Germany**
- Coordinator: Working Group Anti-Muslim Racism, Working Group on Antisemitism

2021-2023 **The European Institute of the Mediterranean, Barcelona, Spain**
- Project Consultant, "Muslim women and communities Against Gender Islamophobia in Society"

2021-2022 **CLAIM Alliance against Islamophobia and Anti-Muslim Hate, Berlin, Germany**
- Policy Researcher

2019-2020 **Islamic Cooperation Youth Forum (ICYF), Istanbul, Türkiye**
- Project Officer

2017-2019 **Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim University, Center for Islam and Global Affairs (CIGA), Istanbul, Türkiye**
- Senior Research Associate

Academic Publications:

Hyökki, L. (2022). Whiteness and Anti-Muslim Racism in Finland. *Context: Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, *9*(1), 61–86 https://doi.org/10.55425/23036966.2022.9.1.61

Hyökki, L. (2020) Sosiokulttuurisen tiedon ja tunnustuksen rooli kaksisuuntaisessa kotoutumisessa: Esimerkkinä musliminaisten päähuivin käyttö In V. Kazi, A. Alitolppa-Niitamo, & A. Kaihovaara (toim.) *Kotoutumisen kokonaiskatsaus 2019: Tutkimusartikkeleita kotoutumisesta. TEM oppaat ja muut julkaisut 2019:10*. Helsinki: Työ- ja elinkeinoministeriö, 221-228. ["Socio-cultural knowledge and recognition as part of integration as a two-way process: Muslim women and the question of the headscarf." In: V. Kazi & A. Alitolppa-Niitamo & A. Kaihovaara (eds.). *Comprehensive review of integration 2019: Integration as a phenomenon 2019:10*. Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Helsinki].

Hyökki, L. (2019) Family reunification in Finland: The EU and Human Rights as competing institutional facts in argumentation. *Migration Letters*. London: Transnational Press.

Hafez, F., & Hyökki, L. (2019). Researching Sisters and Brothers: Implications of In-Group Research to Fieldwork among Muslims. In K. Limacher, A. Mattes, & C. Novak (Eds.), *Prayer, Pop, and Politics . Researching Religious Youth in Migration Society* (pp. 55–71). V&R unipress.

Policy Work:

Bilic S., Hyökki L., and Seta D. (2022). Zivilgesellschaftliche Erfassungs- und Auswertungsverfahren zu Rassismus und Diskriminierung. Eine Expertise im Auftrag von CLAIM. Berlin: CLAIM.

Hyökki, L. and Cubelic, D. (2022). ECCAR Working Group on Anti-Muslim Racism. Good Practices in Tackling Anti-Muslim Racism Locally. Heidelberg: ECCAR.

Hyökki, L. (2018). Islamophobia in Finland: National Report 2017. In: E. Bayraklı & F. Hafez (Eds.), *European Islamophobia Report 2017*. Istanbul: SETA.

Hyökki, L., & Creutz, K. (2017). Islamophobia in Finland: National Report 2016. In E. Bayraklı & F. Hafez (Eds.), *European Islamophobia Report 2016.* Istanbul: SETA

Hyökki, L. and Jardi, P. (2016): Islamophobia in Finland: National Report 2015. In: E. Bayraklı & F. Hafez (Eds.), *European Islamophobia Report 2015*. Istanbul: SETA.

Fellowships and Grants:

Center for Advanced Studies, Research Grant (2021, 2022)
Stiftung Mercator & TUSIAD, Turkey Europe Future Forum Fellow (2020-2021)
Center for Postnormal Policy and Futures Studies, Fellow (2017-)
International Institute of Islamic Thought, PhD Research Grant (2017)
Turkey Youth and Education Service Foundation, PhD Scholarship (2013-2021)
German Academic Exchange Service, Language Assistant Scholarship (2013-2014)
German Academic Exchange Service, MA Scholarship (2008-2011)

Languages:

Finnish (native), English (fluent), German (fluent), Swedish (fluent), French (advanced), Turkish (advanced), Bosnian (beginner)