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A repertoire of everyday resistance: young Muslims' responses to anti-Muslim hostility

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Abstract:
Research has shown widespread discrimination and hostility toward Muslims in Western countries. There is less knowledge of how Muslims resist, oppose, or challenge such behaviour. Based on in-depth interviews with 90 young Muslims in Norway, this study explores responses to anti-Muslim hostility. We describe a repertoire of everyday resistance: talking back, entering dialogue, living the example, denying significance, and talking down. The first three forms occur in face-to-face encounters while the latter two are retrospect sense-making of negative experiences. We conceptualise these responses as everyday resistance because they entail ways of actively countering anti-Muslim hostility, as opposed to passively accepting or adapting to it. This repertoire of everyday resistance can make it easier to avoid victimisation, protect religious identities, and ease the daily lives of young Muslims. Increased attention to narrative resistance in studies of everyday resistance will provide a better understanding of the many ways in which marginalised groups cope, resist, and struggle with their stigma.

Keywords:
Anti-Muslim hostility, everyday resistance, narrative resistance, religious discrimination, Islamophobia, Norway

Introduction

There is vast evidence of hostility toward Muslims across Western democracies (Kundnani 2014). This hostility in its extreme form is reflected in major terrorist attacks, such as the attack on a summer camp on Utøya and bombing in Oslo on 22 July 2011 and the more recent Baerum mosque shooting on 10 August 2019 – just outside of Oslo. The rise of anti-Muslim political violence and sentiments in Norway, as elsewhere in Europe, is closely related to the rise of right-wing, populist parties and mobilisation, as well as anti-Islamic movements (Berntzen and Sandberg 2014; Berntzen 2019). Negative attitudes towards Muslims are widespread in Norway (Hoffmann and Moe 2017), with almost half of the population being wary of Muslims (Brekke, Fladmoe, and Wollebæk 2020). At the same time, Norway is one of two countries in Europe whose citizens are the most accepting of having a Muslim as a family member, (Pew 2018) and there are signs of new and more inclusive ways of constructing Norwegianness (Vassenden 2010).

There is still little doubt that anti-Muslim and anti-Islamic hate and hostility is a major problem in Norway (Brekke, Fladmoe, and Wollebæk 2020), arguably even taking over for racism as the dominant xenophobia. Terrorist attacks often receive the most attention, but anti-Muslim hostility most frequently surfaces in incidents and comments that are part of the everyday lives of Muslims. Sixty-seven of the 90 Muslims interviewed for this study described experiences of hate speech, discrimination and hostility. Bashar (24), for example, who worked in a grocery store, recounted: 'A very racist customer once came to the store and said, "Where do you come from you fucking Muslim?"' Similar incidents in which Muslims are victimised in everyday encounters are common throughout the Western world (Kaplan 2006; Sheridan 2006).

Some researchers have focused on articulating the problems and constraints that stigma creates, and consequently end up portraying stigmatised groups as helpless victims (Fine and Asch 1988). Little scholarly attention has been paid to how Muslims challenge and resist the discourses and practices through which they are marginalised (van Es 2019). In this study, our aim is to show how people who experience stigma, stereotyping, and hostility often resist these. We argue that anti-Muslim hostility and victimisation, although important, are just one part of the story. The other part is how the offended responds and how they interpret hostile acts. The incident above, for example, did not end with the customer's derogatory outburst. Bashar explained what happened next:

> I left the counter, took him to the side, and asked, "What is wrong with you?" He said, "I just want to know where you are from and why you came here; it is not your country." I told him that "I can press charges for what you just said and there are witnesses. I came here with a permit, and I am a Norwegian citizen. You have no right to say things like this. You can ask where I am from, but with a completely different tone."

Bashar's reaction shows one of the many ways in which hostility can be countered by those who experience it. We argue that this way of *talking back* is part of a broader repertoire (Tilly 2008) of everyday resistance (Scott 1985) for young Muslims. This repertoire also includes other forms of responses such as *entering dialogue, living the example, denying significance,* and *talking down* those who express hostility. Together, this repertoire of everyday resistance shows the variety of ways in which young Muslims counter anti-Muslim hostility and try to deny its influence and power. The most clear-cut forms of resistance are confrontations or other reactions in face-to-face interactions (Lamont et al. 2016). Arguably, the narrative work (Frank 2010) conducted in the aftermath of incidents of hostility can similarly be seen as part of a repertoire of everyday resistance.

In this study, we combine sociological studies of everyday life (Kalekin-Fishman 2013) with that of everyday resistance (Pande 2010) to examine the ways in which young Muslims resist anti-Muslim hostility. Approaching such reactions as resistance means situating them in relation to power. We focus our attention on actions that counter stigma as opposed to passively accepting it (Thoits 2011). Data were collected through in-depth interviews with young Muslims in Norway. Anti-Muslim hostility represented a 'powerful constraining force' (Link and Phelan 2001, 376) in the everyday lives of many Muslims in this study. We explore how they counter, challenge, or fend off the hostility they experience.

Everyday life and resistance

Goffman (1959) famously studied everyday life, starting a long tradition of symbolic interactionist research in sociology. In political sociology, the properties of everyday life have long been taken for granted in the theorisation of the social. Everyday life as an object of research, however, has also increasingly become a distinct area of scholarly inquiry outside of the interactionist circles (Kalekin-Fishman 2013). Several studies have examined everyday life as a field of struggle, thus making its political dimensions more explicit (Cohen and Taylor [1976] 1992).

Goffman inspired a vast amount of studies on stigma in everyday life and face-to-face encounters that understand stigma as a result of the negative prejudice about certain markers associated with a specific group of people, such as people with disabilities, or the prejudice related to ethnicity or religion. This interactionist perspective has also inspired research on how people relate to such stigmas, for example through boundary work (Lamont and Molnár 2002; Copes 2016). Goffman's approach to stigma has attracted criticism for not situating it in relation to broader societal structures and power, beyond individual and face-to-face interactions (Link and Phelan 2001). Our study understands power as an element of the stigma experienced by young Muslims, and explores their resistance to that power.

Resistance has been defined differently, but scholars agree that it involves an oppositional act (Hollander and Einwohner 2004), that is, a social action that involves agency and is carried out in some kind of oppositional relation to power (Johansson and Vinthagen 2016). Everyday resistance is, thus, a specific type of oppositional act: informal acts of resistance, which are often non-organized and covert (Scott 1985). Regardless of the intention of the actor to perform everyday resistance or the presence of mixed intentions, things change (Ortner 1995). Everyday resistance can impact social change by undermining power relations through its consequences, while some acts are arguably de facto a response to power relations irrespective of the actor's intention (Baaz et al. 2016). Wearing a hijab, for example, can constitute an important site of resistance for Muslim women (Hooks 1990; Paz and Kook 2020).

Everyday acts of resistance to anti-Muslim hostility may oppose power by challenging the dominant discourse that portrays Islam as an inherently violent religion. The forms of hostility experienced by Muslims vary, but are underpinned by – and can be perceived as expressions of – the discourse that purports Islam and Muslims as threats to Western democracies (Frisina 2010). This narrative can be seen as both repressive and 'productive'

(Foucault 1979). It is repressive because of the negative stereotypes it spreads of Islam and Muslims, but productive because it also triggers resistance. Performance of resistance is, thus, always linked to particular forms of power, which is a crucial part of the context in which resistance originates and is performed (Johansson and Vinthagen 2020).

Repertoires of everyday resistance

We use the concept of a repertoire of everyday resistance for a set of responses to anti-Muslim hostility that involves countering or defending against such hostility. This builds on Charles Tilly's (2008) concept of 'repertoires of contention', which Johansson and Vinthagen (2016) suggested adopting into the study of everyday resistance. In the context of this study, such a repertoire encompasses a set of culturally learned routines by which Muslims interact in conflict with others. The repertoire, or set of methods for everyday resistance, is learned and grows out of the particular social circumstances and settings of those who enact it (Tilly 2008).

Conceptualising the young Muslims' ways of countering anti-Muslim hostility as a repertoire of everyday resistance entails approaching them as contextual and relational: they occur in particular social settings and in response to specific acts and actors. Analysing the ways of acting that constitute the repertoire, thus, calls for paying attention to their characteristics, the social settings in which they are enacted, and how it might affect those who interact (Hollander and Einwohner 2004). Importantly, what we refer to as everyday resistance differs from the stigma management strategies that Goffman (1963) defined as 'passing' and 'covering'. These strategies are primarily about proactively hiding information to avoid hostility and adapting behaviour to make one's stigma less obtrusive in order to reduce social tension rather than reactively challenging hostility that has already been exerted (Goffman 1963, 125).

Johansson and Vinthagen (2016) described everyday resistance as a form of individual activism, contrasting Simi and Futrell's (2009) view, which sees everyday resistance in individual ways of managing stigma (see also Tyler 2018). Management of stigma is a 'self-oriented' form of everyday resistance that is different from the 'other-oriented' acts that challenge a specific actor directly, or which initiate interaction with that actor. Our approach to everyday resistance is, thus, in line with Riessman's claim that everyday resistance 'implies more than accommodation, coping or adaptation in the face of difficult circumstances' (2000, 130). Moreover, as we argue, both acts of direct challenge (during an incident) and narrative management of experienced hostility (after an incident) constitute pivotal parts of a repertoire of everyday resistance.

Narratives in everyday resistance

Narrative resistance has received increasing scholarly attention in different disciplines (e.g. Bamberg and Andrews 2004; Canham and Malose 2017; McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance 2017). It is variously described as opposing powerful master narratives (Talbot et al. 1996) or dominant discursive constraints (De Brún et al. 2014, 78). Conceptualising narrative resistance has been a way for narrative analysis to include a dimension of power, and can be seen as 'an active speech behaviour which serves to decentre the authority of specific individuals or society to dictate identity' (Ronai and Cross 1998, 105–106). Narrative research has, for example, explored how Muslims counter religious extremism through stories (Sandberg and Colvin 2020), sometimes by reference to 'true Islam' and at other times through humour and the use of derogatory terms (Sandberg and Andersen 2019). These 'narrative resistance strategies' (Lavin 2017, 1) shows how people affected by stigma can resist this identity (see also De Brún et al. 2014).

The repertoire of everyday resistance we present below encompasses two different forms of, and settings for, everyday resistance: first, the ways in which participants acted during direct encounters with anti-Muslim hostility, and second, how they later made sense of these negative experiences. We argue that these forms of everyday resistance have been too scarcely attended in research on religious discrimination, Islamophobia, and anti-Muslim hate speech. We further argue that attention to retrospective storytelling should be an important part of studies of everyday resistance.

Data and methods

Our study is based on interviews with 90 young Muslims in Norway aged 18–32. The main criteria for participation were age and being a self-identified Muslim. The interviews were conducted in 2017, in 20 municipalities and with participants from 20 different countries of origin. Participants were among the 200,000 Muslims living in Norway, a secular, social democratic welfare state with a population of 5.4 million (Østby and Dalgard 2017). Islam is the second largest religion in the country, second to Christianity, and the Muslim population makes up about 3.7% of the total population (Østby and Dalgard 2017) as compared to about 4.9% in Europe (Pew 2017). The Muslim population in Norway is highest in Eastern Norway, and Oslo (the capital) stands out with 9.5% of the inhabitants being Muslim (Statistics Norway 2019). Of the Norwegian population with a background from Muslim countries, those originating from Pakistan, Somalia, Iraq and Syria made up the largest groups in 2016 (Østby and Dalgard 2017).

Our sample has a certain 'over-representation' of Somalis and 'under-representation' of Pakistanis compared to their respective percentages of the overall Muslim immigrant population in Norway (see Table 1). This reflects the communities to which the research team had greatest access. Importantly, although the sample is large for a qualitative study, results should be treated as any other qualitative study. The sample and forms of resistance described are not representative of Muslim groups in Norway or Muslims in general, but provide insights into the complex and many faceted processes by which people respond to hostility. Such insights extend far beyond the focus of this particular study.

Table 1. Participants' gender, age, occupation and ethnic and religious background.

Participants	In numbers	In percentage[a]
Gender		

Participants	In numbers	In percentage[a]
Women	45	50
Men	45	50
Age		
18–20	19	21
21–23	19	21
24–26	23	26
27–29	13	14
30–32	14	16
33+[b]	2	2
Average age	25	
Occupation		
Student	36	40
Employed	41	46
Unemployed	7	8
Asylum seeker	3	3
Not specified	3	3
Parents birth country		
Somalia	21	23
Pakistan	11	12
Norway	6	7
Morocco	5	6
Iraq	5	6
Afghanistan	5	6
Two countries[c]	12	13
Other[d]	25	28
Converts	7	8
Islamic affiliation		
Sunni	74	82
Shia	8	9
Other[e]	8	9
Place of birth		
Norway	38	42
Other	52	58

[a] All percentages are rounded off to the closest number.

[b] They were interviewed because they had relevant information about their own youth.

[c] Eight participants had one parent from Norway.

[d] Others include Qatar, Algeria, Palestine, Kosovo, Lebanon, Chechnya, Turkey, Syria, Iran, Eritrea, Ethiopia, the Philippines, and Kurds from Iran and Iraq.

[e]

The other refers to a combination of people with other Islamic affiliations than Sunni or Shia, participants we do not have data on, and participants who would not state their Islamic affiliation.

The Muslim population in Norway is highly diverse with regards to ethnicity, culture and ways of practicing Islam – so is our sample. Most of our participants were Sunni, but we also interviewed Shiites and some who declared affiliation with a smaller Muslim group or who refused to differentiate between what they described as 'sectarian' affiliations within Islam (see Table 1).

Affiliations within Islam probably only played a minor role in participants' experiences of hostility, since most hostility came from people who were unaware of these distinctions. Even those individuals who only 'look Muslim' become targets of anti-Muslim hostility (Awan and Zempi 2020). Characteristics such as religious clothing (especially hijabs), beards, and an ethnic minority background were more important. In terms of hostility experienced in public spaces these signs are often associated with Muslims (see Vassenden and Andersson 2011 on non-whiteness as signifying 'Muslim').

The interviews lasted between one and two hours and were conducted in cafés or at participants' homes. A team of five researchers, three women and two men, from different cultural and academic backgrounds and with different religious affiliations and beliefs (including Muslims), carried out the interviews. The interviewees were recruited using their own social networks (sometimes via Facebook) and referral by university students, by contacting mosques and Muslim youth organisations, and going to Muslim events. Recruitment through social networks and organisations in which participants had faith helped build trust. A trusting relationship may also have been facilitated by interviewers being almost the same age as the interviewees and, in many cases, sharing ethnic or religious beliefs or backgrounds, or minority experiences. Participants might still not have reported experienced hostility or might have downplayed their importance during the interviews to present a favourable self or ruin the atmosphere of the interview. They may also have reported general and unspecified experiences of anti-Muslim hostility as their own to illustrate their prevalence (Taylor et al. 1990).

Importantly, the resistance we examine encompasses responses to what participants themselves perceived as hostilities triggered by them being, or being perceived as, Muslims. Moreover, the participants' stories about hostility and responses are part of their retrospect narratives and are shaped by the present. For the purpose of this paper, we still analytically distinguish between forms of resistance that took place in situ (where we analyze participants' stories as descriptive of what happened in an actual interaction) and those that we describe as being primarily about narrative interpretation (the meaning participants attributed to these events in retrospect).

The interviews were designed to capture the everyday religion of young Muslims in Norway (Sandberg et al. 2018). We asked about their religious beliefs, perceptions of the role of Islam in society and experience of religious discrimination. In this paper, we analyze in detail the parts where we asked the participants about discrimination and their way of responding to it. These parts were identified and coded using NVivo software, following the principle of inductive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2008). We first identified descriptions of the participants' reactions to, and ways of coping with, discrimination and anti-Muslim hostility. In line with the aim of the study, we then created and revised codes (themes) during a process of seeking out patterns of everyday resistance to anti-Muslim hostility. The resulting structure of codes was used as a guide for the presentation of findings in the analysis.

A repertoire of everyday resistance

Our analysis below lays out the five most important forms of everyday resistance that we identified: talking back, entering dialogue, living the example, denying significance, and talking down. For each form, we explicate its character, the social function for those who enact it, and the social settings in which it appeared. These active responses to anti-Muslim hostility were overwhelmingly more present in data compared to reactions like compliance, passive acceptance and social withdrawal.

Talking back

This form of everyday resistance encompasses acts where Muslims take an active stance when they face hostility and 'fight back when they are blamed' (Riessman 2000, 122) for principles or characteristics of Islam or Muslim practices. Talking back is more than simply using one's voice, and involves using it to make oneself heard in a way that 'challenges politics of domination' (Hooks 1989, 8; see also Parati 2005). In our study, talking back involved outspoken and active verbal acts of resistance to those who express hostility by entering discussions, responding to biases expressed by others, or actively responding to criticisms of Islam or Muslims. Talking back varied from modest participation in conversation on the one end of the spectrum to participation in aggressive forms of discussion and outright quarrel on the other end.

Armin (26) emphasised the importance of having good arguments, knowing the topics, and having a quick reply. He was confident while stating, 'I cannot be discriminated against because 99.9% of the time, I have good answers and come-backs'. Underlying this statement was an idea that only 'weak' people could be victims of discrimination. Stronger people, like Armin himself, would always fight back and 'win over' the perpetrators of discrimination and hostility. Sometimes, this was phrased in quite aggressive ways. Sabah (24) said: 'You can pass judgments about me in front of a PC. If you do it in front of me, it is going to be a difficult situation'. She did not clarify whether the response would be verbally or physically aggressive, but left no doubt that she will answer back.

Martine (30) explained how she felt obliged to actively participate in and even prepare for discussions about Islam. These discussions were often triggered by political and violent events that shed a negative light on Muslims:

> I always wanted to defend Islam and explain it. If they asked me something, I had to know the answer. I felt I should be able to explain everything all the time. I should be able to explain September 11 and all kinds of stuff that I had nothing to do with.

The young Muslims often experienced situations where they felt pressured to emphasise or prove that they distanced themselves from religiously motivated violence. Martine entered many such discussions with the aim of defending Islam and speaking out against hostility, but she became increasingly tired of it. Many interviewees saw this demand of having to distance themselves from terrorist groups as provoking. Some refused to do so, because they did not accept being held responsible for actions they did not believe represented Islam (see also van Es 2018). For most of them, it was important to verbally counter hostile or critical comments about Islam. This could be convincing others to change their opinion, but was more often convincing themselves and others that they knew a lot about Islam and did not accept being victimised without talking back.

Muslims who had a Norwegian majority population background described a form of hostility that involved the accusation from their non-Muslim family members, friends and peers that they had betrayed ‘Us’ (the ‘Norwegian’ majority) by voluntarily deserting to ‘Them’ (the ‘non-Norwegian’ Muslim minority). Martine (30), a Norwegian convert from a non-Muslim family, mentioned a phone conversation with her father after a family dinner:

> The next day, my dad told me on the phone, “I thought you probably had a bomb under that dress you were wearing.” I decided not to react or care. I tried not to let it get to me. But, suddenly I said, “Really, dad? You know what, you just called me a terrorist,” and started to cry. When I get mad, I start crying. I told him, “You cannot talk to me like that; do you even know what you are saying?”

Martine had two conflicting inclinations when faced with her father's anti-Muslim comment. The first was to try to ignore it by denying it any role or significance in her life. The other was to talk back to hold her ground (Riessman 2000) and to defend Islam. The strong emotions that the hostility aroused made it difficult to deny the significance of the event and she ended up talking back. Martine's talking back was emotional (including crying), which can be interpreted as related to the family setting, where such displays of emotions are more accepted than in other contexts.

The different forms of everyday resistance that we describe were sometimes combined. The urge, demand, or ideal to talk back, for example, could be combined with not wanting to grant anti-Muslim hostility any influence in their lives (which we will return to later). The ways in which young Muslims in this study talked back differed depending on the social setting. In-depth theological and academic discussions about religion were most common in situations where the young Muslims experienced hostility from family members, friends, colleagues, and acquaintances. In these situations, they could also appeal to the emotions of those who expressed hostility. Replies were often shorter and more aggressive when the hostile actor was a stranger and comments were on impulse, for example, in public or semi-public arenas.

Smith (1993, 404) described how excluded subjects can ‘talk back’ against the dominant culture through personal narratives by ‘staging different performances of subjectivity’. McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance (2017, 190) similarly described the role of counter narratives as ‘a means to “talk back” to injurious master narratives’. This way, the entire repertoire of everyday resistance that we describe in this study can be seen as a way of talking back to a society that is often hostile toward Muslims (van Es 2019). However, when we describe *talking back* in this part of the analysis, we point to a specific form of everyday resistance among young Muslims. Talking back in this sense involves taking an active verbal stand when facing hostility; and arguing, appealing to emotions, or shouting back when being discriminated against. The main aim of those who responded this way seemed to be to stand their ground and refuse victimisation.

Entering dialogue

This form of everyday resistance involved being welcoming toward those expressing hostility to show friendliness and openness to conversation. In contrast to *talking back*, *entering dialogue* involves an emphasis on the value of being open to criticisms and hostile opinions about Islam – and maybe even challenging one's own opinions. An expressed motivation, however, was often a belief that entering such a process would make the other change their negative prejudices. The young Muslims wanted to enter a friendly dialogue to change the views of those who expressed hostility toward Islam.

Fasma (30) once met a 60-year-old woman who was terrified of Muslims. She described how she first talked to her calmly and listened to her fears, which enabled a conversation that could contribute to the removal or reduction of that fear:

> Since she used the word “terrified,” I realized it must be hard for her too. She said she was afraid to go out of her house because of her fear of Muslims. I felt it must be terrible to be in such a situation. Then, I asked her what causes her fear, whether she had any bad experiences, and did she actually know any Muslims.

The woman replied that she did not know any Muslims. Her only source of knowledge about them was from news media. Fasma imitated her with a thin and squeaky voice: ‘Yes, but I have experiences from TV and what I read’. She ended the conversation by trying to convince the woman to not judge every Muslim based on what she read in the newspapers and saw on TV.

Some young Muslims in this study underlined that it was important for them to neither withdraw nor respond aggressively in settings where they encountered prejudice: ‘No matter how negative they are, I would not start a fight or a heated discussion. I would rather share my knowledge with them’. In contrast to *talking back*, which involved more aggressive or emotional ways of speaking and responding, this form of everyday resistance was an attempt to change a negative situation into a friendly encounter. Ana (19) explained how investing in friendly dialogues with those holding prejudices or expressing hostility could have larger ripple effects:

> If I invest some time and meet the prejudiced ones for a dialogue, they end up complimenting me saying I am open and generous. I leave after that. I believe I have changed at least some people. It does not end with one person. The next time they hear something bad about Islam, they can say “Yes, but I remember this girl with whom I had a good discussion.”

Ana said that the ripple effect motivated her to enter more dialogues and conversations to ‘nuance the image’ people had of Islam.

Participants frequently shared their experiences of anti-Muslim hostility, sometimes expressed through questions about Islam. Hearing out and entering an open and friendly dialogue was a form of everyday resistance that saw these incidents as an opportunity to share their knowledge of Islam. According to Harris and Hussein (2020), young Muslims in Western countries are ‘often at the forefront of efforts to explain, demystify and de-stigmatise Islam and Muslim identity’ by engaging in dialogues through everyday knowledge-sharing and challenging prejudices (2020, 1).

Our study includes participants with diverse social characteristics who had experienced anti-Muslim hostility, but women who wore hijabs seemed particularly exposed to this, especially those that were Black. The hijab functioned as a visible marker that triggered prejudice about an oppressive Islamic patriarchal culture (Leet-Otley 2020). Ayan (22) wore a hijab and often received negative comments and questions about it. She chose to perceive those encounters as opportunities to explain why she used it:

> For example, I work as a home nurse. I once went to a patient's house and she asked, “Ugh … why do you use it?” I explained that it was because of my religion. She said “ok” and did not say anything like “do not touch me, you use it” […] I simply answer such questions in school or with people I meet at work.

Entering a friendly dialogue was often a form of everyday resistance used in encounters with friends, family, neighbours, people at their educational institutions or workplace, and others who were not complete strangers. This form of everyday resistance, thus, seems to presuppose a level of closeness between the ‘stigmatiser’ and stigmatised, and some kind of willingness in the person holding anti-Muslim prejudices to enter into a dialogue. As in the cases of Fasma and Ayan, however, it could also be a form of resistance during interactions with relative strangers. In these cases, the power balance usually favoured the Muslims and this seemingly made it easier for them to be friendly with the persons who exerted prejudice because they felt sorry for them.

Echoing what Goffman (1963, 116) referred to as an effort of ‘sympathetic re-education’, entering into dialogue was a form of everyday resistance that involved active engagement with those who expressed hostility. The attempt was to win them over by being friendly and explaining the true nature of Islam. This way of responding is, thus, a combination of *taking* others’ perspectives (aiming for intersubjectivity) and *setting* the ‘perspectives on topics and trajectories of actions for others and themselves’ (Graumann 1990; Linell 2009, 215). The former is an avenue through which the latter can be obtained. Power (and dominant discourses about Muslims) often emerge in interaction, but dialogue can be ‘the locus where resistance is born and developed’ (Linell 2009, 216). Moreover, stories about the peaceful nature of Islam (van Es 2018) may be more convincing in a dialogue than a verbal fight. In a peaceful dialogue, the narrative performance of the story matches its content.

Living the example

The next form of what we describe as everyday resistance toward anti-Muslim hostility pushed the ideal of tranquillity and friendliness even further. This was not verbal resistance, as in the first two forms. Instead, it emphasised showing the true nature of Islam by living the example of a good Muslim. Adilah (25) said:

> I often put up a sign in the hallway of my building saying “Have a nice day.” It means a lot to just smile and say hi. We are living so close to each other. We have to treat people well. Given Islam's poor reputation, we have to try to build another one.

Like many other interviewees, Adilah believed that living the example could disprove prejudices or at least provide an example that could nuance or challenge negative stereotypes about Islam. This was expressed at times in general terms as an ideal for practice or ‘life philosophy’. For example, Anton (25) said:

> My point is that the more negative energy we spread, the more the negativity in our society. You have to try to not make things worse. Be a good example and people will learn from you; be a bad example and people will still learn from you. It goes both ways. You decide what it should be.

This general life philosophy could have been stated by anyone. It could have led back to different religions and ideologies, but it took on a particular meaning for the Muslims in this study. Facing widespread hostility, *living the example* became a way to show that anti-Muslim people and propaganda were wrong. Incidents of hostility could even be an opportunity ‘to be good role models for Islam’ (Harris and Hussein 2020, 11). Marit (23) said that she faced negative attitude toward Islam on a regular basis:

> You just accept it as it is, because Islam and religion are very important to you. You do not waste time trying to get acceptance, you know you are a Muslim. You should rather struggle – jihad.

As opposed to others who were concerned about showing that they were similar to the majority population, Marit was less concerned. The jihad she described, however, had many similarities to the ideal of living the example of a good Muslim. Some young Muslims described living the example as part of ‘the inner’ or ‘the great’ jihad: the struggle with themselves to be a good Muslim. This centred on being a ‘good person’ (good to others), which in their opinion trumped all other demands they had as Muslims (Sandberg et al. 2018).

As mentioned above, the different forms of everyday resistance were interwoven. Sadia (24), for example, described a continuous dialogue she had with a friend, where the importance of living the example was raised:

> So, yes, I talked to her. I said, "This is how our religion is. I go out with my friends, I go to cafes, I participate in the Norwegian society, I go to school, I get education, I am in front of you, I work with Norwegians, I talk to you, and you are my friend. What has this [terrorism and violence] got to do with Islam? Look at me; I am nice to you. I am wearing Norwegian clothes even though I am a Muslim."

Sadia said that her friend gradually changed her view of Islam. This was probably due to a combination of continuous friendly dialogues and Sadia living the example of what many from the majority population would consider a good Muslim.

Scott (1985) described how mundane everyday struggles under social constraints involve a creative capacity for persistence and inventiveness (see also Simi and Futrell 2009). Arguably, for the participants in this study, living the example was more about persistence than inventiveness. Living the example of a good Muslim is an old ideal in Islam that goes back to Prophet Mohamed. When the young Muslims showed patience, endured humiliation, lived as 'good Muslims', and met hate and criticism with love (as some participants described it), they imitated their religious role models and further established Islam as a peaceful religion. This new essentialism that Islam 'really is' peaceful has roots in age-old Muslim ideals, seen in Sufism in particular, but is also linked to new experiences of Western Muslims (van Es 2018). When faced with anti-Muslim hostility emphasising Islam as a religion of war and Muslims as terrorists, living the example of a well-integrated, friendly Muslim could be an effective form of everyday resistance.

Denying significance

The first three forms of everyday resistance we have described take place in particular situations and during interaction with other people (other-oriented). This is what is traditionally understood as everyday resistance (Hollander and Einwohner 2004). The next two forms we describe are different. They involve 'work on self' (self-oriented) and, most importantly, work on their understanding of the role of anti-Muslim hostility. What we describe as *denying significance* encompasses various ways of ignoring hostility, either by downplaying it or by describing relatively serious events as of little importance. This form of 'biographical work strategy' is prevalent when people 'make sense' of their lives (Ronai and Cross 1998, 99), and we argue that it can also be a form of everyday resistance.

Maymuna (24) described experiences of hostility triggered by her wearing a hijab in public spaces: 'I have reached a point where I do not care what people say. I used to often think, what will people say?' In this case, the change is not primarily in how she reacts during hostile encounters, but more in how she handles the situation and thinks about it later. Some participants described how their responses to anti-Muslim hostility changed over time. Sometimes it was because they aged and 'matured' and at other times because the more confronting forms of resistance became too exhausting in the long term. Maymuna described a process where she gradually managed to ignore hostility:

> Some people stare at me when I walk around. I get those looks because I am dark-skinned and wear a scarf. Those looks leave a mark. But, I managed to ignore it gradually, and I do not care much anymore.

Many see this as a gradual process, where they get used to it, become mature, and, thus, manage to trivialise anti-Muslim hostility. This is, of course, problematic as it can serve to normalise such behaviour. Browne, Bakshi, and Lim (2011) described how stigmatised groups sometimes normalise hostility to be able to go on with their everyday life. At the same time, such responses deny those holding prejudices the power to negatively influence the targets of hostility. Rising above hate can also develop into a strong and important part of self-narratives and identity.

For many young Muslims in this study, it was more about not *wanting* to care or let hostility influence their life than actually managing to ignore it. For some, it was related to different ways of resigning. Melodi (23) said that while growing up, there were always people who did not like her. However, over the last couple of years, with the emergence of ISIS, she had experienced increasing prejudices:

> If I think too much about it, I get really sad. I have cut it off a bit because they are so prejudiced. I cannot afford spending too much energy on it […] It is tiring; these are things that you hold dear [religion]. It is like when people say bad things against your mother, because it means so much to you. It feels like being spat upon and walked over. So, I just turn my back.

The young Muslims at times denied the significance of anti-Muslim hostility, after describing grave instances of verbal abuse and discrimination. This might have been a result of problematic trivialisation or normalisation of hostility. However, the ability to try to 'brush it off' and construct self-narratives where the offended rise above the hostility may also have been an important part of a repertoire of resistance toward anti-Muslim and other forms of hostility that marginalised groups face.

To deny the significance of hostile acts is a form of everyday engagement with hostility. It includes different ways of at least trying to denying the importance, relevance, or impact of anti-Muslim hostility. It is primarily a coping strategy; downplaying the significance of hostility can make the lives of offended people easier (Browne, Bakshi, and Lim 2011). Denying significance could have been described only as an individual coping mechanism and explained in more psychological terms, but when these individual stories become cultural stories (Loseke 2007) that are diffused and re-told by Muslims more widely, it can also be seen as a part of their everyday resistance. Arguably, the personal narratives described above are the product of, and can assist in, the further development of cultural stories that can help Muslims reduce the impacts of anti-Muslim hostility.

Talking down

The form of everyday resistance we describe as *talking down* involves ways of highlighting negative characteristics of those expressing hostility to rise above them. This symbolic boundary work uses the 'conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorise' (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 168), so that 'we' can achieve superiority over 'them' (Tajfel and Turner 1985). Similar to denying significance, it is primarily a form of resistance that takes place in personal narratives. However, the consequences of these narratives can reach far beyond the individual.

Omar (30) shared several personal experiences of everyday discrimination and described the people expressing hostilities this way:

> It is primarily people who come from outside of Oslo [the capital of Norway], who have never met a brown person in their life, or old people. The older generation is used to something very different. They just stay home and watch TV, and then suddenly go out into a different reality. This always means trouble.

Coming from smaller places and being old were used as derogatory characteristics implying that these people could not be taken seriously. They were described as ignorant and, in many ways, below the offended in the social hierarchy. Adilah (25) recounted an episode in Oslo: 'An elderly man purposively pushed me into the wall'. She explained that she did not mind confronting him because he was 'only a poor old man'. Bashar (24) had a similar take on the matter. He said the perpetrator 'was not normal, he had been drinking; he was not himself'.

As illustrated by Adilah and Bashar, *talking down* could involve a kind of sympathy or understanding of those holding prejudices or expressing hostility. This was usually done in a patronising way, situating the target of hostility above the hostile actor. Abdul (21), for example, was bullied for being a Muslim when he was younger. Reflecting upon this as a young adult, he emphasised some characteristics of the bullies:

> I also understand the bullies. It was easy to gain popularity by bullying me. Many of them had problems at home. Some were beaten up and many had divorced parents. They were dead tired of their lives and took the frustration out on me.

Abdul reframed bullying as being more about them than about him: they bullied him because they had problems. They were the marginalised ones; he was normal. He later emphasised that he could have stopped the bullies with violence, but he chose not to. This further demonstrated his moral superiority. Through the process of what Ronai and Cross (1998, 117–118) describe as narrative resistance (and biography work), by talking down, the young Muslims also become the authors of their own identities, simultaneously creating a place for themselves in the society, which also transforms stigma and hostility into more positive identity resources.

Talking down also involved turning the table and describing the hostile actors as the extreme ones. Anton (25) described his experience of having online discussions and being threatened with violence. However, he was careful to emphasise the following:

> I just want to say that it is not the majority, but the minority, who are extremists. They are very extreme and favor killing other extremists. They call for murder. I often read, “We should take up weapons and start doing things ourselves.” They do not realize that they are extremists too. I just leave a comment there: “You are not any better than those extremists who say the same things about you.”

By describing those expressing hostility as extremists, Anton positioned himself as the moderate that rejected all forms of extremism, no matter what ideological or religious position it came from. This way, he and many other young Muslims positioned themselves at the centre and rendered those who expressed hostility as marginalised. For ethnic and religious minorities, such symbolic boundary work (Lamont and Molnár 2002) can be an effective way to demonstrate their superiority and narratively become part of the mainstream population.

By explaining and making sense of anti-Muslim hostility in terms of the marginality and deviance of those who expressed it, young Muslims performed narrative resistance to attempts at negatively labelling Muslims and Islam. The ones who expressed hate, they claimed, were the elderly, extremists, those from distant rural areas, and those with drug problems or other social problems. This ‘othering’ of the hostile actors can be seen as a form of narrative resistance employed in response to stigmatising stereotypes (Lavin 2017). By pointing out the negative characteristics of those holding prejudices or expressing hostility, incidents of hostility were turned around and enabled the young Muslims to reposition themselves as ‘normal’ and the hostile actors as the deviants.

Discussion and conclusion

Our analysis has laid out five ideal-typical forms of everyday resistance to anti-Muslim hostility employed by young Norwegian Muslims. Responding to hostility in these ways provided young Muslims with ‘a sense of agency and control’, which seemingly strengthened their individual resilience and eased their daily lives (Harris and Hussein 2020, 12). The forms of everyday resistance that were most prevalent in our data were strategies of talking back and denying significance, while living the example was least prevalent. Given our data and study design, however, care should be taken when emphasising the distribution and prevalence of the respective forms of resistance across our diverse sample. Our study primarily contributes to a conceptual and theoretical discussion of *forms* of everyday resistance, which extend beyond these particular empirical data.

Talking back, *entering dialogue*, and *living the example* are forms of everyday resistance employed in personal encounters with hostility. The first two resemble that of a study of how African-Americans responded to ethnicity-related stigma by ‘confronting’ racism (Fleming, Lamont, and Welburn 2012). The latter is employed to refute anti-Muslim sentiments and is also a powerful collective ideal in many Muslim communities. *Denying significance* and *talking down* occur in personal narratives. The first has some similarities to descriptions of ‘deflating’ racism (Fleming et al. 2012) as a strategy to obtain recognition and maintain dignity. These personal narratives can be seen as part of collective forms of resistance similar to the former types of resistance. Resistance in personal narratives is primarily a way to ‘resist taking on the negative identity for oneself’ (Ronai and Cross 1998, 106), or a strategy for holding one's ground to refuse to internalise a deviant label (Riessman 2000). However, they also do important narrative work (Frank 2010) beyond the individual.

Narratives and counter-narratives in personal narratives are social in their essence, produced and listened to collectively (McKenzie-Mohr and Lafrance 2017). Ronai and Cross (1998, 106) maintained that when an individual resists discursive constraints and other members of the same group incorporate that strategy, it will become part of a local stock of alternative knowledge, shared intersubjectively. This can alter mainstream knowledge and prejudice about the group in question. If this understanding diffuses further into the mainstream, it can have greater impact. It could, for example, become part of a counter-response to the 'right-wing hate speech' that reinforces the stigma affecting Muslims in Western countries (Mårtensson 2014). The prevalent prejudice-based epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007) Muslims experience however, implies that they do not necessarily possess the 'social, cultural, economic, and political power to imbue their cognitions' into the mainstream (Link and Phelan 2001, 376). The collective aspects of the resistance we have mapped still demonstrate that it amounts to more than personal 'coping efforts' (Major and O'Brien 2005). It entails inherently social responses that serve to counter prejudice and stigma (power) rather than passively adapting to it.

Dark skin colour combined with women wearing hijabs seems to trigger two strong and mutually reinforcing antipathies that lead to frequent experiences of hostility (Bigelow 2010). Everyday resistance arguably plays an especially important role for the social groups most exposed to anti-Muslim hostility, and one could expect that particular forms of resistance dominate among particular groups of stigmatised people. Among the different groups of participants however, we found very different responses to anti-Muslim hostility. Throughout the entire sample, forms of resistance were most clearly linked to how hostility was expressed, in what type of situation and by whom, rather than to differences across categories such as age, gender, ethnic background, being a convert or skin colour (see also Lamont et al. 2016, 86–106). Although our qualitative data does not allow for any decisive conclusions regarding distribution of forms of resistance, this observation resonates with Goffman's (1959) view that actors execute different performances in front of different audiences that vary situationally.

While our study shows that resistance plays a significant role in countering and negotiating anti-Muslim hostility in the daily lives of Muslims, it is important to underline that these forms of resistance are not necessarily effective at challenging the societal structures and discourses that these hostilities manifest. Moreover, claiming that some forms of behaviour or talk are part of a repertoire of resistance does not necessarily imply that they are constructive or helpful for the relationships between different groups in society. Some acts of resistance might risk feeding into power and confirming prejudice, for example, if a Muslim talks back in an aggressive way. Talking down can be questionable as it involves reverse hostility and prejudice toward the majority population or a specific social group at times (Kusow 2004). Denying significance can also be seen as a problematic trivialisation and normalisation of hostility (Browne, Bakshi, and Lim 2011). However, regardless of problematic aspects, the repertoire of everyday resistance we have presented makes it easier for Muslims to avoid victimisation and some of its consequences, and serves to protect them from challenges to their religious identity. It also portrays a more agentic image of stigmatised people than what is usually seen in studies of hate speech, stigmatisation and discrimination.

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