HALAL RESISTANCE

Unraveling Muslims' political agency

Samira Azabar

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Unraveling Muslims' political agency in Belgium

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Setting the stage

Chapter 1

Setting the stage

Introduction

For many years prior to my doctoral trajectory, I worked as an educational worker developing courses on societal issues and religion, for professionals, particularly teachers, integration workers and healthcare workers. One of my responsibilities was to co-coordinate the 2009 Youth Islam Gender conference held in Flanders (Belgium) in co-operation with several universities (i.e., University of Antwerp, Catholic University of Leuven and University of Hasselt), with lectures and workshops focusing on the identity formation processes of young Muslims in Belgium. At the core of the conference were questions like how to reread the Quran in a more gender inclusive way, how to navigate multiple subjectivities[1] as young Belgian Muslims with a migration background, but also whether Muslims should withdraw from or participate in the political arena and how to preserve the essence of Muslim identities in Islamophobic environments.

All these questions show how the socio-political integration of Muslims was (and still is) fiercely debated in our society, and how it affects Muslim subjectivities. Indeed, scholars have expatiated on how Islam has been (and still is) problematized and framed as an obstacle to Muslims' political integration in Western Europe, with Muslims stereotyped as the dangerous Other opposing democracy and Western values (Fadil et al., 2015; Said, 1979; Islam, 2020; Selod, 2018, Cesari, 2013), even before 9/11 (Said, 1979; Cesari, 2014; Ismail, 2008). Being Muslim is thus seen as incompatible with modernity, situating Muslims as outsiders of a modern national imaginary (Fadil, 2015; Cesari, 2013; Sinno, 2012). Academic work refers to this othering of Muslims as a form of structural racism, namely Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism[2] (Garner and Selod, 2015; Meer and Modood, 2009; Zemni, 2012; De Koning, 2016).

[1] Following Foucault, subjectivities are individual subjects/agents who do not come fully formed into the world, but are constituted in and through a set of social relations imbued with power. Thus, power is a key element in the very formation of individuals, as they are always subjected to complex and shifting power dynamics (i.e., sexism, racism, class oppression) and at the same time enabled to take up the position of a thinking subject in and through these relations (Allen, 2002:135).

[2] In this dissertation these concepts are used as synonyms: Islamophobia is defined as a specific form of racism targeting Muslims (see also Zemni, 2012; Garner and Selod, 2015).

These socio-political dynamics, together with four decades of the institutionalization of Islam in Belgium, resulted in a follow-up conference in 2014, titled *"Resistance is halal"*. National and international scholars, such as Farid Esack (University of Johannesburg), Malika Hamidi (EHESS) and Kim Lecoyer (UC Louvain), but also Muslim politicians and activists were invited to discuss how Islam emerges publicly as a source of inspiration to fight against injustices in secular societies. Several political tools were suggested, from institutionalized modes (i.e., voting, standing as a political candidate, founding a Muslim party), to noninstitutionalized modes of participation (petitions, demonstrations, boycotting of services and products), in order to tackle Muslims' exclusion in society. These discussions sparked my (research) interest in Muslims' political agency, as Muslims shared their thoughts and actions expressing their individual power in a society characterized by Islamophobia.

Many of these questions, however, need more scholarly attention, focusing on the Belgian case: What do Muslims consider as politics? Why do Muslims primarily vote for leftist parties? Which candidates are preferred by Muslims to represent them? Do Muslims take part in a variety of political activities (i.e., not only voting), and if so, how can we explain these various forms of participation? To what extent does an Islamophobic environment weaken or reinforce political participation? How do Muslims challenge oppressive narratives? In addition, there is currently a lack of methodological innovation in the study of these questions to account for the heterogeneity among Muslims. This dissertation aims to fill some of these gaps by answering how and why Muslims participate in Belgium, a secular environment characterized by Islamophobia, by studying Muslims' voting behavior, noninstitutionalized participation and further issues. It thus aims to provide a more comprehensive image of Belgian Muslims as political actors compared with the current state of the art, acknowledging the interlocking difficulties they encounter as a stigmatized, vilified social group owing to their Muslim faith (Fadil et al., 2015). So, this dissertation investigates whether – and to what extent – religiosity and an Islamophobic environment shape Muslims' political activities. I[3] do so by studying the notion of Muslims' political agency in the Belgian context, while accounting for the intersecting power dynamics at play i.e., gender, religion, class and ethnicity. After all, the question of how Muslims counter their marginalization or produce alternative ways to participate has been somewhat neglected in academia, owing to an overemphasis on scholarly work centering around the securitization of Islam (Sunnier, 2009; Fadil et al, 2015).

[3] Many papers are the outcome of a collaboration with colleagues (e.g., my promotors). For more information on this: see authors' contributions page 257.

It goes without saying that the political integration of Muslims into European societies has become a highly politicized research focus. However, research on Islam and Muslims has mainly concentrated on what policymakers and public opinion deem important (Sunier, 2009; Sayyid, 2009). Consequently, less attention has been paid to frames and processes that affect Muslims in the political arena, or the knowledge which they produce, altering the notion of agency or public spheres (Fadil et al., 2015; Martiniello, 2009). One of the major consequences of this is the gradual narrowing down of research on Muslims to issues of security, deviant behavior and cultural clash prompted by, for example, the terrorist attacks (Sunnier, 2009). Recently, Fadil et al. (2015:222) have also argued that academic interest in Islam became heightened all over western Europe due to "the rise of post-1989 civilizational narratives, punctuated by global events such as 9/11 and campaigns such as the 'war on terror". Therefore, scholars have addressed the problematic knowledge production around Muslims, because Muslims are primarily seen as subjects of an integration or security discourse, reinforcing the idea of the divergent Other (Said, 1979; Saeed, 2009; Sinno, 2012; Cesari, 2013; Fadil et al., 2015; Torrekens, 2021). Additionally, there has been a shift to a "culturalization of citizenship" in public and academic discourses, defining citizens less in terms of civic, political or social rights and more in terms of assimilation to the social norms, values and culture of the dominant majority (Geschiere, 2009; Fadil et al., 2015). Allievi (2005) refers to this process of redefining concepts as a way to re-become the Other, invigorating the urge to scrutinize Muslims.

In sum, research on Muslims in Belgium remains tightly bound by dominant concerns about Muslims' integration, ignoring how they challenge dominant exclusionary narratives using a wide repertoire of political tools. Certainly, some progress has been made in studying Muslims' agency (see Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; van Es, 2019), but our knowledge remains fragmented, in particular when it concerns in-depth insights into the several modes – and motivations – of Muslim political engagement, accounting for their marginalized position, but also their power to influence oppressive narratives. Moreover, there has been insufficient exploration of the gender dimension of Muslims' political participation, let alone implementation of an intersectional approach rigorously dissecting repressive power structures invoking the resistance of Muslim citizens.

This dissertation contributes to minorities' participation literature by applying innovative rigorous analysis unraveling the agency of a historically disadvantaged minoritized group, Muslims in Belgium, as they resist being othered and excluded from society. An agential approach acknowledges Muslims as subjectivities confronted with exclusion, but also able to form and transform the political and public sphere(s). I hereby focus not only on mainstream political behavior, e.g. (compulsory) voting, but also on noninstitutionalized forms and hidden everyday resistance tactics accounting for Muslims' forms of

political engagement related to their vilified and stigmatized social position in society. This approach broadens the notion of political acts, and uncovers practices that may have remained invisible (Scott, 1985; de Certeau, 1990; Johanssen and Vinthagen, 2019). Agency is defined as the ability to decide on and perform practices (as Muslims do), and is therefore an expression of individual power, in interaction with and in response to others (Crossley, 2022; Cole, 2021).

Social structures are defined as a complex and interconnected set of forces, relationships and institutions working together to condition people's thoughts, behavior, experiences and choices. Despite their influence, however, people can still think for themselves and act in ways that shape their experiences and life trajectories (Cole, 2021; Crossley, 2022). Cole (2021) stresses the ever-evolving dialectical relationship between social structures and a person's agency: they have the ability to influence each other, such that a change in the one requires a change in the other. To put it differently, while social structures shape Muslims, Muslims also shape social structures. From an agential perspective, Muslims can reaffirm social structures by reproducing them, but they can also aim to challenge them by contesting the status quo and creating new norms. However, from the perspective of modern individualism, presenting individuals as autonomous, self-reflexive actors capable of taking their own decisions, Muslims are frequently perceived as lacking agency owing to their Islamic faith (Driezen et al., 2021; Modood, 2019). Secularization and individualization processes in Western Europe are interpreted as indications of modern nations requiring de-institutionalization and rejection of traditional religious authorities.

Consequently, agency is associated with a movement against religious norms and traditions, requiring Muslims to assimilate. Muslims are expected to adopt the dominant secular repertoire – particularly in public spaces – exiling religious practices to the private sphere, if they wish to claim equal membership of the national belonging (Modood, 2019, Driezen et al., 2021). This racialized context ascribes negative traits to Muslim groups (i.e., Muslims are dangerous, violent, anti-Western and lacking in agency and autonomy), while portraying the dominant/secular group as rational, modern and as the embodiment of agency and autonomy, and thus may invoke racist practices excluding Muslims (Bayrakli and Hafez, 2019; EUFRA, 2017). Furthermore, Cole (2021) also pointed to social scientists slipping into the trap of describing oppressed populations as if they have no agency, owing to the recognition of social structures dominating the subjugated i.e., class stratification, systemic racism and patriarchy. Or, as Cole summarizes it, social scientists "might think that the poor, people of color, and women and girls are universally oppressed by social structures, and thus, have no agency". Indeed, Muslim minorities in large urban contexts are generally characterized by a low socio-economic status: low levels of educational qualification, limited labor market participation and high degrees of poverty compared with

the majority population. Previous studies have described how the lower classes display the lowest rate of participation (Beeghley, 1986; Brady et al., 1995), but also that negative discourses can encourage groups, like Muslims post 9/11, to participate politically rather than abstaining from the political process that may benefit their concerns (Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008; André et al, 2017; Oskooii, 2016).

Second, informed by intersectionality theory, this dissertation pays attention to how Muslims, compared with the dominant group, are differentially located, differentially identified, and therefore differentially evaluate these locations and identifications, shaping their political engagement. An examination of interlocking systems of power affecting those who are most marginalized in society stresses how citizens' experiences and interests are informed by being members of multiple groups, instead of one particular group (van Es, 2019; Collins, 2020). It makes it clear how experiences within groups (i.e., Muslims, women, or Muslim women) can differ depending on their other identities that intersect with each other. This is particularly the case in environments experiencing radical transformation as Europe becomes more and more religiously plural (hereby nullifying the secularization thesis which claims that the role of religion will diminish in modern times) and experiencing widespread racialization marginalizing Muslims. I therefore explore whether and how religiosity and Islamophobia influence Muslims' political activities, while shedding light on the specificity and gendered participatory patterns of Muslims. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that although Muslims are shaped by social (oppressive) structures, they nonetheless have the ability – the agency – to make decisions and express them in political behavior.

But why is it useful to study Muslims' political engagement in Belgium? I acknowledge that emphasis is often placed on the fact that migrants belong to ethnic minorities, prompted by the idea that this characteristic is especially conducive to under-representation in the political arena. Yet this dissertation will highlight another related characteristic which in post-9/11 times (and before) may even function as a stronger social marker of the "otherness" of migrants, namely that many Europeans with a migration background are Muslims (Helbling and Traunmüller, 2020). Indeed, although a bulk of political participation studies focuses mostly on ethnicity as a salient identity marker, this dissertation centers around religion, acknowledging how ethnicity and religion are intertwined (Fleischmann et al., 2011; Zibouh, 2013). Several arguments justify this choice. First, scholars have acknowledged the revival of religion – particularly Islam – in Western European societies, which contradicts the secularization thesis that claims that religion plays a more marginal role (Berger, 1999; Habermas, 2008). Muslims indeed stand out due to their high and stable levels of religiosity over time and across immigrant generations compared with the majority, but also other minority groups (Fleischmann, 2022). Second, in a post-9/11 era, research claims that the salience of Muslims' religious identity seems to have risen above that of

their ethnic background (Dancygier, 2014; Voas and Fleischmann, 2012), referring to this phenomenon as the ethnicization of Islam (Fadil et al., 2015). Accordingly, scholars argue that the development of a distinct Muslim identity in the electoral arena (Peace, 2015: 3), the increased public scrutiny following terrorist attacks (Dancygier, 2014: 14) and the collective history of being stigmatized as the religious "other" (Peucker, 2016) warrant studies on Muslims' political agency and integration in Western societies.

Although there are no official statistics about Muslims in Belgium, some authors have referred to an increase in Muslims' demographic presence, which in turn makes them a social group with significant political impact. However, little systematic research is available on Muslims' political choices and explanations of these choices (Zibouh, 2013). Lastly, following the standpoint theory, which argues that an individual's perspectives are shaped by their social and political experiences, we can conclude that Muslims are differentially located in our society socially, economically and politically. Experiences form a standpoint – a point of view – through which a specific individual sees and understands the world (Harding, 1992). These marginalized standpoints are dynamic and multifaceted, challenging the status quo as represented by groups with more social power.

The following sections expatiate on the research objectives and contributions, followed by a review of scholarship published on Muslims' political participation, aiming to offer an extensive – albeit non-exhaustive – overview of the literature on Muslims' political activities. After describing the research context (Belgium) and data collections, the introductory chapter concludes with an outline of the dissertation.

Research objectives and contributions

In this dissertation, I will study Muslims' political agency against the background of a racialized environment: Flanders/Belgium, where the public debate around Muslims is characterized by exclusion and hostility towards Muslims (Mescoli, 2019; Fadil et al., 2015; Dancygier, 2017). Agency is here perceived as the ability of individuals (i.e., Muslims) to have the power and resources to act in the political arena (Cole; 2021; Crossley, 2022). I start from the perspective of those who self-identify as Muslim, to study *how* and *why* Muslims participate in politics and what shapes their political agency in a racialized environment, i.e. an environment that thrives on racial boundary making while constructing a hierarchy (Us vs Them), claiming that the Islamic faith and the (secular) modern West are incompatible. Consequently, I will study whether and how Muslim identification (all chapters), religious

behavior such as mosque attendance (Chapters 2 and 4) and religious salience (Chapters 4, 5) but also Islamophobia (Chapters 4, 5 and 6) shape Muslims' political choices. All in all, my main interest is in Muslims' experiences and how they deal with negative portrayals that seemingly limit them in everyday life, and in the political actions they take in order to mitigate their marginalization.

In short, I will investigate Muslims' institutionalized (party and candidate choice) and noninstitutionalized participation (i.e., demonstrations, petitions), and the influence of religiosity and Islamophobia on participation. Additionally, next to the more acknowledged forms of participation, I will also explore hidden resistance practices, aiming for a more systematic and comprehensive approach to Muslims' political participation, and thus Muslims' political agency. These hidden forms of politics are informal and non-organized, also referred to as infrapolitics or invisible politics (Scott, 1990), but are hardly ever recognized as political acts, compared with more visible modes of political actions such as voting or demonstrations. Studies indicate a lower voter turnout of specific minoritized groups (i.e, Muslims), claiming they are not interested in politics (see review Cesari, 2014), yet studying a wide range of political actions provides a more complete overview of how and why Muslims aim to alter dominant narratives to their benefit.

Second, owing to their different social positions and widespread Islamophobia, marginalized minorities such as Muslims may participate in different ways. I therefore draw on intersectionality theory, emphasizing the interaction between different dimensions of inequality such as ethnicity/race, gender and religion (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2020). This dissertation acknowledges the importance of the intersecting power dynamics undermining or reinforcing Muslims' agency, and consequently criticizes the essentialist tendency to treat social groups (i.e., women or Muslims) as homogeneous entities with the same specific interests, while focusing on privileges and disadvantages associated with the various social identities (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2020; Severs et al., 2016:348). For instance, Muslim women have specific interests and needs (one example being the headscarf debate) different from other women *and* from Muslim men (see also Crenshaw 1991). So, to approach them solely as women or solely as Muslims, as if there are no differences within groups, is inaccurate and counterproductive. However, despite its innovative approach, intersectionality theory has not been systematically implemented in political science research. Intersectionality scholars have stressed that it is vital to account for the "social positioning of the social agent" or the "social perspective" to reveal how different individuals see the world in different ways and are treated in different ways (Yuval-Davis, 2011; Severs et al, 2016; Young, 2002), which also affects how they engage in the political realm.

Thirdly, a combination of methods is used to study Muslims' political participation, focusing on Muslim identity. Most research on Muslims' political participation relies on qualitative research, since collecting quantitative representative data on Muslims can be difficult owing to a lack of official statistics on the Muslim population in Western European countries. Although a qualitative approach has its merits (i.e. an in-depth understanding of Muslims' views on politics and motivations/obstacles to participation), we can also learn from quantitative data owing to the generalizability of the findings. The multi-method approach followed in this dissertation aims to bring together the best of both research methods, through the collection of unique exit poll data combined with in-depth semi-structured interviews to study Muslims' political agency.

Furthermore, the quantitative studies in this dissertation show several strengths owing to (1) a fairly unique dataset (2) collected in a very interesting electoral context: Antwerp/Belgium (3) applying an intersectional lens. The data collection – the exit poll data – yielded accurate and representative data on a national level while oversampling Muslims in urban contexts. The compulsory voting and oversampling of Muslims in Belgium ensured sufficient data on Muslims' electoral choices in an interesting setting: a flexible proportional list system with a wide range of parties (from radical left to radical right parties) each presenting a candidate list which was diverse in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and religion. Voters could either vote for a list, or cast one or multiple preference votes within the same list. Additionally, not only demand-side data (Muslim voters' characteristics) but also supply-side data (candidate characteristics) were collected and modelled simultaneously in a multilevel analysis. This way, we could account for supply side characteristics (i.e. list puller, political experience) to test whether Muslim belonging plays a role in the decision-making process of Muslims. Moreover, because Muslims are not a monolithic group, this dissertation aims to grasp the heterogeneity within Muslim groups i.e., gender, age, religiosity, ethnicity as previously mentioned. Previous scholars have emphasized that although literature on intersectionality theory is emerging in the political sciences, there are still lively discussions on how to empirically (in a quantitative manner) study intersectionality in the social sciences (Spierings, 2012; Bauer et al., 2021; Misra et al., 2020).

Additionally, the in-depth interviews conducted by an insider, a Muslim researcher, not only elaborated on these choices, further questioning the motives behind political choices and views on politics, but also expand our knowledge on what drives Muslims' political engagement in a racialized environment, where Islam is a "chronic object of discussion and debate" (Brubaker, 2014:3), while the main message stresses that Islam and the West are incompatible. How do Muslims navigate such racialized environments? How and why do they counter narratives that other them? What makes them participate, and around which topics, on which terms? All in all, the interviews aim to unravel Muslims' agency in

the political field. We know from previous literature (de Certeau, 1980; Scott, 1985) that marginalized minorities may participate beyond the traditional and acknowledged forms of political participation. These hidden resistance tactics are less studied, and are mostly applied by the marginalized, thus expanding the repertoire of political actions that citizens can undertake (Scott, 1985). All in all, there is less research available focusing on how Muslims counter discourses that marginalize them, so through in-depth interviews we can learn more from vilified minorities in Western democracies aiming to tackle their marginalization as citizens.

State of the art and theoretical framework

This section consists of two subsections. It begins by setting out a conceptual framework defining and clarifying the main concepts used: (a) *the political participation* of (b) *Muslims* (c) in a *racialized environment* (d) through an *intersectional lens*. As discussions about concepts in social sciences can be endless, the aim here is not to resolve the academic disputes but simply to clarify how the main concepts are interpreted throughout the dissertation. Secondly, I give an overview of the literature on Muslims' political engagement. When combined, the sections serve as an introductory framework for the six subsequent empirical chapters scrutinizing Muslims' institutionalized, noninstitutionalized and hidden resistance tactics (or infrapolitics), applying an intersectional approach.

Conceptual framework

(a) Political participation Van Deth (2016:3) defines citizens' participation in politics as "*any voluntary, nonprofessional activity concerning government, politics or the state"*. Ample research makes a distinction between electoral, or institutionalized participation (i.e., voting, contacting an elected official, being a member of a political party) and non-electoral or noninstitutionalized participation (Barnes et al., 1979; Stockemer, 2014). Regarding the latter, I refer broadly to all forms that are noninstitutionalized, including the former "unconventional" forms (e.g., demonstrations and signing petitions), but excluding illegal acts of civil disobedience or political violence (e.g., occupying buildings or damaging property).

Both institutionalized and noninstitutionalized participation are seen as "legitimate" and "normal" mechanisms to communicate citizens' interests to political decision makers (Norris et al., 2005; Marien et al., 2010; Stockemer, 2014; van Deth, 2014). Scholars argue that citizens' participation is crucial for the stability and legitimacy of democracies, as people's sense of having a stake in the system makes it

possible to channel their demands in legal and peaceful ways (Just, 2017:2; van Deth, 2016; Verba et al., 1993). Generally, variation in participation is not perceived as problematic if it is a free and voluntary choice (Marshall, 1950; Verba et al., 1993). However, concerns do arise when abstention from political engagement is related to systemic individual or group-level characteristics uncovering structural inequalities in society. Additionally, scholars emphasize the importance of participation for the quality of democracy, stating that: "Where few take part in decisions there is little democracy; the more participation there is in decisions, the more democracy there is" (Verba and Nie, 1972:1). It is therefore all the more important to research Muslims' participation.

Similarly, van Deth (2016) argues that vibrant democracies are characterized by a continuous expansion of the available forms of participation, so that ultimately almost every activity by some citizen can be understood as a form of political participation. The author took up the core features of political participation in a conceptual map covering five distinct forms of participation, arguing that voluntary actions by citizens in (1) the sphere of or (2) when targeting government/state or politics are considered as political participation. Additionally, political participation includes (3) citizens aiming to resolve collective or community problems, or (4) use actions that at first sight (i.e., a play, flash mob) cannot be recognized as political but occur in a political context (i.e., when performed before the parliament). Lastly, when an activity is used to (5) express political aims and intentions, this too is considered as political participation (van Deth, 2016). Clearly, van Deth offers a comprehensive conceptualization of political participation, not only focusing on activities in the sphere of or targeting government and or state, but also broader actions with a political intention.

It is particularly important to look beyond traditional modes of participation when considering minorities such as Muslims, who could have specific ways of engaging with political activities owing to the intersections of multiple power locations. This dissertation therefore does not limit the domain of the political to the realm of overt political acts, but incorporates hidden everyday forms of resistance tactics enacted by the subjugated (Fadil, 2009; Scott, 1985; de Certeau, 1980; Johansson and Vinthagen, 2019). A renewed interest in de Certeau's and Scott's work emphasizes that resistance can be very different things, even mundane practices of accommodation and non-confrontation in daily life, such as representing oneself as modern and emancipated to counter the "oppressed Muslim women" narrative (see van Es, 2019; Johansson and Vinthagen, 2019:9), as long as these acts are performed to alter the power dynamics in their favor.

These forms of politics are informal and non-organized, also referred to as infrapolitics or everyday invisible politics (Scott, 1990), but are often not recognized as *politics* compared with collective

resistance (i.e., demonstrations). In his prominent work, Scott (1985, 1990) makes a plea for acknowledgment of everyday tactics as real politics. The author studied the hidden tactics of Malaysian peasants in a rural class conflict: these included pilfering, sabotage and slander, used to survive and challenge domination by the elite, because overt rebellion was at times too risky for the peasants. Similarly, de Certeau (1980) unraveled the everyday tactics of the ordinary class (or consumers) as repeated maneuvers challenging the power structures that discipline lives (or strategies) in liberal-democratic contexts. In his theoretical work, he emphasized how the repertoires of resistance take place in the streets, highlighting the vital role of power relations in constraining the forms of resistance. Indeed, power and resistance are entangled in multiple and complex ways (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2019). In addition, echoing previous research, I argue that visible forms of resistance may feed into infrapolitics and vice versa (Lilja et al. 2017; Johansson and Vinthagen, 2019; Scott, 1985). In short, these two forms of resistance – public and hidden everyday resistance – are not mutually exclusive, but could rather be seen as complementary (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2019; Scott, 1985).

(b) Muslim As this dissertation focuses on understanding the ways in which a category of individuals, who identify themselves as Muslims, engage with and participate in the political realm, it seems necessary to provide a definition of who Muslims are. Like many other concepts, this concept has a variety of meanings. Brubaker (2012:2) rightfully asks: "But what does it mean to study 'Muslims' in European countries of immigration? Who and what are we talking about when we talk about 'Muslims'? The answer is by no means self-evident."

Several scholars have pointed to how the notion of Muslims was previously attached to (descendants of) guest workers who migrated to Belgium for work purposes in the '60s (Allievi, 2005; Fadil et al., 2015; Mansouri, 2020). The integration of migrants was first perceived through a socio-economic lens: the integration of Muslims, as an underprivileged working migrant class, was seen to be conditioned by their socio-economic background, facing structural forms of exclusion such as poverty and unemployment (Fadil et al., 2015). This rapidly shifted to demanding that Muslims comply with (the norms and values of) the liberal secular democracy. Religious particularities were used to identify Muslim minorities, considered as an indication of "failed integration". Meer (2010) refers to a shift from race to the emergence of religion as a salient identity marker of difference, whereas Samad (1992:508) clarifies that groups labeled as Muslims have also been studied by sociologists, anthropologists and political scientists as Black working class, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis etc.

The increasing public visibility and accommodation of Islam in Belgium as migrants settled down, but also several international events in the '80s (i.e., the bombing of Libya by the US government, the Salman Rushdie affair) resonated in Brussels and attracted much media and public attention, identifying

the Other as Muslim. The narrative of the violent and dangerous Muslims was boosted by 9/11 and the following terrorist attacks. This led to a massive shift in public representations which also shaped the self-identifications of Muslims (Fadil et al., 2015; see also Mead, 1934). Or as Allievi (2005) puts it: "The other, the different, the foreigner, the immigrant. And today the Muslim." Indeed, as argued above, Islam (and Muslims) is still publicly discussed as a problem in secular societies, which portray Muslims as outsiders of the modern nation. There is a risk that research focusing only on Muslims/non-Muslims as distinct categories will foreground religion as an explanatory variable, using it to explain existing differences, while other dynamics may play a more decisive role (Brubaker, 2012; Allievi, 2005).

Therefore, the different chapters of the dissertation do not define Muslim as "a religious identity, but instead an identity that may have religious, racial, political, or cultural dimensions" (Sinno, 2012). Although I acknowledge the limitations of the term "Muslim", as it may de-emphasize the multiple subjectivities at play, I still use the term, as Muslims' Muslimness lies at the heart of being othered (Meer, 2010; Islam, 2020). Moreover, the experience of being stigmatized as Muslims in everyday interaction or public discourse leads some to reactively assert a Muslim identification, to revalorize what has been devalorized (Brubaker, 2012:3). The negative portrayal of Islam as incompatible with Western democracies fuels a misperception which characterizes Muslims as the dangerous and inferior Other, not capable or unwilling to engage with secular nations, while denying their agency. Additionally, this boundary making of Us vs Them constructs the (inferior) Other exclusively in religious terms, as first and foremost Muslim, and therefore a monolithic group.

However, we should keep in mind that Muslims are not homogenous, but rather marked by complex power dynamics such as language, ethnicity, religious traditions, gender or class, among other variables (Mansouri, 2020). Subjectivities are thus fluid and shaped by relations of power. This dissertation acknowledges these differences by applying an intersectional approach focusing mainly on Muslim belonging, religiosity and gender, accounting for other intersecting dynamics i.e., class and age. Additionally, to respect the agency of Muslims, I do not myself label participants as Muslim, but rely on the self-identifications of Muslim participants. In the quantitative studies (Chapters 2 to 5) of this dissertation I asked whether they perceive themselves as Muslim (or any other religion), whereas in the qualitative studies (Chapters 6 to 7), I explicitly send out a call for Muslim participants. In the following section, I elaborate on how racialized processes complicate Muslims' position in secular societies.

(c) Racialized environments Owing to the changing racial, ethnic and religious landscapes in the US and Europe, new racial paradigms are moving beyond biological definitions of race while providing a new language and space to explain how groups acquire racial meaning dependent on social, political

and economic contexts (Selod and Embrick, 2013; Casey, 2021). Racialization is gradually becoming perceived as a process of ascribing sets of negative characteristics "viewed as inherent to members of a group because of their physical or cultural traits" (Cainkar and Selod, 2018:170). These traits are not limited to skin tone, but include a myriad of attributes including cultural traits emerging as racial, such as language, clothing and religious practices (Garner and Selod, 2015:7). Racialization refers to the construction of racial boundaries between social groups and thus a hierarchy (a superior Us versus an inferior Them), not only based on phenotypical differences but more importantly by giving social meaning to religious differences (Islam, 2020; Meer, 2010; Garner and Selod, 2015; Onasch, 2017). For instance, Muslims are perceived as non-European, patriarchal, backward, dangerous, violent and thus ill-equipped to adapt to modern and advanced secular democracies respecting gender equality, sexual orientation and freedom of speech. When this boundary work persists through time and involves cultural and social hierarchies, symbolic boundaries may reinforce social boundaries, which are objectified forms of social differences, stating who belongs and who does not through legitimation or stigmatization (Driezen et al., 2022; Islam, 2020: Onasch, 2017). For instance, owing to racialization portraying Muslims as patriarchal, anti-Western and dangerous, Trump issued a Muslim ban in 2017 (Zopf, 2018) and in Europe, several countries have banned the burqa and veil in the public sphere and/or state schools and workplaces (Brems, 2020). Similarly, Islam (2020) stresses the dialectical relationship between race, racist structures, racist practices and ideologies. Simply stated, racist structures in society can only exist through racial ideologies that legitimate racist practices, which on their turn are reinforced by racist practices to produce racial structures. It is this racialized social system which affects and constrains the racial experiences of Muslims.

In sum, these racialized processes positioning Muslims as the Other invoke racism, the superiority of one group over another, by problematizing markers such as religion and ethnicity (Banton, 2015, Sayyid, 2009, Garner and Selod, 2015; Islam, 2020). Defining Muslims as the divergent and dangerous Other is not new; it originated *before* colonial times as social hierarchies based on religious differences in general were created in the premodern era (Selod and Embrick, 2013:646; Islam, 2020; Cainkar and Selod, 2018). Racial ideologies are thus not static; they are fluid and continue to form and transform racial categories (Islam, 2020). So, the ways in which Europe is debated and reimagined through the so-called *Muslim Question* undermines the idea of Islamophobia as a 9/11 phenomenon (Fadil, 2019; Selod, 2018). This constructed Muslim-as-the-Other discourse is also narrated in the seminal work of Edward Said (1978), which criticized the use of the Orient as the antithesis of the West, justifying Western colonial and imperialist agendas. In a post 9/11 society, these racialized images are still vividly present and have been intensified under the guise of the War on Terror. Additionally, scholars have argued that racialization processes are gendered: as terrorism resulted in the criminalization of Muslim men as

(potential) terrorists, Muslim women were seen as oppressed and a cultural threat to the Western ideals of gender equality. This gendered and racialized discourse becomes even stronger when visible markers are involved, such as a long beard, Islamic dress or a veil, making Muslims more vulnerable to anti-Muslim racism (Abu Lughod, 2002; Islam, 2020; Durani, 2020).

Interestingly, these negative characteristics can also be attributed to groups who were earlier classified as White, such as Muslim converts (Meer, 2010; Cainkar and Selod, 2018; Casey, 2021) or even to non-Muslims: hate crimes were waged against Sikhs because they were mistaken for Muslims (Sian, 2017). So, even a presumed religious identity or practice becomes a marker of race/Muslimness, subjecting minorities to Islamophobia (Cainkar and Selod, 2018; Islam, 2020; Sian, 2017). Intersectionality scholars further argue that racialized Muslim subjects may intersect with other racialized subjects such as Black subjects, emphasizing the complexity of Muslim subjectivities (Selod, 2018; Cainkar and Selod, 2018). For instance, a Black Muslim woman with a veil will have other racial experiences from a white Muslim woman who chooses not to wear the hijab, due to the visibility of her Muslimness. Nevertheless, the marginalization of groups through cultural differences, and the lack of attention hereto, has kept the racialized experiences of Muslims invisible. Consequently, scholars have criticized how Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism has not been taken seriously or even viewed as something which must be addressed for security reasons (Garner and Selod, 2015; Meer, 2010; Meer and Modood, 2012). Nevertheless, scholars invest in developing theories in order to gain insights into multiple forms of oppression experienced by minorities. One of these frameworks is intersectionality, which I will elaborate on in the next section.

(d) Intersectionality Black feminists have criticized identity movements of the early ’70s and ’80s for focusing only on the problems of middle and upper class heterosexual white women (Crenshaw, 1991; hooks, 1981; Collins, 2019). They have called for a feminist theory that accounts not only for gender but also considers race/ethnicity, class, and sexuality. As Black feminist scholars, they have emphasized the importance of creating knowledge about oneself, resisting stereotypes and biased perceptions of African-American women and countering the idea of objective studies performed by white academic scholars (Bourbain, 2022). This othering of minorities, comparing them with the dominant group and evaluating how integrated they are, strengthens the Us vs Them claim where the dominant group is perceived as the norm. By studying multiple forms of oppression together, using intersectionality as a framework where social inequalities occur along different intersecting axes, research sheds light on the complexity of oppression, but also on the complexity of Muslim subjectivities. Indeed, Muslims should not be reduced to their Muslimness only, but are (also) minoritized ethnic groups, from different social classes, gender and so on. The intersectional approach thus emphasizes this interaction between different

dimensions of inequality such as ethnicity/race, gender and religion, as axes of power that mutually reinforce one another (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 2019). Or, as Collings put it, we cannot understand any form of oppression without examining it in relation to others (Collins, 2019).

Additionally, scholars refer to "invisible intersectionality", arguing that persons with multiple subordinate group identities, such as Muslim women, become "invisible" for policy-makers compared to those with a single subordinate group, notably women and Muslim men (Crenshaw,1991; Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008). Scholars have developed a critique of how a discourse or policy aimed at either women or Muslims fails to account for, respectively, religious discrimination and patriarchy in their battle for social justice, leading to a reproduction of Muslim women's subordination in both cases (see also Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectional theory allows us to explore how Muslim subjectivities create alternative political acts related to the multiple inequalities they experience, or feel connected to multiple groups experiencing oppression. Similarly, Joly (2017) argues that although the discourse of discrimination in Britain and France affected Muslim men and women alike, Muslim women suffered additionally due to the prevailing prejudices as women of Muslim background. She demonstrated that Muslim women are positioned within complex relations (i.e., unequal gender relations intersecting with their religious group and majority society) and found obstacles and facilitators governing their capacity to act politically. Research focusing on Muslims' agency should therefore account for the power dynamics constraining this agency. Likewise, in Belgium, van den Brandt (2019) elaborated on how Muslim women belonging to a feminist and antiracist movement (BOEH!) engage in political protest against the ban on veils introduced by the local government with a view to imposing a normative secular model of emancipation.

The question of political participation of Muslims

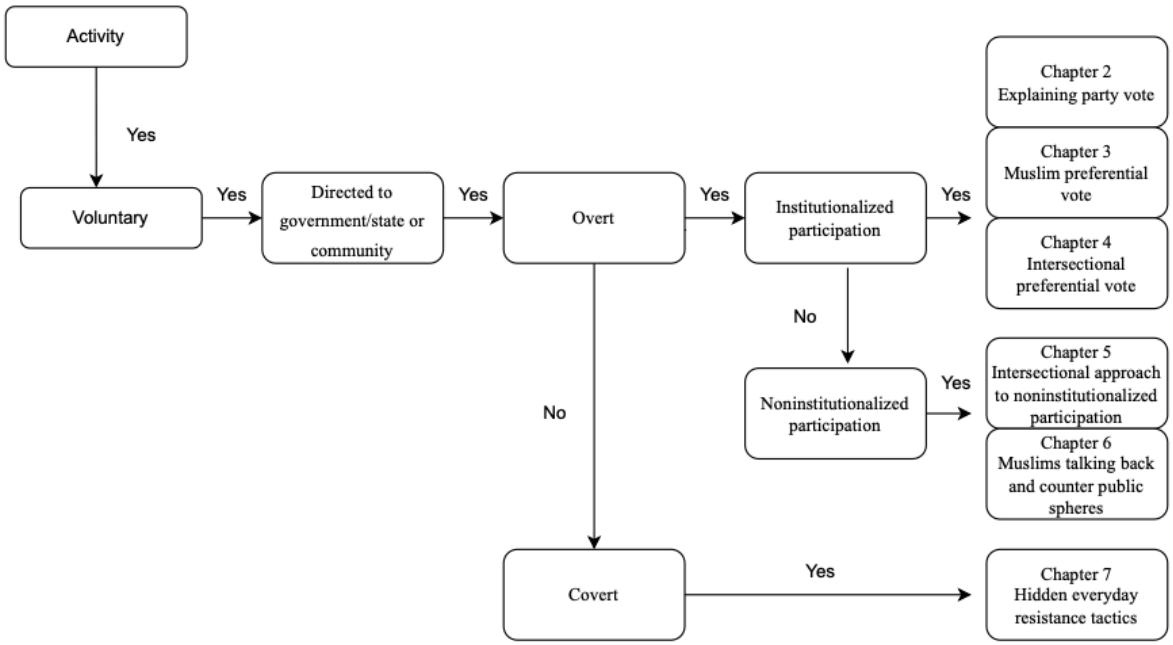
Interestingly, Muslims' political integration was for a long time not considered to be a salient issue. In the 1960s, migrant workers from Muslim countries such as Morocco and Turkey were not perceived as potential citizens but merely as guests invited to work and produce (Martiniello, 2006; Mescoli, 2019; Fadil et al., 2015). In European literature, the thesis of political quiescence or passivity of migrants viewed Muslim migrants as apolitical and politically apathetic. Martiniello (2006) identified two types of explanation provided by scholars for migrants' apathy, in addition to the temporay nature of the migration process. First, that they had no political rights in their home country and therefore were not familiar with the electoral system in Belgium, and second, they lacked political and democratic culture – and were thus less culturally developed – as a consequence of being socialized in an authoritarian regime. Both explanations have their flaws: the first argument ignores other forms of political activity

such as trade union politics and community organization, while the second reflects a culturalist and paternalistic approach (Martiniello, 2006; Boussetta, 2000).

The portrayal of migrants as apolitical has been challenged by multiple academic studies on Muslims' voting behavior and involvement in mainstream political institutions (Heath et al., 2015; Amjahad and Sandri, 2012; Castano, 2014; Cesari, 2013; Zibouh, 2013; Bergh and Bjorklund, 2011). However, scholarship on Muslim minorities' political engagement in its various forms is still in its infancy, with a few notable exceptions (Swyngedouw, 2015; Amjahad and Sandri, 2008; Zibouh, 2013). Before expanding on the available studies on Muslims' engagement, I present Figure 1 on what is meant by political participation. This figure shows an overview of how political participation is defined in this dissertation, inspired by van Deth's conceptual map of political participation, in which the author goes through several steps to decide whether a phenomenon can be labeled as political participation (2016:7). I adapted it to cover Muslims' everyday resistance tactics as covert participation owing to their marginalized social position in society. Subsequently, I linked these several modes of participation (e.g., voting, signing petitions, participating in demonstrations) to the chapters of my dissertation.

This dissertation defines political participation as (1) an activity or action, thus focusing on the behavioral aspect. Second, the performed activities need to be (2) voluntary, as political participation should not be a consequence of force or coercion. However, like van Deth, I do not categorize compulsory voting as non-voluntary, because countries with compulsory voting do not force citizens to actually cast a vote but oblige citizens to attend the polling station on election day. Furthermore, one can ask whether the activity is (3) directed to (or in the sphere of) the government, state or community. As many activities can be categorized as such (i.e., voting, demonstrating against racism, posting political messages online, boycotting Israeli products), I draw a distinction between whether the activities are overt or covert. Under overt action, I have studied either institutionalized activities (also referred to as electoral activities such as voting) or noninstitutionalized activities (also referred to as non-electoral activities i.e., participating in demonstrations, boycotting products and services). When the activities are instead covert or hidden, aiming to oppose oppressive hierarchies, the focus is on the everyday resistance tactics of Muslims. In the following sections, I will elaborate on the available studies on Muslims' political participation.

Figure 1 *What is political participation? Overview of dissertation*



(a)Institutionalized participation Scholarly research on voting behavior can be divided into major research schools. One notable school created a sociological model of political cleavages such as religion (Church vs state), area of residence (rural vs urban) and socio-economic status (owner vs worker) to explain voters' electoral choices (Lazarsfeld et al., 1944). These socio-cultural lines or cleavages divide citizens into groups with specific political interests, often resulting in political conflicts among these groups. Accordingly, these cleavages determine the party system and individual voting behavior of citizens according to their social group (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). Second, the Michigan model has been commonly used to successfully explain a party vote for the majority group. As a theory of vote choice, the Michigan model centers on partisanship designed as a psychological affinity with a political party, referred to as party identification (Campbell et al., 1960). Attachment to a party is thus acquired through a socialization process that assumes a stable and lasting relationship with a political party, and influences the evaluation of candidates and issues as short-term factors. The output of this funnel of causality is the vote.

Nevertheless, one could ask whether these models – mainly used for majority groups – could also explain Muslims' electoral behavior. Or are minority groups in need of other theoretical models adjusted

to their positionality as minorities? As partisanship is, rather, perceived as a sophisticated vote, one should question whether belonging to a social group (e.g., Muslims) could better explain their electoral choices. Furthermore, Brady et al. (1995) developed a resource model considering resources (such as time, money and civic skills) applied for instance at the workplace, organizations or religious institutions. More specifically, those who have the time, money and civic skills are more likely to participate in politics. As these resources are not equally distributed, and Muslims are more likely to have a lower socio-economic status and lower education level (and thus fewer resources), research could investigate the participation rate of minoritized Muslims.

Several studies have revealed that Muslims' political participation is characterized by a lower electoral turnout, a preference for left-wing political parties and Muslim candidates, particularly in urban cities with a sizeable Muslim electorate (Cesari, 2014; Teney et al., 2010; Van Heelsum et al., 2016). Notwithstanding this geographical concentration, most Muslim voters have intended to vote for established mainstream leftist parties. For instance, in the US the overwhelming majority of Muslim voters cast their votes for Hillary Clinton (75%) in the 2016 presidential elections, while 66% of Muslims state that they identify with or lean towards the Democratic party (Pew Research Center, 2017b). The same goes for UK Muslims, who are a strong Labour constituency: in 2015, 74% of Muslims opted for the Labour party. In 2017, this share had risen to 87% (Curtice et al., 2018). With regard to the French presidential elections in 2007, Dargent (2009) showed that 95% of Muslims voted for Ségolene Royal (Parti Socialiste) compared with only 5% for Sarkozy.

With regard to Belgium, the available electoral studies are conducted in the capital of Belgium, Brussels, owing to the presence of a sizeable Muslim electorate. Zibouh's (2013) overview of the scant electoral studies in the French-speaking part of Belgium confirms the leftist vote. Based on exit poll data gathered at the 2004 regional elections in Brussels, the majority of Muslims voted for left-wing parties, more specifically the social democrats (Parti Socialiste) (Sandri and De Decker, 2008). A similar pattern of results was found at the federal elections in 2007 (Amjahad and Sandri, 2012), despite major scandals of financial fraud concerning politicians belonging to the Parti Socialiste. More recently, Swyngedouw et al. (2015) have focused on the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, Flanders, revealing the variation in the leftist vote of Muslims, from radical left to the social democratic party. It is interesting to ask why Muslims opt for primarily leftist parties. Currently, scholars still rely mainly on (macro-level) aggregated data to explain the electoral choices of Muslims in Western Europe. For instance, scholars generally discard religious motivations as crucial factors in Muslims' party vote, based on an assumption of the secular leftist vote (Amjahad and Sandri, 2012; Castano, 2014), while others claim that Muslims' precarious socio-economic background and experiences with discrimination serve as an explanatory

factor (Cesari, 2014; Zibouh, 2013). However, it goes without saying that these contextual inferences are sub-optimal because of the imminent risk of ecological fallacy. More empirical research is thus necessary to explain Muslims' preference for left-wing parties, Chapter 2 of the dissertation will help to explain Muslims' tendency to vote for leftist candidates, focusing on the following research question: **What explains Muslims' leftist party choice? (RQ1)**

Less research than on the issue of Muslims' party vote has been conducted on the preferential vote(s) of Muslims, let alone on their motivations to use preferential voting. A growing body of literature on voter-candidate similarities demonstrates the preference of voters for representatives who embody their demographic characteristics (Cutler, 2002; Popkin, 1991). Studies point out that men and women are more likely to vote for respectively men and women (Erzeel and Caluwaerts, 2015; Plutzer and Zipp, 1996) and ethnic minorities are more likely to vote for candidates with an ethnic minority background (Teney et al., 2010; Togeby, 2008; Baretto, 2007; Michon and Tillie, 2011). Similar results could be expected when focusing on Muslims' preferential votes, notably that they would vote for Muslim candidates, in particular because the Muslim identity is contested in society. Therefore, Muslims could expect Muslim candidates to represent their needs and interests more effectively than other (non-Muslim) candidates on the list. Moreover, although scholars have pointed to preferential voting as a sophisticated way of voting (André et al., 2012), Muslims' group consciousness and strong social identity could compensate for the lack of political resources among members of "deprived" groups (Miller et al., 1981). These preferential votes could contribute to Muslims' descriptive and substantive representation in policymaking institutions, increasing the sense of inclusion in the political system (Dancygier, 2014).

As far as I know, only Heath et al. (2015) have studied whether Muslims vote for Muslim candidates, using cross-sectional survey data and candidate data focusing on Uttar Pradesh (India), where Muslims feel extremely discriminated against and excluded. The study revealed that respondents who belong to the Muslim faith are more likely to vote for Muslim candidates, but on the condition that these Muslim candidates have a realistic chance of winning. Chapter 3 explores whether Muslim candidates evoke similar effects in secular democracies where religious conflicts are less violent but where there is nevertheless a public debate on the demographic presence and growth of Muslim minorities in Europe (Fadil et al., 2015). I, together with colleagues, pose the question **Is there such a thing as a Muslim vote? (RQ2).**

In addition, there has been almost no research done on the particularities of the preferential voting behavior of Muslim men and women. As Muslims' gender ideology is often identified as conservative

and thus one of the main challenges to Muslims' socio-political integration, Muslim women are, allegedly, more inclined to vote for male Muslim candidates and thereby discriminate against candidates who resemble them the most descriptively (Dancygier 2017). This assumption goes against previous findings of intersectionality scholars (Mahmood 2005; Salem 2013), who criticize the widespread portrayal of religious women as uniformly oppressed and suffering from false consciousness. Research that delves deeper into intersectional voting behavior, answering the question of whether the intersection of religion and gender explains Muslim men and women's preferential vote(s), is therefore useful. Chapter 4 aims to answer the question: **Is there such a thing as an intersectional vote among Muslims (RQ3)?**

(b) Noninstitutionalized participation. The bulk of research into Muslims' participation mainly focuses on electoral participation and representation, whereas there has been less systematic analysis of noninstitutionalized participation, in particular in non-Muslim countries with Muslim minorities. However, some studies reflect on how non-electoral participation is motivated by dissatisfaction with the party-political system. For instance, Martin (2017) found evidence of young Muslims in the UK refraining from voting but engaging in protests against the war in Afghanistan. Indeed, van Deth (2016) found similar results showing young people refraining from voting, but engaging in other types of political activities (i.e., boycotting, demonstrating, signing petitions, wearing a badge and using social media for political ends). Thus, research is deemed necessary to address Muslims' modes of participation beyond the electoral field, as the issue of how Muslims challenge the discourse and practices through which they are marginalized is rather underexplored (O'Loughlin and Gillespie, 2012; Van Es, 2019), with a few exceptions (Peucker, 2018; 2021; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; van Es, 2019).

Additionally, previous studies in the US were mainly interested in what drives the noninstitutionalized participation of Muslims, focusing on religious attendance, religious salience and discrimination (Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008; Jamal, 2005). First, in line with the view of civil organizations and institutions as mobilizers, attendance at religious institutions can help increase citizens' civic skills and political efficacy (especially for those with a lower socio-economic status), and thus increase noninstitutionalized participation (Verba et al., 1995). Furthermore, visiting worship places can amplify the group consciousness and sense of group identity that are often needed to become politically involved (Oskooii, 2016; Calhoun-Brown,1996; Verba et al., 1995), particularly in the case of politicized minority groups such as Muslims. However, less systematic research on how mosque attendance influences participation is available in Europe. Not only is religion more imbedded in the United States, but the general level of religiosity is also much higher than in Europe, where religion (especially Islam) is seen with unease in the public sphere (Cesari, 2014; McAndrew and Sobolewska, 2015). Surprisingly, most research did not

consider mosque attendance as a gendered religious practice. Previous studies have shown that despite the rise of women's participation in mosques, these spaces still remain "bastions of male dominance" (Gilliat-Ray, 2010:202; Nyhagen, 2019). Although I acknowledge the inclusive mosque initiatives (see for an overview Nyhagen, 2019), mosques remain characterized by patriarchal regimes. To date, we know little about the effects of mosque attendance on Muslim men and women's noninstitutionalized activities in Belgium, or Europe.

Second, the scant research on religious salience has given rise to mixed findings depending on the questions asked, although general studies find that the higher the religious salience, the more the individual will engage. Third, the role of discrimination has been studied, arguing for a nuanced picture of how Muslims' feelings of discrimination influence political behavior. For instance, Oskooii (2016:613) makes a distinction between political or institutional discrimination (discriminatory policies or activities by the state) and social discrimination, referring to interpersonal discrimination; he concludes that it is mainly institutional experienced discrimination that leads to political activism. In contrast, discriminatory interactions in public or private settings make a person less likely to engage politically. In sum, Chapter 5 gains insights into the intersectional dimension of noninstitutionalized participation, studying **to what extent gendered differences in religiosity contribute to Muslim men's and women's engagement in noninstitutionalized participation (RQ4).**

As Chapter 5 relies on quantitative ESS data, and therefore a fixed set of noninstitutionalized modes of participation (i.e., boycotting, demonstrating, signing petitions, wearing a badge and using social media for political ends), other forms of political action may be ignored. Chapter 6 therefore delves deeper into Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation through interviews with Muslims, scrutinizing the several modes of participation used and what drives their participation in order to extend our understanding of Muslims' political behavior. Relying on hooks' (1989) concept of talking back and Fraser's (1990) counterpublics, I account for the racialized environment Muslims navigate. Moreover, recent studies have referred to distinct experiences among Muslims depending on the intersecting power dynamics at play, i.e., as gendered Islamophobia (Perry, 2014; Weichelselbaumer, 2019; Amnesty International, 2012). Muslim women are rejected and reviled by majority groups on the same basis as all Muslims, yet they are also seen as not fitting with the Western ideal of womanhood (Perry, 2014:6; Cesari, 2014). Thus, the intersecting spaces that Muslim women occupy mean that the religious discrimination they experience is distinct from that suffered by Muslim men, and their experienced gendered violence different from that of other women (Perry, 2014; Crenshaw, 1991). This could influence their participation patterns and strategies. Chapter 6 therefore scrutinizes the way in which Muslims in Belgium, as a historically disadvantaged group, attempt to "make themselves heard" in the political

arena and seek inclusion in order to participate on equal terms as others (hooks, 1989; Fraser, 1990). The research questions are as follows: **With which forms of non-institutionalized participation do Muslims engage, and what shapes these noninstitutionalized activities (RQ5)?**

(c) Hidden and everyday resistance tactics Less research has been conducted on Muslims' hidden resistance tactics. There is a paucity of studies on how Muslims contest and challenge discourses that marginalize them (Marouka, 2008; van Es, 2019; Bibi, 2020). For instance, Marouka (2008) found evidence of Muslim women students in New York constructing their veil into an activist tool, while consciously promoting positive images of Islam in everyday interactions with non-Muslims. Fadil (2009: 444) illustrates – with the case of not-handshaking – how Muslim women wish to abstain from shaking hands with the opposite sex, but do so anyway because they do not want to disrupt or transgress the dominant sensitivities. However, after building a trust relationship, Muslim women see opportunities (or tactics) to downplay the religious practice of not-handshaking by culturalizing it (i.e., making a comparison with Chinese people who also do not practice handshaking), enhancing their agency (Fadil, 2009).

In a similar vein, van Es (2019) showed how Dutch Muslim women active in religious organizations act as ambassadors of Islam, thus monitoring their own behavior in everyday interactions with non-Muslims by representing themselves as modern and emancipated to counter the "oppressed Muslim women" narrative. For instance, women emphasized having a paid job or talked to non-Muslims about how their husbands cooked a nice meal. These subtle actions stressing their agency aim to restructure the dominant discourses about Muslim women. These findings confirm a study of Jouili (2007) studying the ethical dilemmas of pious Muslim women in France negotiating their religious duties in a secular public sphere. One of the tactics used is da'wa, or representing Islam in a good manner by participating "actively and successfully in society—especially by pursuing a professional career and thereby embodying the image of a 'modern' Muslim woman" (Jouili, 2007:32).

More recently, Ellefsen et al. (2022) discussed Norwegian Muslim men and women who downplay the significance of experienced hostility as a coping mechanism, or talk in a derogatory way about hostile actors, situating them below the offended in the social hierarchy. The authors argue that Muslims demonstrate their moral superiority by constructing positive identity resources and therefore a place in society where they belong. Likewise, Hassani (2022) explored how young Muslims in Denmark resist Islamophobia through their middleclass positions and social involvement, stressing their belonging and rejecting marginalization. Research on Muslim youth shows how young Muslims construct a Muslim or ethnic cool identity (a positive self-image) through a cultural repertoire of ethnoreligious hybridity,

challenging cool identities that maintain an ethnic and religious hierarchy constructed by white youngsters (Driezen et al., 2022).

Additionally, Driezen et al. (2021) also show how school-aged Muslims explain that they – in everyday interactions with non-Muslims – stress personal interpretations and flexibility in relation to religious norms, foregrounding their agency and autonomy in being religious. Muslim youngsters emphasized the importance of their position and identification as Muslim, owing to the negative portrayal of Muslims in society. Bendixsen (2013) shows a variety of tactics performed by young Muslim women in Germany, in addition to projecting an alternative self-image challenging Muslims' othering. One of these tactics was labeled the "Joke tactic", characterized by irony, satire and jokes: young Muslim women laughing and mocking stereotypes dismantle experiences of Othering, taking other persons by surprise. Indeed, by joking with the existing stereotypes, Muslims shared them, took ownership of them and subverted them, thus reducing the power exerted by these stereotypes. Another tactic discussed was the Rehearsal tactic. Young Muslim women engaged in weekly meetings initiating role-plays of situations where they were othered in public places, practicing how to react to feel more secure. These "weapons of the weak" (Scott, 1985) or "tactics as art of the weak" (de Certeau, 1984) are individual and non-organized acts influencing (but not fully altering) power domination (Scott, 1985; de Certeau, 1984; Johanssen and Vintagen, 2019; Hassani, 2022). Chapter 7 discusses the agential perspective of Muslims, studying **which hidden and everyday resistance tactics Muslims undertake in order to change the status quo that maintains racial hierarchies (RQ6).**

Research context, methods and data

Muslims as political actors in Belgium

This dissertation focuses mainly on Muslims' agency in the research context of Belgium. However, a specification of the different foci of the studies is needed. To explain Muslims' party vote, the unique data collection allowed a focus on Belgium as a case (Chapter 1). Second, owing to the rigorous data preparation and statistical analyses involved in studying Muslims' preferential vote, Antwerp was selected as a research context in which to unravel Muslims' (gendered) preference for Muslim candidates (Chapters 2 and 3). For Chapter 4, European Social Survey data were used, selecting Western European countries to explore the drivers of Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation, applying an intersectional lens. Lastly, to study Muslims' talking back and resistance tactics (Chapters 5 and 6), semi-structured in-depth interviews were used, to highlight the complexities of the topics discussed,

enabling a proper understanding of the context of these experiences. Before discussing the methods and data, I will elaborate on the research context.

The case of Belgium/Flanders: a racialized environment with opportunities

Muslims in Belgium are mostly Moroccan or Turkish labor migrants who arrived in the 1960s, or their offspring, and make up approximately 7.6% of the total citizenry (Pew Research Center, 2017). These guest workers were mainly employed in low-skilled jobs and encouraged to stay permanently in Belgium due to the shortage of workers in those industries and to "compensate for the anticipated demographic shortage and ageing of the population" (Fadil et al., 2015:224). So, migration has not only diversified the population culturally but also age-wise. However, the support for migration came to an end with the 1973 oil crisis, leading to the closure of Belgian borders so that further immigration was only possible through family reunification or marriage migration. At that point, guest workers gradually turned into residing households and minority communities settling in Belgium (Allievi, 2005).

As the debate about migration and integration of Muslims in Belgium is increasingly polarized (Loobuyck and Meier, 2014), it is currently one of society's most controversial topics in Flanders (the northern part of Belgium), contributing to the popularity of nationalist (N-VA) and radical right (Vlaams Belang) parties at the 2019 national elections in Belgium. The non-profit organization behind Vlaams Belang was even convicted of racism in 2004, and changed its name to proceed in politics. A recent report shows that the party manifesto of the radical right party contains several human rights violations, especially towards Muslims (Brems et al., 2019)[4]. Despite a so-called "cordon sanitaire"[5], an agreement between traditional parties to refrain from forming a government with the radical right party, Vlaams Belang was involved in the government negotiations of 2019 at the request of the nationalist party. Overall, the narrative of Muslims, and thus also their demographic growth, as a "problem" has gained the upper hand in Belgium (Mescoli, 2019).

Despite this narrative, scholars describe younger generations as less secularized than their first-generation parents (Cainkar, 2004; Fleischmann et al., 2011; Fleischmann, 2022). This process has been viewed with suspicion by the dominant majority in Belgium, in particular due to 9/11. In a 2018 Ipsos survey, only 35% of Belgians stated that Muslims are part of the national community while 40%

[5] The traditional parties previously agreed on the cordon sanitaire due to the controversial programme of the radical right party, also known as the 70-point plan, in response to the "problem" of immigrants. Nevertheless, a human rights NGO evaluated Vlaams Belang's influence, stating that almost a third of the controversial programme has either been executed, or discussed by other parties (Demeulemeester, 23 March 2016).

answered in the negative and 27% responded "not sure" (Ipsos, 2018). Belgium has had its own share of terror attacks, and is a much debated case due to having the highest ratio of foreign fighters in Europe (Sealy and Modood, 2020). There is widespread discomfort in the country, asking whether Islam is compatible with Western values; this has strengthened the idea of Muslims as a potential threat whose actions have to be monitored closely (Mescoli, 2019). This discourse has facilitated restrictions on Muslims' religious practices, such as a general ban on the burqa, on veils in schools and in some areas of the labor market, and barriers to the official recognition of mosques, which have to pass a security screening by governmental institutions (Brems, 2020).

In addition to these exclusionary policies, reports argue that Muslims are victims of structural discrimination in the domains of employment, education and housing, referring also to a rise in hate crimes against Muslims (Bayrakli and Hafez, 2019; EUFRA, 2017; Gündüz, 2010). In addition, Shaheed (2021), the UN Special Rapporteur, recently denounced how states responded to security threats by adopting policies that disproportionately target Muslims. Additionally, European Muslims seem to be overrepresented in low-paid jobs and unemployment, with below-average education, living in poor housing conditions and facing barriers to engage with wider society (OSCE, 2018; EUFRA, 2017). One of the first studies on poverty rates shows that 55% of the Moroccan and Turkish population find themselves below the poverty level. Their marginalized position is shown more explicitly by the fact that the poverty risk for people with a migration background is four times higher than that of the majority (Van Robaeys, 2007; Dierckx et al., 2011). With regard to unemployment, minorities have an unemployment rate of 28%-38%, and those who work are overrepresented in non or lower qualified jobs (60% compared with 38% for the white population (Van Robaeys, 2007; Fadil et al., 2015). In short, Belgium is a good case to study how racialization shapes Muslims' political engagement.

Flanders, Belgium is a neutrality model in which pro-active recognition and state support for religious denominations is constitutionally ingrained (Fadil et al., 2015). The Belgian state not only recognizes religious denominations (e.g., Islam in 1974) but also financially supports confessional traditions without the right to interfere in their internal organization (Fadil et al. 2015). Consequently, Islamic teachers in public schools and Muslim chaplains in prisons are appointed for Muslims who want to make use of them, and a representative body was established in 1999, although it still relies on structures of the Christian Church (Kanmaz and Zemni, 2008). Nevertheless, as well as the institutionalization of Islam bringing opportunities, Muslims themselves seem to organize community-based networks to reject marginalization (Jacobs et al., 2004; Bousetta, 2000). Torrekens (2009) finds an explanation in the presence of a younger and more educated generation of Muslim actors who protest against any hostility towards the growing visibility of Muslims in urban contexts (i.e., building a mosque), while

Van den Brandt (2019) argues that the exclusion of Muslimahs from political discussions about their interest and needs has generated activism among Muslim women, who insist that their voices and experiences be recognized by politicians and policy makers. Through petitions and demonstrations, Muslims aim to alter exclusionary policies. Accordingly, Pedziwatr (2010) previously referred to development of a civic consciousness among certain segments of the Muslim population.

The Antwerp-Belgian case, a flexible-list PR multi-party system

Furthermore, in the Belgian flexible-list PR multi-party system, citizens can opt for different political parties, ranging from the radical left to the (far) radical right. Moreover, voters have the opportunity to cast a vote for a party (list vote) or for one or more candidates within the same party (multiple preferential votes). Many studies examine contexts where parties can only field one candidate, with the result that the number of ethnic minority/Muslim or women candidates is low. Here, on the contrary, the presence of long lists of candidates with various backgrounds – up to 55 candidates in the local elections – allows voters to cast multiple preferential votes and therefore offers them an extremely broad freedom of choice (van Erkel, 2019; André et al., 2012), providing interesting analytical possibilities. Hence, whatever the ideology of voters, they can vote for *one of their own*. In addition, candidate lists with up to 55 candidates make it impossible for voters to be totally informed about the different stances of all the candidates, resulting in a low information context where candidate traits seem likely to play a most decisive role (Banducci et al., 2008; Cutler, 2002; Wauters et al., 2020). Political psychology theories point out that people evaluate candidates based on socio-demographic traits when information is lacking. Better informed voters will gather more information, and will adjust their evaluations to consider more than these traits, unlike less informed voters. Last but not least, the compulsory voting system in Belgium obliges citizens to vote, particularly ethno-religious minorities who may otherwise abstain from voting.

As the scrutiny of Muslims' preferential voting needed more data preparation, it was easier to focus on the 2018 local elections in Belgium's largest city, Antwerp. This is an interesting context because, in theory, it is a most likely case for intersectional voting, owing to the multiple preferential voting possible in a PR multiparty system. On the one hand (demand side), the city has about half a million inhabitants, with a perfect gender balance and a high diversity rate with more than 174 nationalities (Stad in Cijfers, 2018). Antwerp is referred to as a majority–minority city: different migratory minority groups (50.1%) make up the majority of the local population (Stad in cijfers, 2018). Antwerp is also home to a large Muslim community (OSF, 2011), an estimated 20% presence (Zibouh, 2013). However, "the exact number of people of Muslim culture or Islamic faith living in Belgium today is difficult to determine,

as there is no official registration of the population's ethnic and religious ties" (Fadil, 2014: 83). On the other hand, as previously explained, the long and diverse candidate list does not limit citizens to voting for one or several candidates, but offers them a broad choice. In addition, the quota ensures there are enough women in eligible positions, stating that there has to be an equal number of men and women candidates on the list. Studies claim that these contexts will lead to people voting for candidates sharing salient demographic characteristics (Cutler, 2002; Popkin, 1991), in particular when there is too much information present. Citizens will therefore rely on demographic cues and vote for one of their own to represent them.

Lastly, a study conducted by Noel Clycq (OSF, 2011) revealed that although minorities feel themselves as belonging to the city of Antwerp, the experienced discrimination is seen as a barrier to full and equal participation for minority communities. Additionally, Antwerp is traditionally the stronghold of Vlaams Belang, one of the more successful far-right parties in Europe (Thijssen and de Lange, 2005). The right-wing nationalist party N-VA (also the largest party in Belgium) dominates the local council after decades of control by the Social Democratic party. The mayor of Antwerp is also the chairman of N-VA. Government rules restricting religious practices, such as a ban on veils and religious slaughter and a troubled relationship with mosque boards, could provoke a reaction from Muslims who stress their threatened religious identity and act upon it in order to defend Islam – referred to as reactive religiosity (Nagra 2011; Voas and Fleischmann 2012). Hence, because Antwerp has become the bulwark of right-wing parties, it is a very interesting context to study preferential voting by Muslims.

Method and Data

Exit poll data Within an inter-university consortium[6], unique exit poll data were collected throughout the country at the 2018 local elections (Belgian Local Election Study), which provided us with representative and more reliable data than the standard post-electoral surveys. We randomly sampled polling stations in 45 municipalities, adopting a systematic design in every polling station: every fifth voter was asked to participate when leaving the polling station. To make sure we gathered enough respondents belonging to ethno-religious minority groups, we oversampled polling stations in districts with a high Muslim electorate by deploying more interviewers: three interviewers instead of two per polling station. The intensively trained pollsters were equipped with tablets to accurately register preference votes using a mock ballot form. Lastly, we invested in a diverse range of pollsters to obtain a higher response rate among minority groups, owing to their recognizability, and to overcome possible language barriers (i.e., first-generation Muslims)[7].

Together with a face-to-face survey, a mock ballot paper was presented as a tool to record the multiple preferential voting behavior in a reliable way. The mock ballot paper perfectly resembled the design of lists and candidates as seen on the computer screen in the polling booth. We asked voters about their nationality as well as both their parents' nationality; for Muslims, we asked about mosque attendance, voting behavior and questions related to their political attitudes. On the supply side, data were gathered on candidate characteristics using official documents: official electoral lists containing the candidate's political party and position on the ballot list. To find information about incumbents, the formal website of the city council was used, as well as the website tracking all political mandates in Belgium (http://www.cumuleo.be). Gender and ethnic minority background were defined by name recognition and background checks via the personal websites of candidates, news articles, their political party and their social media (Dancygier, 2014; Erzeel and Caluwaerts, 2015).

In order to identify Muslim candidates, we took a three-step approach due to the lack of official statistics taking ethnicity or religious belonging into consideration. First, I used an onomastic procedure – with name recognition – to define Muslim minorities (Heath et al., 2015). However, a name alone does not necessarily indicate religious belonging, especially since Muslims are mainly but not exclusively of Maghrebi or Turkish descent. Identification can also be based on the self-definition of candidates as being of Muslim culture (Zibouh, 2013). Therefore, background checks on the belonging dimension of

[6] The consortium consisted of the University of Ghent (UGent), University of Antwerp (UAntwerpen), Hasselt University (UHasselt), University of Namur (UNamur), Free University of Brussels (VUB) and the Catholic University of Leuven (UCLouvain)

[7] Permission was granted by the Ethical Commissions of all universities that were involved in the data collection.

candidates were made via their websites, news articles, their political party and their social media. If candidates referred to themselves as Muslims, I confirmed their Muslim belonging. Lastly, where possible I used peer assessment of fellow political candidates: I asked candidates of several political parties if I had identified their colleagues rightfully as belonging or not to the Muslim faith. I acknowledge that defining the religious belonging of candidates has its limitations; however when religious diversity and Islam are as politicized as during the 2018 local elections, information about political candidates can be collected by researchers in various (but time consuming) ways. Obviously, both approaches (supply and demand) have distinct limitations, therefore we combined them. Combining supply and demand data allows us to test whether religiosity explains voting for Muslim candidates, while at the same time one can control for candidate characteristics, such as political experience and the position on the ballot list.

European Social Survey data Since few data are available on Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation, this dissertation makes use of the European social survey data to study which political actions are conducted, and to what extent gendered patterns are present among Muslim men and women. To address what shapes and informs the noninstitutionalized participation of Muslims, we selected the most recent wave of the European Social Survey (ESS) – 2018 (round 9). This project is well known for its high standards of methodological rigor in survey design and cross-national data collection (Just et al. 2014). The rich data contains questions measuring respondents' religiosity and different forms of political participation. In addition, the survey is conducted in an identical manner in a broad range of European countries, thus facilitating comparative studies (Just et al., 2014:132). Six Western European countries were selected with sufficient data on Muslim respondents to conduct statistical analyses. In all these countries, a similar anti-Islam discourse, with multiple debates about Muslims' political integration, religious dress restrictions and "Muslim terrorism", has become mainstream (Cesari, 2014).

Semi-structured in-depth interviews Lastly, to strengthen my earlier findings, explore what these findings actually mean, and broaden the usual interpretation of the concept "political participation", I interviewed 17 Muslims living in Flanders about whether and how they aim to change what they perceive as obstacles in society. Respondents were recruited through a call shared by several community organizations and individual Muslims, but mostly from snowball sampling: the first Muslims who were interviewed spread the word, which led to Muslims in their network contacting me for an interview. Purposive sampling was used because it was mostly higher educated Muslims who replied to the call. A total of seventeen interviews were conducted with thirteen second or third-generation[8] Muslims with

[8] When one or both of the parents/grandparents are born in a non-EU country, I refer to the participants as respectively second and third-generation. One of the participants is actually 1.5 generation, as she herself was born in Morocco, but migrated as an

a Moroccan background, two with a Turkish background and two converts with an ethnic majority background. Nine of them defined themselves as women, seven as men and one as non-binary. Five respondents finished secondary school only (low-educated), while 12 respondents are students or have already completed higher education. All participants live in an urban context and 7 out of the 17 respondents volunteer in a collective, i.e., a youth organization, anti-racist movement, feminist collective or mosque.

The interviews were conducted between February and April 2021[9] with the permission of the participants; they took on average 1 hour 45 minutes[10]. Participants were questioned about their personal political biographies, notably how they describe and evaluate current politics, the issues that concerned them and engagement herein, the range of political actions they have participated in and their motivations for doing so. Lastly, I queried them about the role of religion in their participation. Due to Covid-19 measures, half of the interviews were conducted in person, respecting all the applicable conditions, the other half took place online using Skype or ZOOM. The names of the participants were altered in order to preserve anonymity. The transcribed interviews were analyzed with NVivo, thematically linked to their repertoire of engagements and the mobilizing forces to engage with political actions. Other data were coded inductively in order to further shed light on Muslims' activities in a racialized environment, to explore the multiple ways in which the subjugated resist oppression.

I, a Muslim wearing a headscarf, conducted all the interviews myself; this could generate a sense of familiarity and openness towards Muslim participants, who themselves are consistently scrutinized because of being Muslim. Creating a safe space is necessary due to the intimate questions posed, and could be easily done by someone perceived by participants as a member of the in-group. Additionally, at the beginning of every interview, I emphasized that I was interested in participants' individual narratives owing to the large diversity of Muslim communities, as well as stating that all data will be treated as confidential. Furthermore, to respect their agency, each respondent could withdraw at any moment without any explanation, as the data belonged to them. My reflexive thoughts on the research process are noted down in the following section.

orphan to be raised by a family member in Belgium.

[9] To exclude any bias, I stopped the interviews approximately two weeks before the start of Ramadan (12 April 2021).

[10] Permission was granted by the Ethical Commission of the university to which the author is affiliated.

Reflexive notes on my positionality as a researcher

In the following section I will reflect on my social position within academia, conducting research on Muslims' political agency at a time of intensified Islamophobia. Firstly, I expand on researchers' reflexivity, positionality and the benefits hereof for researchers and the knowledge we produce. Secondly, I describe shifting between being an outsider and insider, in relation to academia, the participants and the research topic. I do not, then, think of insider–outsider positionality in terms of a binary but rather perceive it as a continuum (Miled, 2019; Bourabain, 2022). For this section, I rely on a personal narrative technique drawing on my poignant experiences as a junior researcher and reflections on these experiences, while applying insights of critical race theory such as intersectionality (Collins, 2019) and double consciousness theory (Du Bois, 1903). These reflections were not only the outcome of reading up on the abundant body of literature on reflexivity and positionality, but also of engaging in multiple informal conversations with colleagues, and of the first thoughts and feelings jotted down after every interview.

Previous literature pointed out how reflexivity addresses the self-awareness of researchers and the recognition that we – as researchers – are part of the world that we study (Crasnow, 2014; Drowing, 2006; Lambert et al., 2010; Bourabain, 2022; Miled, 2019). This perspective entails continuous reflection by researchers to recognize, examine and understand their social background, multiple identities and the assumptions affecting their research practices, in particular their blind spots (Palaganas et al., 2017; Ganga and Scott, 2006; Rose, 1997). Reflecting on one's positionality thus acknowledges intersectionality as a critical framework describing how differences in socially constructed positions and complex interconnected power dynamics shape identities and access in a society characterized by inequality (Duarte, 2017; Collins, 2019). Intersectionality enhances analytical sophistication in the research field and theoretically explains how heterogenous members of specific groups (i.e. Muslims, women, members of the middle class) might experience the same environment differently depending on their ethnicity, gender, sexuality, class, and other locations.

This constructivist lens developed by feminist and (later) race scholars – stressing the situatedness of knowledge – contrasts with the perspective of a reality existing independently from an individual's beliefs and constructions (Haraway,1988; Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002). It challenges the positivist notions of objectivity and truth or, as Haraway posits: "the god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere" as a cover and legitimization of a hegemonic masculinist positioning (1991:189). This myth of researchers' undisputed absolute objectivity and neutrality relates to knowledge production by dominant groups reproducing their worldviews as the norm, while the knowledge of researchers from

marginalized groups is perceived as "subjective" (Bourabain, 2022). This relates to my own experiences: I – as a clearly Muslim researcher with a migration background – was asked to clarify my positionality at an early stage of my doctoral trajectory owing to the fact that I – as a Muslim – conduct research on Muslims' political agency in Belgium. As far as I remember, none of my other colleagues was asked to do so, suggesting that I would encounter difficulties in maintaining a distance towards participants owing to being Muslim myself, a distance deemed necessary to produce accurate and objective findings. Previous scholars have discussed how the objectivity of "native" researchers, researchers sharing the same characteristic as their interlocutors (i.e. minority religion, minority ethnicity), is viewed with suspicion (Fadil, 2003; Miles, 2019; Bourbain, 2022).

This request to write on my positionality, however, made me rigorous in my research and analytically careful in writing up my findings, which at the end benefited the knowledge produced. I therefore am not against researchers being asked to reflect at every stage of their research; on the contrary, I would highly recommend this reflexive attitude to any colleague in academia, whether applying a quantitative or a qualitative approach. In particular, the focus on how one's personal and societal position as a researcher – and thus power relations – comes into play at every stage of the research, could benefit the research process. What I do disagree with, is how – in academia – reflections and writings on positionalities are only requested from minoritized researchers, as if they are the only ones with a non-neutral position, thus disregarding the fact that every researcher (regardless of, for example, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, class) sees the world through a perspective related to their social position in society. Nevertheless, in my academic surroundings there is a shared consensus about what proper and valuable research entails in terms of theoretical frameworks ("the classics"), methods (quantitative) and analytical techniques (statistics) to reveal how socio-political dynamics operate. A thorough contemplation on reflexivity is perceived as less relevant, as it works with surveys, experiments and polls, as compared to "hard numbers". Silberzahn and Uhlman (2015) postulated how research with the same data can nevertheless result in different findings depending on the statistical techniques chosen. The authors provided 29 research teams with the same data and research question, and concluded that "Any single team's results are strongly influenced by subjective choices during the analysis" (Silberzahn and Uhlman, 2015:190).

My experiences also invoke the same concerns about choices made in the research process. While collecting quantitative data, I was given the task of recruiting pollsters in several polling stations in a majority minority city. I consciously approached not only students with characteristics of the dominant group but also students with a minority background, to overcome possible thresholds leading to the well-known underrepresentation of minority participants in survey research. I did so with great success.

However, a few months prior to the data collection, the university was verbally attacked by Filip Dewinter, a leading member of Vlaams Belang (a far-right party), because the university used a picture of a student with a headscarf for a campaign to attract students (GVA, 12 March 2018). To prevent similar attacks, concerns about the consequences of our methodological choices, i.e. working with students with headscarves, were raised by colleagues. In addition, pollsters with a headscarf could also deter non-Muslim participants, in particular radical right voters. The idea of a temporary headscarf ban was discussed, and I, as an "insider", was asked to bring the "bad news" to the students involved. Although, at the end, we finally decided to "take the risk", this case illustrates how certain elements and thoughts can influence our research choices and how reflections on this can make us aware of this unconscious bias. We should keep in mind and question why none of these limitations arise when recruiuting students characterized by features of the dominant group.

Other experiences in the field were related to how to formulate the questions in surveys (i.e. on religiosity), relying on previous studies on Muslims' religiosity. However, El Menouar (2014) has raised the problem of using measurements of Christian religiosity and translating these into Islamic terminology, because it can lead to measurement problems. There has been little research on how we can measure Muslims' religiosity in a proper manner, and whether indeed (levels of) religiosity or rather differences in reasoning about religion and religious meaning-making affect Muslims' participation (Fleichmann, 2022). Consequently, the results can be interpreted wrongly. In addition, El Menouar (2014) points to how the strong religious beliefs of Muslims are perceived as a stagnation and lack of religious dynamism, because most Western scholars perceive secularization as the only way to progress in modern societies. These prejudices towards Muslims became clear when discussing the quantitative findings with other colleagues, notably that Muslims are more likely to vote for leftist parties and Muslim candidates. The idea that these political choices could be well reasoned were questioned, while colleagues searched for explanations such as strong group feelings and loyalty among Muslims. While I do not disregard these possible explanations, other clarifications are also worthy of investigation. Furthermore, when I discussed why Muslim women voters were not more likely to vote for Muslim women candidates (Chapter 4), some people pointed to the conservative attitudes of Muslim women. More rigorous analysis dismissed this explanation, leading to the opposite conclusion: Muslim women voters were eager to have an equal share of men and women candidates in political institutions. Moreover, Muslim women were more likely to vote for women candidates, thus countering the wide-spread stereotype of oppressed, conservative Muslim women. So, although the majority of reflexive writings on researchers' positionality deal with qualitative research, my experiences show that such writings would also benefit researchers in the quantitative field.

Although I highly appreciate the valid and rigorous insights of quantitative research, I am also swayed, as I show in some chapters, by a more qualitative approach, and specifically by standpoint theory, which views "the process of approximating the truth as part of a dialogical relationship among subjects who are differentially situated" (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis, 2002:315). This theory goes beyond thinking of social locations but "*also emphasizes crucial political elements in which research encounters are embedded and knowledge is produced"* (Kapinga, 2022:104). Relying on feminist and critical race scholars (Collins, 1986; hooks, 1989; Du Bois, 1903), I thus start from the experiences of participants – shaped by oppressive power structures – as a priority for the production of knowledge, aiming to unravel how power structures unfold in Muslims' lives, and how Muslims counteract what they perceive as domination. This Muslim agency perspective, with a focus on gender and on their marginalized position, brings out several tactics of Muslims depending on their social locations, experiences and their context.

Discussing both paradigms, positivist and interpretivist, and criticism of these would go beyond the scope of the dissertation. However, the point that I want to emphasize is the value of a multi-method approach, offering different insights benefiting from the advantages of both methods, or, as Woolley stated (2009:23): "*Linking the quantitative and qualitative components effectively is the basis for producing integrated findings that are greater than the sum of their parts"*. This is particularly true in critical studies aiming to gain insight into oppressed groups resisting power and effecting social change (Mertens, 2012). If researchers opt for a multi-method design, they mostly think of a quantitative design with qualitative deepening, to further develop an understanding of the quantitative findings. However, one could also turn the tables and start with a qualitative design, followed by a survey or experiment to test whether the qualitative findings could be generalized.

Shifting between outsider-insider positions

Vis-à-vis academic colleagues

In the next section, I reflect on the intersecting axes of domination coming into play vis-à-vis research colleagues, and how shifting power dynamics made me feel an outsider, while also having experiences of being an insider, depending on the social interactions. Collings (1986) refers to the notion of the *outsider within* position of minoritized researchers aiming to change the status quo within academia.

I consider myself as a woman with a Moroccan migration background (second-generation) and visibly Muslim owing to my headscarf, and I am also perceived as such. As I previously worked as an educational worker developing courses for professionals about topics such as religion and societal

diversity, and volunteered in several antiracist (and) feminist organizations with an activist basis, I already had some work experience prior to my research position at the university. To say the least, my double consciousness – the sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others (Du Bois, 1903) – was well developed, as I facilitated group processes on sensitive and politicized topics such as the role of religion in secular societies, diversity in education, Muslim feminism, radicalization and discrimination, being strongly aware of my position. When I was guiding these learning processes, my sociological analyses were mostly seen as personal anecdotes, despite my education as a sociologist. Additionally, I was primarily seen as a devout Muslim and "not from here". I therefore had to continuously detect possible obstacles (i.e. my use of language, the way I dressed, the examples and analytical exercises used) preventing the trainees from gaining the insights needed to work in multi-diverse environments. I thus was conscious about how people perceived me.

This was no different in the academic field. Owing to the intersection of my multiple subjectivities in combination with my research topic, I again had the feeling of being perceived as an outsider and in some cases even biased. In a way, I felt I did not comply with the criteria of an *ordinary* researcher, which was (unconsciously) indicated by (senior) researchers. Two specific experiences can illustrate this aspect. First, in my first year as a doctoral student – while discussing with a colleague who had many years of experience in academia – he promptly said that my research fields would be limited due to the way I look, referring to the intersection of my ethnicity, gender and religion. When I asked what he meant, he said that it would be impossible in my position to interview politicians from radical right parties. Despite the fact that the latter was not part of my personal wishes or interest, it made me in a way "not whole" as a researcher. When I questioned in turn whether he – as a white man – would encounter similar limitations conducting research about minorities, he answered "*I have to think about that"*. Being part of the dominant norm, especially in institutions such as the university, seems to dilute the need to adapt a rigorous reflexivity on positionalities of the researcher and "the researched".

However, some of my experiences also made me more aware of my multiple identities, which I had not thought about. For instance, a senior academic with a well-established career stated that he was "*fascinated*" that I *"made it here"*, referring to my position at the university. He explained this by elaborating on the normalcy of his position, saying: *"my parents were higher educated, while yours are illiterate"*. Although this was not his intention, and the comment was probably meant as a compliment, it made me feel "out of place", an outsider not belonging in academia. Moreover, it made me more aware that people (still) see me partly or mainly as a descendant of illiterate, migrant working-class parents, while I would rather categorize myself as (lower) middle-class with a working-class background, having enjoyed social mobility. The latter becomes very clear when I navigate through my personal networks

reminding me "where I came from", while my (lower) middle class background was less questioned by family and friends. In my surroundings, most second-generation Muslims were brought up with the idea that they have to do better than their parents, who mostly worked in the mines or factories (and thus in low-wage jobs), although this requirement applied mostly to the male members of the families. The "good immigrant" is a label that came back multiple times during my childhood and while working: non-Muslims described me as "the good one [migrant]" owing to my proper Dutch and successful studies, whereas fellow Muslims internalized the concept as "one of the good ones", those who succeeded despite all the hurdles that come with being Muslim, fulfilling the dreams of first-generation parents – although they maybe hoped that I would become a doctor in another sense of the word.

However, my experiences as a researcher were not all about being an outsider, particularly in the research group I was part of. The endless efforts of (senior) researchers, providing learning moments and passionate coaching in the craft of carrying out research, were appreciated and emphasized what we share as researchers. One specific experience made me feel appreciated as a researcher, when the University of Flanders asked me to speak on my research. This organization aims to make science more accessible to a broader audience through a weekly programme and podcast with what they call "top scientists". While I was first hesitant to collaborate, they discussed merely my findings, not my appearance, advising me on how to communicate my research in an accessible way. Although the invitation came from the organization, a colleague had redirected them to me, which felt like appreciation of my research work, and thus also of me as a researcher.

To conclude, all these experiences made me self-aware as a researcher, focused on doing proper research in what most of my academic colleagues perceived as being "the right way" to be more critical about the choices made throughout the research process. These choices include, for instance, how we measure religiosity and the alternatives (Fleischmann, 2022; El Menouar, 2014) but also what we perceive as valuable political participation (Johansen and Vintagen, 2019), expanding political participation to include less visible political acts, also referred to as infrapolitics, in particular among those who are marginalized in society (Scott, 1985; de Certeau, 1990). This was only possible with a continuous process of reflexivity, discussing my work with colleagues and reading the work of critical race scholars, which brought me new perspectives.

Vis-à-vis participants

The insider-outsider continuum could also be seen vis-à-vis participants. Doing research on Muslims' political agency in times of radicalization, Islamophobia and racism is challenging to say at least. Owing

to the politicization of Islam/Muslims and the enhanced surveillance in Western countries, Muslims could have perceived my research as an "invasive stretch of surveillance" initiated by the government (Lather 2001, 483; Miled, 2019). Therefore, I was open about my research aims: to research Muslims' political participation – and the role of religion herein – in a society characterized by inequalities, but also emphasizing my concerns with social justice issues and inequalities (Dennis, 2009). Additionally, I emphasized that I was interested in participants' individual narratives owing to the large diversity among Muslim communities, as well as stating that all data would be treated as confidential. I shared these intentions at the beginning of every interview; these in-depth interviews are one of the strengths of qualitative research, as I had more opportunities than academics carrying out quantitative research to engage with participants, to clarify my research aims and answer any questions that they had.
As participants agreed to share their choices and thoughts, I stressed that at any time they had the right to withdraw their participation without any explanation, also leaving it up to them to decide where they were comfortable for the interview to take place. They furthermore had the right to look at my analyses and provide feedback about my interpretations. This careful consideration in a phase of (pre)data collection, together with the sense of "us" as Muslims, created a safe space allowing participants to elaborate on their (intimate) experiences. Some even claimed that this research could benefit Muslims aiming to counter prejudices.

Previous research discussed the disadvantages of being an insider, referring to subjectivity (Simmel, 1950), potential bias (DeLyser, 2001), multiple identities obscuring insiderness (Merton, 1972), the expectations of the academic community (Fadil, 2003) or participants sharing less information because they assume their input relates to *obvious facts* (Kapinga et al., 2022). With regard to subjectivity, Brubaker (in Timmermans and Tavory, 2012: 173) already said the following: "*We may see through gendered and racialized eyes, but we also see through the theoretical lenses of the training we went through.*" Regarding the risk of taking certain facts for granted, I was aware of this issue, so asked additional questions to be sure I had interpreted their experiences correctly; due to other differences (and thus owing to the insider-outsider continuum) my aims to understand participants' thoughts and choices were sincere. Muslim communities are, after all, heterogenous.

As a Muslim woman with a migration background, I may invoke a sense of familiarity and openness among Muslim participants. This advantage in gaining access to participants and information (Kapinga et al., 2022; Hussain and Bagguley, 2012; Miled, 2019, Chaudry, 2017) – in particular among the marginalized – should not be underestimated, but I do not claim that it is impossible for non-Muslims. However, insiders (i.e. Muslim researchers) have knowledge of the various Muslim religious and cultural codes, which benefits the research as participants may feel more at ease. Henkel (2011:395)

explains this as follows: *"In their religious texts as well as their conversations, members of religious groups often use certain language and terminology that can sometimes be difficult for outsiders to understand*." Participants were more than happy to help me out, explaining that we are *"in the same boat and should help each other as Muslims"* (Ayse, 24 y). Some participants with a headscarf particularly stressed our shared identities as visible Muslim women navigating an Islamophobic and patriarchal society, while others referred to shared experiences of being a second-generation or more educated Muslim trying to change the status quo, saying: *"you know what I mean"* or *"as you know"*.

Some expressed this even more clearly, saying that *"because we are both Muslims, I can say this here"* (Mohamed, 37y, security guard) or *'I would not say this to a non-Muslim'* (Wissam, 38y, policy officer) when talking about Islamophobia or discrimination in general (see also Kapinga et al., 2022). Either they spoke about how *"most people are racist"* (Moussa, 40y, unemployed) or criticized white people for thinking they are morally superior, or they discussed the problematic issues within Muslim communities such as sexism or homophobia (Nadia, 24y, food deliverer). So, my experiences contradict the conclusion of Ryan et al. (2011) and Kapinga et al. (2022) that it is often easier to talk about intracommunal concerns to someone who is an outsider from one's community. On the contrary, Muslim participants specifically stated that they avoid criticizing Muslims owing to wide-spread Islamophobia, as they feel that non-Muslims would use their words against them or *"to attack Muslims"*. I argue that the strength of Muslim participants' group feeling could explain certain results: notably, the stronger the group feeling, the lower the chance that Muslim participants would criticize fellow Muslims in conversations with non-Muslim researchers.

This relates to Du Bois' concept of double consciousness: minoritized citizens struggle with a duality, being Muslim and Western, in a situation where they are othered due to their Muslimness but included in society thanks to their Westernness. Du Bois reveals how this duality leads to "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (1903:364), as our idea of ourselves – who we claim to be – is derived from interaction with others. Indeed, Muslim participants said they were careful in the way they express themselves towards non-Muslims, as they know how they are perceived in a context where Islamphobia reigns. This could be problematic if non-Muslim researchers do not fully engage with Muslim participants, building a relationship based on trust. Owing to Muslims' double consciousness (Du Bois, 1903), religious Muslims in particular could downplay their Muslimness or use common (and thus secular) language to make themselves clear towards non-Muslim researchers, especially when they are constantly vilified and stigmatized. Muslim participants greeted me with *salaam alaikoem* (peace be upon you) – an Arabic/Islamic way of greeting – and referred to religious registers and motivations, whereas they would probably refrain from doing so in non-Muslim contexts. One specific experience

with a participant, Maryam (28y, community worker), touched me, as she was emotional and even cried when she talked about what inspires her activism, notably religion. While explaining her religious principles of doing good and helping to make the world better, she told me that it was one of the few times she could express this due to the secular and thus often hostile environments she has to navigate.

Although aware of my religious identity positioning me as an insider, I was also wary of my other identity markers, such as my gender, my class, my ethnicity and my research position possibly pushing me to an "outsider position", depending on the (encounters with) participants. Indeed, the Muslim population is undeniably heterogenous and complex, owing to multiple (power) locations. However, I argue that sharing a marginalized position, experiencing similar inequalities and feelings of being excluded due to one's Muslim identity could trump differences in locations, particularly given the focus and topics of my research: Muslims' resistance in a racialized environment. In the following section, I will discuss this insider-outsider continuum and how these (power) differences played out in the conversations that took place. I further qualify this idea, stating that maybe more than our shared Muslimness, our marginalized position acted as the common location between me and the participants, due to a combination of gender, ethnicity, language, class and ideology. I will now share the moments when I felt uncomfortable and like an outsider when expanding on the social interactions with Moussa (40y), Ayse (24y) and Mohamed (34y).

When conducting my first interview with Moussa (40y), a father of four, unemployed and a volunteer in a mosque, he brought someone with him, explaining that his friend gave him a lift there. Because of religious and cultural norms (Henkel, 2011), some (wo)men prefer to not stay alone with someone of the opposite gender in the same room. I thus said that his friend could choose whether to stay in the same room, or outside waiting for him. Moussa quickly replied that his friend would stay. Although his friend remained quiet and did not interrupt, I do not know if the interaction with Moussa would have been substantially different. So, although sharing our Muslim identity, I felt aware of how my gender, intersecting with ethnicity and religion, but also my higher level of education and use of language played a role in our interaction. Moussa was in a way critical about himself: he said "*who would listen to me?*" referring to being an unemployed, male visible Muslim with a Moroccan background. When questioning Moussa about whether he participates in changing the status quo, he said that he didn't do as much as he wants, explaining that he doesn't "*speak as nice as"* me.

People often comment – insiders as well as outsiders – that my *"Dutch is really good"* or my *"articulation is really proper"*, mostly meaning that it is surprising to hear no clear accent owing to my migration background. Indeed, the use of language by working class people with a migration

background is highly scrutinized and negatively perceived (Eribon, 2013; Scott, 2008). Young Muslim minorities in particular are criticized for not speaking proper Dutch (Agirdag, 2020). If outsiders complimented me, I felt recognized in a way as if I belonged to those speaking the language at a similar level, but also truly offended due to the stereotypes they ascribed to me. However, at the stage of the interviews, I had some moments doubting whether I would be perceived as someone privileged, due to my proper Dutch and my position as a researcher at the university, and thus not able to recognize the marginalized position of Muslims in society.

Ayse (24y, student) reminded me not only of the language stigma, as she also was praised for her Dutch, but also of being constantly under surveillance owing to her headscarf. On multiple occasions, she stressed how her headscarf always made her an outsider as she was constantly denied work because of it, leaving her depressed about her future in Belgium. When talking about the headscarf, she often had the tendency to briefly describe her experiences thinking I would understand, stating that *"I don't have to explain this to you"*. Paradoxically, I asked her several questions to grasp the obstacles she experienced, and the counteracts she performed to protect herself but also change the status quo on this matter. This was challenging, as I was trying to strike a balance between acknowledging her difficult experiences due to being a woman with a headscarf, experiences that I share, but also questioning the uniqueness of her experiences without jeopardizing our common ground. However, when talking about her Turkish background, she was more detailed; she provided me with several examples and explained how she thought her position differed from mine on these aspects. She even asked whether she needed to elaborate on Turkish cultural norms or the dynamics in Turkish mosques, as she felt that "*among people with a Moroccan background, it's different"*. Indeed, Fennema and Tillie (2010) have found differences between citizens with a Moroccan and Turkish migration background. For instance, the latter group is more connected to their fatherland, Turkey, than citizens with a Moroccan background. Although Ayse stressed some aspects of difference, I had the feeling that our shared marginalized experiences as women with a headscarf in patriarchal communities trumped the ethnicity factor. In particular, she stated that *"women like us should aim to get in these positions [higher positions]"* (Ayse, 24y), referring to my research position, in order to break with stereotypes but also domination of the majority. For Ayse, successful Muslim women in the labor market indicate not only that women with a headscarf are not oppressed but could also act as role models for younger Muslim women feeling depressed by the hostile society they have to navigate.

The last experience that stuck with me, is an interaction with Mohamed (34y, security guard), a former religious leader, that lasted more than three hours. The participant knew me from my political engagement in a feminist and anti-racist organization, and informed me about this. Throughout the

interview, he made it clear that he perceived me notably as *"an intellectual", "die-hard feminist", "well spoken"* and "*soft in discussions"*. Adapting a rightist and elitist narrative, he blamed Muslim terrorists for the current Islamophobic climate, and claimed that people with a migration background commit more criminal acts than the dominant majority because *"they just want to make easy money" (*Mohamed, 34y). I was surprised that he shared these statements, knowing my personal position on these issues, but I suppose that he saw me more in a researcher's role as I emphasized that I was interested in different views of Muslims. He even stated multiple times that he wanted to help me out as he appreciates academia and knowledge produced to improve society. In a way, he felt he had to be careful in how he expressed his opinion but that did not prevent him from being outspoken. Moreover, he stressed a few times that he could not say these things to other Muslims because he would be perceived as a traitor, but he believed that I could understand his choices due to my open mind and interest in Muslims' engagement, "*for the sake of research"* Mohammed (34y).

Additionally, he said he appreciated my openness and softness in discussions and my accent-free Dutch *"to convince the dominant majority that we are not all like them [Muslim terrorists]"*. Mohamed hesitantly shared that he voted for the nationalist party and identified himself as a conservative, claiming that only a certain elite (and not the citizens) should have a say in how we organize our society. In short, he was quite talkative, and although we were both Muslim, both second generation and active in organizations aiming to tackle inequalities, we strongly differed in every way in how we analyze the current political climate and the solutions we provide. As we were ending the interview, he started to ask questions on positions he had described and asked where I stand: it was as if the roles were reversed. He took the liberty of interviewing me, thus switching not only the roles but also the power dynamics. We eventually had a talk about how we positioned ourselves, ending with the conclusion that we maybe both want to tackle inequalities but opt for different ways to do so. Mohamed contacted me a week after saying he enjoyed the conversation and thanked me for not being judgmental. He even helped to reach out to other Muslims in his network, directing them to me.

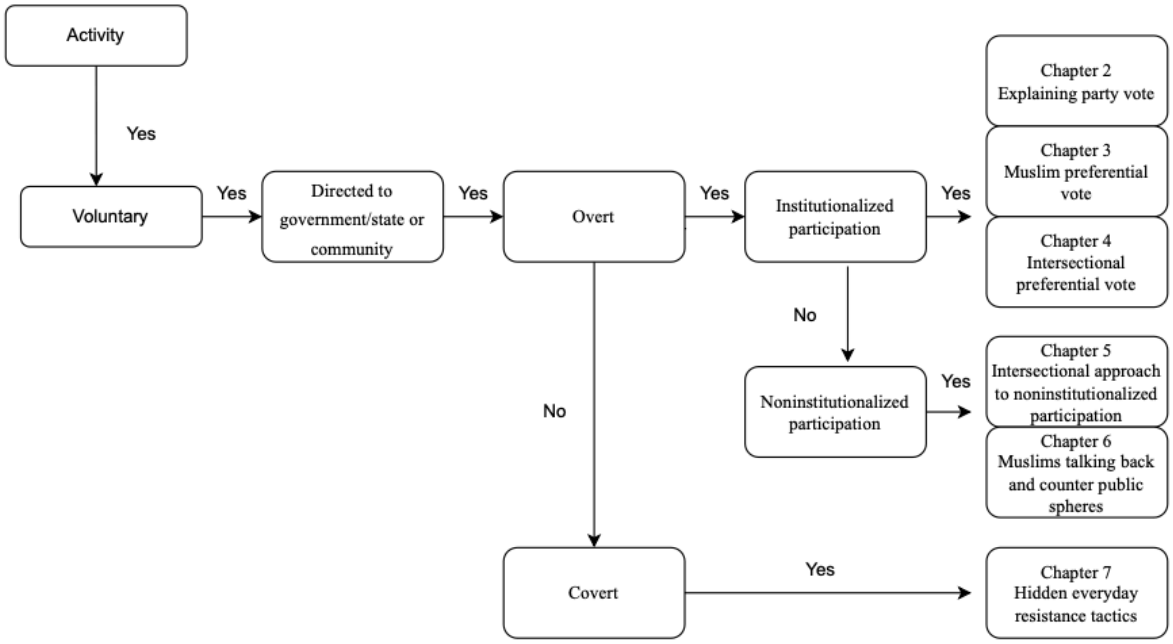
All in all, researchers – regardless of the topic studied or research field – must be willing to reflect on their positionality, why we engage in the work and the implications of this work for participants. Not doing so could compromise the integrity of our research and maybe impact the lives of research participants (Ghaffar-Kucher, 2015:5). I would even argue that the need for reflexivity on the researcher's position holds in particular for researchers from the dominant group, as they are less often questioned about their position because they are perceived as the norm, neutral and objective. The interactions with participants, and how they perceive a researcher, affect not only the research process but also the knowledge produced and the recommendations of researchers to challenge and critique the

dominant hegemonic discourses and normalized common sense (Miled, 2019). Allow me to even take it a step further. I believe that we, as social scientists, have a responsibility towards society to contribute to resolving social problems, in particular systemic inequalities. The way we, as researchers, deal with our positionality in research projects could make us humbler and therefore enable us to produce knowledge which will not maintain the status quo but make the world a fairer place.

Outline of dissertation

This dissertation takes an article-based approach consisting of six empirical studies on Muslims' institutionalized participation, noninstitutionalized participation and hidden everyday political practices. As described in the theoretical framework, political participation is perceived as a voluntary activity or action directed to the government, state or community. A distinction is made between overt participation, which is clearly visible, and covert participation, which remains below the surface. Figure 1 gives an overview of how specific forms of political participation are linked with the empirical chapters on Muslims' political participation, showing a comprehensive notion of Muslims' engagement.

Figure 1 *What is political participation? Overview of dissertation*



Chapter 2, taking a mixed-method perspective, unravels the motivations behind Muslims' tendency to vote for leftist parties and cast preferential votes. Based on exit poll data gathered at the 2018 Belgium local elections and in-depth interviews with Muslims, we tested whether considerations related to the Michigan model (issues, candidates, party) and/or minority-specific factors (religion and political alienation) explain Muslims' electoral preferences.

Chapter 3 explores to what extent there is such a thing as a distinct Muslim vote in flexible proportional list systems, and whether religious belonging and behavior shapes the Muslim preferential vote. It asks the question: Are Muslim voters more likely to vote for Muslim candidates? Voter and candidate characteristics are modelled simultaneously in cross-classified multilevel analyses to study the decision-making process of Muslim voters (demand side) while accounting for the list composition in terms of the individual candidates (supply side).

Chapter 4 delves deeper into the candidate preferences of Muslims, studying the gendered preferential voting behavior in the 2018 local elections in the largest city of Belgium, Antwerp. Applying an intersectional lens, this study goes beyond a single-aspect approach, shedding light on the complexity of the candidate preferences of Muslims. The paper thus explores the existence of an intersectional vote. The findings provide new insights which could have implications for the strategies of political parties as to which candidates they should field at elections.

Chapter 5 extends the interpretation of political participation, with a quantitative focus on the noninstitutionalized participation of Muslims in Belgium, and the drivers of participation. An intersectional approach is taken, to scrutinize gender-based differences within Muslim groups and counter the idea of a homogenous Muslim group. Drawing on European Social Survey data from six Western European countries (Belgium, France, Netherlands, Germany, Italy and the UK), the study explores whether religious indicators (religious salience, mosque attendance and religious discrimination) shape Muslim (wo)men's noninstitutionalized participation.

Chapter 6 further investigates what informs and shapes the "talking back" of Muslims, and how they challenge hegemonic assumptions in the secular public sphere. Relying on the conceptual frameworks of hooks (1989) and Fraser (1990), new insights are provided as Muslims generate counterpublics, opposing the idea of a secular public sphere with which they have to comply.

Chapter 7 explores the hidden and everyday resistance tactics of marginalized minorities in a racialized society, over and above widely recognized types of political actions. The study aims to explore which everyday practices Muslims undertake in order to change the status quo. Unpacking Du Bois' double consciousness, we elaborate on how Muslims always look at themselves through the eyes of others and how this shapes their everyday resistance practices.

The final chapter, **Chapter 8**, draws upon the entire dissertation, concluding with its key findings and social implications. Subsequently, we acknowledge the limitations of the studies and suggest future research avenues in the field of Muslims' political agency.

CHAPTER

02

Exploring mediating motivations for Muslims' electoral preferences: Issue Voters Rather Than Ideologues

Chapter 2

Exploring mediating motivations for Muslims' electoral preferences: Issue Voters Rather Than Ideologues

Abstract

Research has revealed that a significant part of Muslims cast a vote for a left party, on the one hand, and/or a preferential vote(s), on the other, but the underlying explanatory factors remain unclear. Based on mediation analyses, we test whether the 'left-wing tendency and personalization of the Muslim vote' are motivated by specific considerations related to the Michigan model (issues, candidates, party evaluation) and/or minorities-specific factors (religion and political alienation) vis-à-vis non-Muslims. For this purpose, we focus on the electoral preferences of Muslims in Belgium based on mock ballot data connected to an exit poll for the Belgian local elections in 2018. Our structural equation analyses reveal that issues are particularly relevant for Muslims compared with non-Muslims when explaining the leftist vote. Furthermore, neither the Michigan model nor the minorities-specific variables seem to explain Muslims' preferential voting vis-à-vis non-Muslims. Consequently, using in-depth interviews with Muslims, we further unravel these motivations and the decision-making process leading to their vote choices.

Keywords: Muslim, left party vote, preferential vote, Belgium.

Reference: Azabar, S. and Thijssen, P. (2022). Exploring mediating Motivations for Muslims' Electoral Preferences: Issue Voters Rather Than Ideologues. *Special Issue Politics of the Low Countries*, 4 (2), 159-186

Introduction

This chapter explores the political incorporation of migrants from different perspectives. One of these is their electoral choices but also the underlying motivations. Previous studies found migrants to often vote for parties on the left and as well as for candidates reflecting their own ethnic and/or socio-economic background, but why do they do this? In this respect, one often focuses on the fact that migrants belong to ethnic minorities, assuming that this characteristic is especially conducive to under-representation. Yet we will highlight another related characteristic that in post-9/11 times may even function as a stronger social marker of the 'otherness' of migrants, namely that many Europeans with a migration background are (religious) Muslims (Helbling and Traunmüller, 2020).

The political representation of ethnic minorities has been extensively studied in Europe, focusing mainly on the supply of ethnic minority candidates on party lists and their election (Sobolewska, 2014; Togeby, 2008). In general, these studies conclude that ethnic minorities are under-represented in elected bodies. Similarly, minorities' political participation has received scholarly attention, revealing ethnic minorities' lower voter turnout (Cesari, 2014; Van Heelsum et al., 2016), the leftist party preference (Azabar and Thijssen, 2020a; Jacobs et al., 2004; Swyngedouw et al., 2015) and – rather exceptionally – the preference for ethnic minority candidates (i.e. the ethnic vote) and Muslim candidates (i.e. the Muslim vote) in urban cities (Azabar and Thijssen, 2021; Teney et al., 2010).

Currently, scholars still rely mainly on (macro-level) aggregated data to explain the electoral choices of Muslims in West-Europe. For instance, scholars generally discard religious motivations as crucial factors for Muslims' party vote on the assumption of the secular leftist vote (Amjahad and Sandri, 2012; Castano, 2014), while others claim that Muslims' precarious socio-economic background and experiences with discrimination serve as an explanatory factor (Cesari, 2014; Zibouh, 2013). But it goes without saying that these contextual inferences are sub-optimal because of the imminent risk of ecological fallacy. Also, less is known as to why Muslims are more likely than non-Muslims to vote preferential (Azabar and Thijssen, 2020b). Clearly, scholarship explaining minorities' electoral preferences is still in its infancy in Europe, with a few notable exceptions focusing on the party level (see Bergh and Bjorklund, 2011; Goerres et al., 2021; Sanders et al., 2014). This article aims to contribute to the literature on minorities' political integration by explaining Muslims' electoral choices in Belgium, a flexible proportional system where voters can vote either for a party list (and thus agree with the order of the candidate list as presented) or for one or more candidates on a single party list.

But why should we study Muslims' electoral choices specifically? First, scholars have acknowledged the revival of religion in west-European societies (in particular, Islam), which contradicts the secularization thesis, which claims that religion would play a more marginal role in modern societies (Berger, 1999; Habermas, 2008). Second, although previous studies focus mostly on ethnicity as a salient identity marker instead of religion, scholars emphasize how ethnicity and religion are intertwined (Fleischmann et al., 2011; Zibouh, 2013). Moreover – in a post-9/11 era – research claims that the salience of Muslims' religious identity seems to have risen above that of their ethnic background (Dancygier, 2014; Voas and Fleischmann, 2012), referring to this phenomenon as the 'ethnicization of Islam' (Fadil et al., 2015). Accordingly, scholars argue that the development of a distinct Muslim identity in the electoral arena (Peace, 2015: 3), the increased public scrutiny following terrorist attacks (Dancygier, 2014: 14) and the collective history of being stigmatized as the 'other' (Peucker, 2016) warrant studies on Muslims' political agency and integration in western societies. Lastly, Fadil et al. (2015) have referred to the increasing demographic presence and growth of Muslims in Belgium turning them into an important political force. Hence, despite the increasing impact of Muslims on electoral outcomes, little systematic research is available explaining, on the one hand, their party vote and, on the other hand, casting a preferential vote.

Drawing on exit poll data of the local elections of 2018 in Belgium and in-depth interviews with seventeen Muslims, we aim to explain the motives behind Muslims' electoral choices, notably their tendency to vote leftist and to cast preferential votes, compared with non-Muslims (RQ)**.** On the one hand, we depart from the idea that the same theories explaining non-Muslims' electoral choices, notably the Michigan model (party evaluation, issues and candidates), can also explain Muslims' electoral preferences. On the other hand, studies have pointed to the saliency of minorities-specific motivations (see Goerres et al., 2021). Owing to the politicization of Islam and studies pointing to the salience of religious politics among Muslims (Elshayal, 2018; Modood, 2003), we also account for religious issues as an explanatory variable as well as political alienation because the marginalization and exclusion of Muslims could lead to political alienation (Taush, 2019). This study goes beyond assumptions for minorities' political behavior by focusing on Muslims' self-declared motivations of electoral preferences and thus Muslims' political agency. Because we rely on self-reported motives based on an open-ended question – which may be conducive to post-rationalization – we complement our quantitative survey research with in-depth interviews with Muslims to further unravel their political choices and decision-making process.

In this article, we aim to contribute to the scant literature explaining the electoral motivations of Muslims with respect to their party vote, on the one hand, and preferential vote, on the other. In order to examine

this, we look at the Belgian local elections of 2018. As one of the smaller countries in Europe, with an estimated 7.6% Muslims (Pew Research Center, 2017a), Belgium is an interesting case to study Muslims' electoral preferences owing to the compulsory voting, its flexible proportional system and the extensive choices on both the party and candidate levels. In addition, the Muslim population in Belgium consists of, primarily, first generation and their offspring with a Moroccan and Turkish background sharing a similar profile owing to their migration experiences. However, this does not mean that Muslims are an undifferentiated group, but rather that we look at Muslims as a separate political category, acknowledging its limitations (Dancygier, 2014; Peace, 2015). Thus, we do not consider Muslim to necessarily mean: *a religious identity, but instead an identity that may have religious, racial, political or cultural dimensions* (Sinno, 2012). To put it more clearly, those citizens who identify themselves as Muslims – regardless of the extent of religious practice – are defined as such.

We find that the reason why Muslims disproportionally vote for leftist parties is somehow driven by their stronger preoccupation with particular issues than by party evaluation motives, vis-à-vis non-Muslims. However, the other mediators, notably religious issues, political alienation and candidates do not explain the massive support of Muslims for leftist parties. Nevertheless, the size of the mediating effects of issues is rather small. Interestingly, the direct effect of belonging to the Muslim group on left vote remains strong despite the several mediators and controls in the model. Second, with regard to casting a preferential vote, we find that Muslims indeed vote more preferential than non-Muslims. Yet, interestingly, we do not find any significant mediating factors, either of the Michigan model or of the more minorities' specific factors (religious issues and political alienation).

Literature review

Electoral preferences of Muslims: A low turnout, a Leftist party vote and a preference for Muslim candidates

Several studies have revealed that Muslims' political participation is characterized by a lower electoral turnout,[11] a preference for left-wing political parties and Muslim candidates, particularly in urban cities with a sizeable Muslim electorate (Azabar and Thijssen, 2021; Cesari, 2014; Teney et al., 2010; Van Heelsum et al., 2016). Notwithstanding this geographical concentration, most Muslim voters have intended to vote for established mainstream leftist parties. For instance, in the US the overwhelming majority of Muslim voters cast their votes for Hillary Clinton (75%) in the 2016 presidential elections, while 66% of Muslims state that they identify with or lean towards the Democratic party (Pew Research

[11] In countries without compulsory voting.

Center, 2017b). The same goes for UK Muslims, who are a strong Labour constituency: in 2015, 74% of Muslims opted for the Labour party. In 2017, this share has risen to 87% (Curtice et al., 2018). In regard to the French presidential elections in 2007, Dargent (2009) showed that 95% of Muslims voted for Ségolene Royal (Parti Socialiste) compared with only 5% for Sarkozy.

With regard to Belgium, most electoral studies are conducted in the capital of Belgium, Brussels, owing to the presence of a sizeable Muslim electorate.[12] Zibouh's (2013) overview of electoral studies in the French-speaking part of Belgium confirms the leftist vote. Based on exit poll data gathered at the regional election of 2004 in Brussels, 46% of Muslims voted for the Parti Socialiste, while 13% voted for the Liberal party (MR) and 7% for the Christian Democrats (cdH) (Sandri and De Decker, 2008). A similar pattern of results was found at the federal elections in 2007 (Amjahad and Sandri, 2012), despite major scandals of financial fraud concerning politicians belonging to the Parti Socialiste.[13]

More recently, a few studies have focused on the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, Flanders, revealing the variation in the leftist vote of Muslims (Azabar and Thijssen, 2020a; Swyngedouw et al., 2015). At the local elections of 2018, on an aggregate level, 60.3% of Muslims (compared with 36% non-Muslims) voted for a traditional leftist party: a third for the Socialist Democrats, 15% for the radical left and 11% for the Green party (Azabar and Thijssen, 2020a). Interestingly, when distinguishing among the several regions in Belgium, Muslims in Flanders voted less traditional left (52.1%) than did their Brussels (62.7%) and Walloon (70.7%) counterparts (see Table 1). Hence, not only non-Muslims in Flanders but also Muslims vote more rightist than their fellow citizens in Brussels and Wallonia. All in all, we can conclude that Muslims' party preference may differ regionally and that more variation in the leftist Muslim vote occurs in the Flemish region (Azabar and Thijssen, 2020a).

Table 1 *Party family choice of Muslims and non-Muslims at the local elections of 2018 in Belgium according to region (N = 4511)*

Party choice	Muslims (N = 462)	Non-Muslims (N = 4049)
Blank	6.7	4
Local parties	13.2	20.4
Social Democrats	34.8	15
Greens	10.6	14.7
Radical Left	14.9	5.7

[12] Approximately 25% of Brussels inhabitants are Muslim (Zibouh, 2013).
[13] 43% of Muslims voting for Parti Socialist, 11% for the Greens, 19% for cdH and 15% for MR.

Liberals	3.9	8.5
Christian Democrats	11.3	12.2
Nationalists	3.2	14.6
Radical right	0.4	3.5
	100 %	100 %

Source: Azabar and Thijssen (2020a)

Contrary to the case concerning Muslims' party vote, less research has been conducted on the preferential vote(s) of Muslims, let alone on their motivations to vote preferential. The scant research on Muslims' preferential votes has shown that Muslim voters are more likely to vote preferential than non-Muslims in Antwerp, the largest city of Belgium (Azabar et al., 2020b), and for Muslim candidates (Azabar et al., 2020b; Heath et al., 2015). Interestingly, scholars have pointed to preferential voting as a sophisticated way of voting (André et al., 2012). However, Muslims' group consciousness and strong social identity could compensate for the lack of political resources among members of 'deprived' groups (Miller et al., 1981). Hence, a possible explanation lies in their precarious situation and the under-representation of their interests, triggering Muslims to vote more preferential to obtain a fairer representation and policy. These preferential votes could contribute to Muslims' descriptive and substantive representation in policymaking institutions, increasing the sense of inclusion in the political system (Dancygier, 2014).

Muslims' motivations for electoral choices

We aim to explain, first, Muslims' tendency to vote for a left party and, second, to vote preferential with the Michigan model as it is one of the most commonly used theoretical approaches to explaining voting behavior in established democratic countries (Goerres et al., 2021). We are aware that Campbell et al. (1960) initially developed the funnel of causality to explain party voting in the US and that more fine-grained models have been developed to explain preferential voting in European PR systems (e.g. André et al., 2012). Yet we argue that the basic explanatory categories of the funnel of causality (party evaluation, candidate evaluation, issues) may also provide useful insights for preferential voting because in the Belgian electoral system, a preference vote is ipso facto a second-order choice in the sense that one first has to select the preferred party in order to obtain its candidate list. This resonates with authors such as Dalton (2014: 184), who have demonstrated that the Michigan model can also be used to explain vote choices in general and not just party voting. Second, we will deal with Muslim-specific factors such as religious issues and distinguish them from other issues because of the specificity of a Muslim vote, next to political alienation, as an explanation for Muslims' electoral choices.

Explaining Party Preferences with the Michigan Model

Party Evaluation

The Michigan model has been commonly used to successfully explain party vote for the majority group. As a theory of vote choice, the Michigan model centres on partisanship designed as a psychological affinity with a political party, referred to as party identification (Campbell et al., 1960). Attachment to a party is thus acquired through a socialization process that assumes a stable and lasting relationship with a political party. Yet, Rosema (2006) has convincingly argued that in European PR systems party identification is less stable and more evaluative, using the term party evaluation. Subsequently, once voters positively identify with a party – as a long-term factor – it can shape attitudes towards candidate choice and issue preferences as short-term factors (Goerres et al., 2021; Rosema, 2006). Factors that influence party choice can therefore possibly shape candidate choice. In this article, we argue that the Michigan model can also explain minorities' party choice, in particular when it concerns the short-term factor such as candidates or issues (see Bergh and Bjorklund, 2011). However, researchers have argued that voters who vote on the basis of party evaluation tend to be politically sophisticated (Campbell et al., 1960; Goerres et al., 2021; Rosema, 2006). Owing to the low political knowledge and interest among Muslims, we argue that the explanatory effect of party evaluation for Muslims does not explain the leftist vote among Muslims vis-à-vis non-Muslims (Van der Eijk and Niemöller, 1987).

H1a. Party evaluation does not explain Muslims' (leftist) party preference, vis-à-vis non-Muslims

As voters first choose their preferred party and subsequently cast a list or preferential vote (André et al., 2017), we also account for the mediator *left vote* when explaining Muslims' preferential voting behavior. One can assume that ideological voters are more likely to refrain from preferential voting as they would agree with the list presented by the party. As we hypothesized (H1a) that Muslims do not vote according to party evaluation motives, the latter also does not explain whether they cast a preferential vote or not, compared with non-Muslims. We thus hypothesize the following:

H1b. Party evaluation does not explain Muslims' likelihood of casting a preference vote, vis-à-vis non-Muslims

Issues

We further assume that policy issues, as short-term factors traditionally explaining voting behavior, can also guide Muslims' political behavior. Popkin (1991) argues that voters are expected to know which positions parties take with regard to (certain) policy issues. Not all policy issues are considered by the voter but only those they are attracted to. Popkin (1991) talks about issue publics: voters who focus on

a certain policy theme and put it first as a decision rule. We hereby do not claim that the same issues are perceived to be important but that issues explain party choice more for Muslims vis-à-vis non-Muslims owing to their marginalized status.

Previous sociological research has taught us that Muslim minorities reside mainly in large cities and are characterized by a relatively precarious status because of systemic exclusion: a low level of education, high unemployment, underprivileged and over-represented in jobs with low qualification requirements and low wages (Fadil et al., 2015; Noppe et al., 2018). Accordingly, Inglehart's (1977) scarcity hypothesis emphasizes that when scarcity prevails, material needs like hunger and safety will be addressed first. More recently, Zibouh (2013) and Cesari (2014) claim that the electoral choices of Muslims are influenced by motives related to socio-economic and equality issues. The latter refer to Islamophobia and discrimination of Muslims in western countries (Bayrakli and Hafez, 2019). Given the precarious situation of Muslims, we hypothesize that the left-wing preference can be explained by issues influencing their vote choice.

H2a. Issues explain Muslims' (leftist) party preference to a higher extent than non-Muslims

These issues could also influence minorities' tendency to vote preferential as scholars claim that voters use information shortcuts such as demographic cues to estimate a candidate policy preference (Cutler, 2002; Popkin, 1991). When marginalized voters believe that candidates 'who are like them' share similar experiences and will pursue policies that will benefit them (Dancygier, 2014; Mansbridge, 1999), issues could trigger them to vote preferential (André et al., 2017; Azabar et al., 2020b). The under-representation of their interests may activate this specific type of voting pattern to obtain a fairer representation and policy, especially when these issues relate to material/basic needs (Inglehart, 1977).

H2b. Issues explain Muslims' likelihood of casting a preference vote to a higher extent than non-Muslims

Candidates

Thirdly, it is very plausible that voters, in general, are guided by candidates when voting for a party. This could apply, in particular, to local elections, as the chance of a voter knowing a candidate is high (so-called 'friends and neighbour' voting, see Górecki and Marsh, 2014). However, political studies have pointed to the under-representation of minorities such as women and ethnic minorities in political bodies (Azabar and Thijssen, 2021; Teney et al., 2010. Moreover, scholars previously claimed that Muslims are more drawn to leftist parties owing to their socio-economic status and the discrimination

they experience (Cesari, 2014; Zibouh, 2013). Accordingly, Bergh and Bjorklund (2011) referred to the leftist vote of migrants as a way of group voting, referring to an iron law. We therefore expect Muslims to mention candidate motives when voting for a party, albeit to a lesser extent than non-Muslims, particularly in Belgium, where right-wing candidates are among the most popular candidates.

H3a. Candidates explain Muslims' (leftist) party preference to a lesser extent than non-Muslims

Furthermore, we could expect voters who choose a party because of candidates to be more prone to cast a preference vote than others. In particular, Muslims residing in social contexts where they are fiercely debated and problematized could be eager to support 'one of their own' to represent them in the political arena (Azabar et al., 2020b; Heath et al., 2015). André et al. (2017) argue that under-represented groups are more likely to cast preferential votes for in-group candidates in order to obtain more diverse elected bodies. Second, a symbolic explanatory approach argues that when voters identify themselves as group members, they will support their in-group members more than out-group members (Tajfel and Turner, 1979), in particular, historically marginalized groups, because they have a stronger feeling of identity owing to barriers they face in society (Miller et al., 1981). Sharing a common socio-demographic trait, particularly one that is visible and politically salient, could lead to voters supporting political candidates who are alike (Popkin, 1991). Indeed, Teney et al. (2010) have established that ethnic minorities prefer candidates with an ethnic minority background (ethnic voting). As far as we know, a dearth of studies has pointed to the existence of a Muslim vote: Muslim voters are more likely to vote for Muslim candidates (Azabar et al., 2020b; Heath et al., 2015). In addition, we formulate explorative hypotheses stating that Muslims' preferential voting can be explained owing to knowing the candidate personally and, to a lesser extent, owing to the competences of the candidate as more political information is required for the latter vis-à-vis non-Muslims.

H3b. Candidates explain Muslims' likelihood of casting a preference vote to a higher extent than non-Muslims

H3c. Knowing a candidate personally explains Muslims' likelihood of casting a preference vote to a higher extent than non-Muslims

H3d. Competences of a candidate explain Muslims' likelihood of casting a preference vote to a lesser extent than non-Muslims

Explaining Muslims' party preference with Muslims' specific factors

Political Alienation

The political-social discussions about Syrian foreign fighters and terror, next to the usual debates about the headscarf, Islamic schools and ritual slaughter, have rendered Islam the focus of heated and polarized political discussions in which in-group and out-group thinking thrive easily (Bayrakli and Hafez, 2019; Fleischmann et al., 2012). For example, a European report (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2017) found that 1 in 3 European Muslims experienced discrimination in the labor market and that half of the Muslims surveyed encountered obstacles in the housing market. International studies consistently report on the various forms of exclusion and discrimination experienced by Muslims, partly explaining their lower socio-economic status and higher poverty rate (Amnesty, 2012; European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia 2006; Open Society Foundation, 2011). This exclusion could eventually lead to Muslims being politically alienated and thus they would rather opt for 'exit' than 'voice' as they have few resources (Hirschman, 1970; Verba et al., 1995). Indeed, Muslims generally vote less than non-Muslims in western countries (see Cesari, 2014). However, as voting is mandatory in Belgium, we hypothesize that Muslims will cast a party vote, but not preferential, as they are more politically alienated and will vote merely to avoid potential penalties compared with non-Muslims. Subsequently, we hypothesize that political alienation does not explain the leftist vote or casting a preferential vote vis-à-vis non-Muslims.

H4a. Political alienation does not explain Muslims'(leftist) party preference, similar to non-Muslims
H4b. Political alienation does not explain Muslims' likelihood of casting a preference vote similar to non-Muslims

Religious Issues

Drawing on the social identity theory of Tajfel and Turner (1979), Verkuyten and Yildiz (2007) further state that group consciousness among Muslims was already strong but may be strengthened in the current context. These findings are in line with the conclusions studying the politicization of the Muslim identity in various Western European urban areas. A strong Muslim identity encouraging young Muslims to take political action (Fleischmann and Phalet, 2012) refers to an identity politics, notably a power struggle by group members who are strongly aware of their religious group membership and who are committed to the interests of the group. Would this phenomenon be limited to more informal forms of participation such as demonstrations and protests? Sanders et al. (2014) state in their study that experiences of (religious) discrimination do shape the political vote choices of British minority groups. The authors argue that discriminated minorities opt for left-wing parties because they represent the interests of minority groups. Modood (2003) further argues that British Muslim voters are encouraged

to adopt identity politics in a context that stigmatizes Muslims because of their religious identity and would therefore lean more towards leftist parties. Our fifth hypothesis therefore focuses on religious issues as an explanatory variable, not only on the party level, but the same thought process could lead to hypothesizing that Muslims would vote more preferential owing to religious issues eagerly searching for a Muslim candidate as they could defend their religious interests best.

H5a. Religious issues explain Muslims'(leftist) party preference to a higher extent than non-Muslims' party preference
H5b. Religious issues explain Muslims' likelihood of casting a preference vote to a higher extent than non-Muslims

Methods and Data

In order to analyze the electoral preferences of Muslims – notably party vote, on the one hand, and preferential vote, on the other – we conducted an exit poll at the local elections in 2018 and in-depth interviews with Muslims in Belgium. At the local elections, all citizens had to vote owing to the compulsory voting system, although this will not be the case anymore from 2024 onwards. Migrants lacking citizenship and living more than five years in Belgium can vote after registering themselves at the municipal council. In what follows we will shed light on the exit poll data and then expatiate on the interviews.

Exit Poll Data 2018

At the 2018 local elections, we conducted an exit poll in a consortium of six universities (VUB, UHasselt, UGent, UAntwerpen, UNamur and UCL), providing representative and reliable data. The approval of the Ethical Commission has been provided by each university. We randomly sampled 45 municipalities across Belgium where a systematic design was adopted: every fifth voter was asked to participate when leaving the polling station. As ethno-religious minorities tend to participate less in research, we selected six municipalities with a high ethno-religious diversity to oversample nine polling stations by deploying more interviewers in order to get more ethno-religious respondents.[14] The 228 trained pollsters were equipped with tablets to accurately register party and candidate choices using a mock ballot form resembling the design of lists and candidates as seen on their computer screen in the polling booth. Lastly, we invested in diversity among pollsters to obtain a higher response rate among

[14] Antwerpen, Sint-Jans-Molenbeek, Sint-Joost-ten-Node, Charleroi and Luik.

minority groups, lowering the threshold for Muslims to participate. We presented respondents a face-to-face survey (consisting of questions on socio-demographic traits, voting behavior and political attitudes) together with a mock ballot as a tool to record the multiple preferential voting behavior in a reliable way. The mock ballot perfectly resembled the design of lists and candidates as seen on their computer screen in the polling booth. This resulted in 4,511 respondents, the majority of whom we identify as non-Muslims (N = 4049), notably those who are not Muslim. Among the respondents, 462 self-identified as Muslim, mostly with a Moroccan or Turkish background, as these minorities are over-represented in Muslim communities.

The motivations to vote for a party are measured based on an open-ended question. We acknowledge that the reliability and validity of self-reported motivations via open-ended questions is debated within research as respondents could answer in a socially desirable manner or post-rationalize their choice (Geer, 1988; Murphy et al., 2020). Yet these biases tend to be more limited in exit poll data as respondents are interviewed right after they have voted. Nevertheless, to strengthen the quality of the measurements, we made sure that answering the open-ended questions was not obligatory as research stated that mostly respondents who are uninterested or unable to answer the question leave such questions unanswered (Geer, 1988). Second, we tested for the coherence of answers provided by respondents, comparing our coding with other answers (Lefevere, 2010; Van Holsteyn, 1994). Third – and most importantly – we do not rely only on exit poll data but, additionally, conducted interviews with Muslims to explain their electoral choices more in depth, expanding our understanding thereof. We gain insights into not only their electoral behavior and motivations but also their decision-making process. We will elaborate on the interviews in the next section. For this study, the open question in the survey about party voting motives has been coded to map voters' party motives (*You have just voted for the municipal elections. Could you explain with your own words why you have voted for this lis*t?). Seventy-nine per cent of interviewees responded to the question. Every response was assigned to a maximum of one code; thus, the categories are mutually exclusive (see Table 2). We coded the motivations inductively, but most codes aligned very well with the basic categories of the Michigan model: party evaluation, candidate evaluation and issues. We recoded them accordingly but added a separate category for religiosity issues – to explore the distinctiveness of Muslims' electoral behavior – next to the category political alienation when respondents stated to have voted owing to the mandatory voting.

Because of the interest in religion, we coded motives mentioning a religious practice (i.e. religious slaughter, headscarf ban, mosque attendance) as religiosity issues. We hereby apply a strict interpretation of religious issues, possibly excluding themes such as anti-discrimination or education, which could also have religious connotations. A combination of party evaluation and multiple issues is

coded as party evaluation. When someone feels close to a party, they will, logically, also value the party position concerning the issues. This is true of the combination of party evaluation and candidates as well: voters first vote for a party and subsequently cast a preferential vote(s) for candidate(s) within the party. Other multiple issues were coded as issues: for Muslims these concerned mostly anti-discrimination, social cohesion and exclusion in education and on the labor market. As for non-Muslims, most issues were related to poverty, mobility, climate and social cohesion. The first author coded the open question, and 125 responses were coded double by a second coder. To measure intercoder reliability, we calculated Cohen's Kappa, which is 0.73 (S.E. = 0.55; N = 125). Table 2 gives an overview of codes and examples.

To understand whether Muslims cast a preferential vote owing to party evaluation, issues, religious issues, political alienation or candidates, we rely on the same coded motivations as explained previously, except that for candidates we also explore whether voters are more likely to vote preferential because they know a candidate or owing to the competences of candidates. In what follows, we will elaborate more on the variables used in our statistical analyses.

Table 2 *Coding scheme of self-reported motivations to vote for a party*

Codes	Examples of voting motives
Religious Issues Motive	For change concerning the feast of sacrifice and the ban on veils, Muslim tolerant
Issues Motive	Against poverty and to give chances to the unemployed, socio-economic policy
Alienation Motive	voting is compulsory, the least bad party
Party Evaluation Motive	I share their values and vision, evaluation
Candidate Motive	I trust the candidate, I voted for my husband

Source: Azabar and Thijssen (2020a).

Operationalization of Dependent, Independent and Mediating Variables

In this article, we aim to explore the underlying mechanisms of the relationship between self-reported Muslim identification and voting, on the one hand, leftist and, on the other hand, preferential through mediators using MPLUS. Mediators tell us something more about how an independent variable impacts the dependent variable. We acknowledge that in this case, with the use of reference categories, multiple models are possible. However, to maintain a clear overview, we only showcase the models with significant mediators, notably issues and party evaluation, as these models are complementary.

Dependent Variables

Left vote – With regard to our first dependent variable explaining the leftist party vote *(left)*, we asked respondents which list they had voted for using the mock ballot tool. We constructed two variables for the left vote, pointing at, respectively, voting for the traditional leftist parties labelled left vote (the Radical Left, the Greens and the Social Democrats) and one where the Christian Democrats, as a center party, are included (*Leftcdv*). We will run the mediation analyses with both DVs. *Pref vote* – With regard to our second dependent variable explaining whether respondents have cast a preferential vote or not (*Prefvote*), we coded respondents who cast a list vote as 0 and those who cast a preferential vote as 1.

Mediating Variables

For the mediating variables explaining the relationship between the dependent and the independent variables, we posed the following question: *You have just voted for the municipal elections. Could you explain in your own words why you have voted for this list?* We then coded respondents' self-reported motives mentioned in Table 2 (*Party evaluation, Candidate, Religious issues, Issues and Alienation*). When applicable, we coded 1, otherwise 0. See Table 3 for an overview of registered motives. We will use the same motivations to explain the dependent variable Prefvote. In addition, to further explore Muslims' preferential voting, we questioned respondents in the exit poll why they voted for a candidate offering them three options, notably (a) because of their personality/charisma (b) because of their competences and (c) because they know them. We then created dummy variables to explore whether these could mediate between Muslim identification and casting a preferential vote (KnowCandidate, Personality, Competence).

Table 3 *Self-reported motivations to vote for a party according to Muslims/non-Muslims*

Codes: motivations to vote for party	Muslims (N = 343)	Non-Muslims (N = 3236)
Religious Motive	6.4 %	0.5 %
Issues Motive	14.2 %	13.4 %
Alienation Motive	11.7 %	11.6 %
Party evaluation Motive	48.8 %	55.4 %
Candidate Motive	18.9 %	19.1 %
	100 %	100 %

Source: Azabar and Thijssen (2020a)

Independent Variables

For the independent variable *Muslim*, we questioned respondents as follows: *Would you consider yourself affiliated to any specific philosophical denomination or religion? If yes, which one?* Respondents who self-identified as Muslim were coded 1; all others as non-Muslim. As we acknowledge the heterogeneity of the latter category, we also compare Muslims with only Catholic/Christian respondents as a robustness check. Next, with regard to the independent variable *Migrant*, we asked voters about their nationality as well as their parents' nationality. When respondents or at least one of their parents lacked a nationality of a European country, we coded 1, while all others were coded 0. We further control for socio-demographic variables such as *Gender* (male = 0; female = 1), *Agedum* (18-34, 35+), *Edudum* (low = 0, high = 1) and *Region* (Brussels/Wallonia = 0, Flanders = 1).

In-depth Interviews

The seventeen in-depth interviews are part of a broader project on Muslims' political participation in Belgium. Questioning their electoral participation, motives and decision-making process, but also their challenges and obstacles in the political arena, we aim to shed light on Muslims' electoral and non-electoral participation, next to their decision-making process. Respondents were queried about their personal political biographies, notably how they describe and evaluate current politics, the issues that concern them and engagements herein, the range of political actions they have participated in and their motivations to do so. Lastly, we queried them about the role of religion in their participation. Participants contacted the first author, consenting to an interview after they had seen the call distributed by civil society organizations or being asked by someone in their network as we applied snowball sampling. As most interviewees were mostly higher educated and politically interested, we used purposive sampling to interview lower educated Muslims. Participants who have agreed to the interviews were mostly second- or third-generation Muslims with a Moroccan background, two with a Turkish background and two converts with an ethnic majority background.[15] Nine defined themselves as women, seven as men and one as non-binary. The majority, twelve participants, are studying or have finished their higher education, whereas five participants had obtained (only) their secondary degree.

The interviews were conducted in February-April 2021 and took on average 1 hour 45 minutes. Owing to Covid-19 measures, half of the interviews were conducted in person with respect for all the applicable measures, while the other half took place online using Skype or ZOOM. The names of the participants

[15] When either both or one of the parents/grandparents are born in a non-EU country, we refer to the participants as, respectively, second and third generations.

were altered in order to preserve confidentiality. All interviews were conducted by the first author, who is Muslim and recognizable as such, which could generate a sense of familiarity and openness towards Muslim participants, particularly those who feel otherised. The interviews were transcribed and analysed with NVivo. For this study, we coded the interview data deductively according to the themes of interest, notably, on the one hand, party choice and, on the other hand, candidate choice, together with the motivations hereof. We also took note of the considerations Muslims made while casting a vote.

Findings

Quantitative Section: What explains the Leftist and preferential vote of Muslims vis-à-vis non-Muslims?

Because the five motivational categories were measured in a disjointed and exhaustive way, in order to avoid collinearity problems, we test the complete set of mediations in two models, notably Model 1A and Model 1B. Both models have a good fit with a chi-square = 67.39 (df = 18, $p = 0.00$), RMSEA = 0.03 (Model 1A) and chi-square = 46.46 (df = 17, $p = 0.00$), RMSEA = 0.02 (Model 1B). We present the models with significant regression coefficients ($p < 0.05$) only. As we compare Muslims with the heterogeneous group of non-Muslims, we conduct robustness checks for all analyses comparing Muslims with the Catholic/Christian voters (see Appendices 1 and 2). All in all, our analyses show similar findings, notably the role of issues and party evaluation on Muslims' leftist party vote.

Figure 1A *Mediation analysis explaining Muslims' leftist vote (Path Model 1A)*

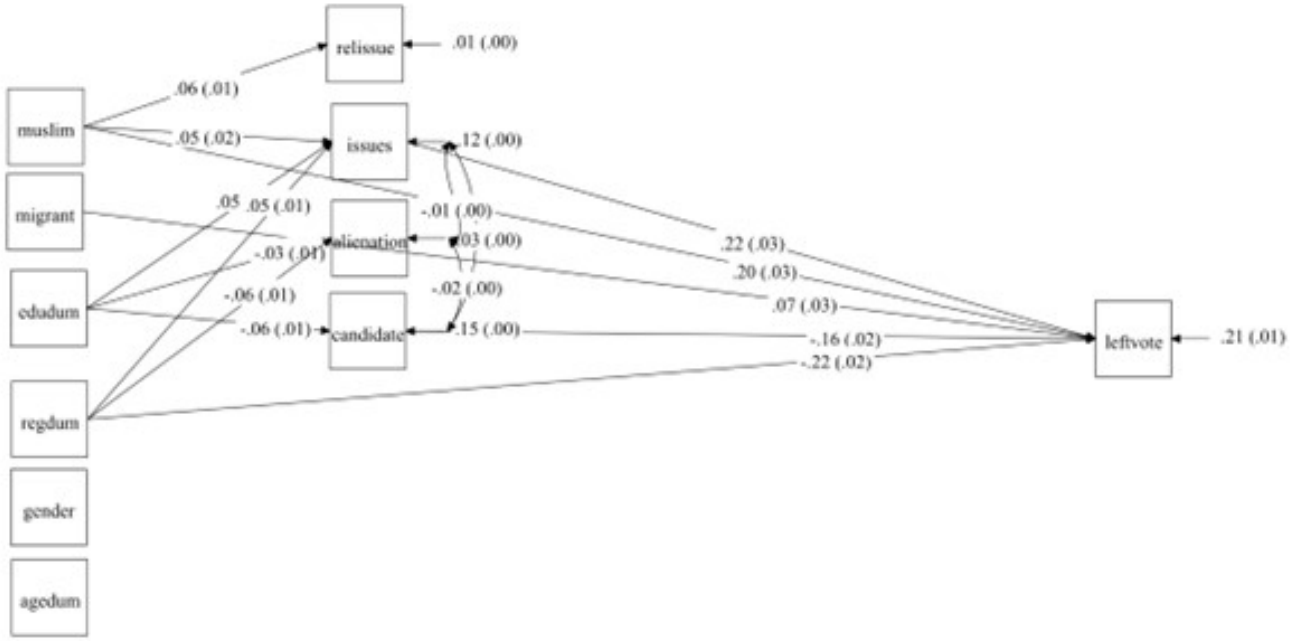


Figure 1B *Mediation analysis explaining Muslims' leftist vote (Path model 1B)*

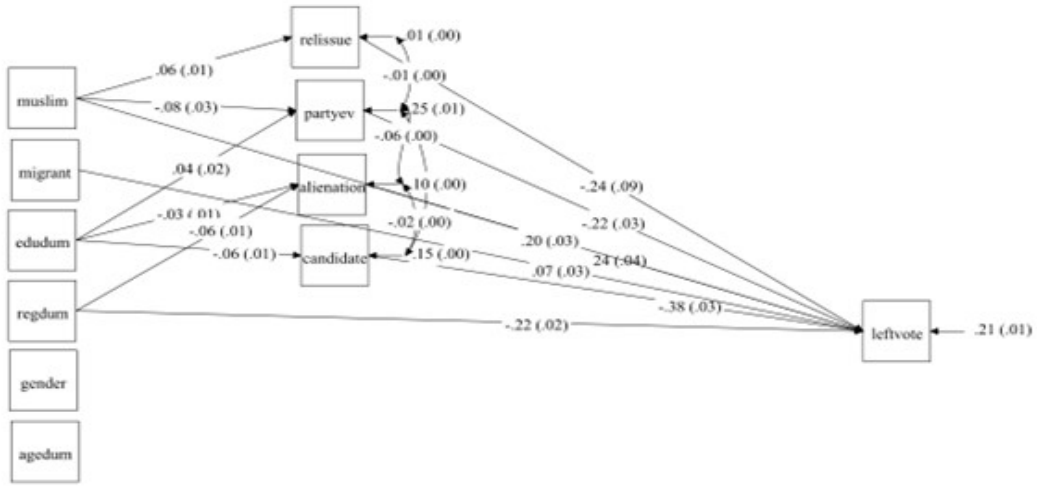


Figure 1A confirms H2a as the effect of Muslim on the left vote is significantly mediated by their inclination to vote in terms of issues compared with the reference category party evaluation. Muslims are significantly more issue voters vis-à-vis non-Muslims, and issue voters, in turn, tend to vote for a party of the left. In other words, the fact that Muslims more often cast a left vote, compared with non-

Muslims, can partly be explained by their issue preferences (B = 0.01, S.E. = 0.00, p = 0.00). Figure 1B tells a complementary story. H1a can be falsified because the leftist Muslim vote is significantly mediated by the fact that they are *less* driven by party evaluation. One can therefore also say that the leftist Muslim vote is partially driven by the fact that left voters are less motivated by party evaluation. Yet we should point out that the size of both mediation effects is relatively small. This is reflected in the robust direct effect of being Muslim in model 1A (B = 0.20, S.E. = 0.03, p = 0.00) and Model 1B (B = 0.20, S.E. = 0.03, p = 0.00). Apparently, only a relatively small part of the leftist Muslim vote can be explained by their specific motives, which points at a strong structural basis, such as the fact that they tend to belong to less affluent minority groups. Interestingly, the direct effect of being Muslim is stronger than the direct effect of having a migration background (B = 0.07, S.E. = 0.03, p = 0.00) on the dependent variable *left vote*, which can partly be explained by their particular issue preferences.

Furthermore, candidates (H3a) and religious issues (H5a) do not significantly mediate the *left vote* vis-à-vis non-Muslims, and hence we reject both hypotheses. Lastly, as we hypothesized political alienation (H4a) to not explain Muslims' leftist preference, we confirm H4a. These results are confirmed by our robustness test comparing Muslims with Catholic/Christian voters (see Appendix 1). As expected, the Muslim vote is more often driven by religious issues, compared with that of non-Muslims. Yet these religious issues do not lead to more votes for the left in Model 1A. However, Model 1B shows that religious issues attenuate left voting when comparing Muslims with the heterogeneous group of non-Muslims. A robustness test comparing Muslims with Catholic/Christian voters shows that this effect is non-significant and thus disappears (see Appendix 1). Our main findings, notably issues and party evaluation mediating Muslims' leftist party vote, remain intact.

In Figures 2A and 2B we explore the specific motivations Muslims might have to cast significantly more preference votes vis-à-vis non-Muslims (Azabar et al., 2020b). As voters according to the Belgian electoral system first choose their preferred party and subsequently cast a list or preferential vote (André et al., 2017), in Figures 2A and 2B we also account for the mediator *left vote* when explaining Muslims' likelihood of voting preferential. Figures 2A and 2B show the results for the dependent variable cast a preferential vote (no/yes) and mediating variables of the Michigan model and Muslim-specific variables, notably party evaluation (H1b), issues (H2b), candidates (H3b), KnowCan (H3c), Competences (H3d), political alienation (H4b) and religious issues (H5b). Both models have a good fit with a chi-square = 107.95 (df = 30, p = 0.00), RMSEA = 0.02 (Model 2A) and chi-square = 316.1 (df = 30, p = 0.00), RMSEA = 0.05 (Model 2B). Given the limited number of specific factors with regard to preferential voting, these results should be interpreted with caution.

Figure 2A *Mediation analysis explaining Muslims' preferential vote (Path model 2A)*

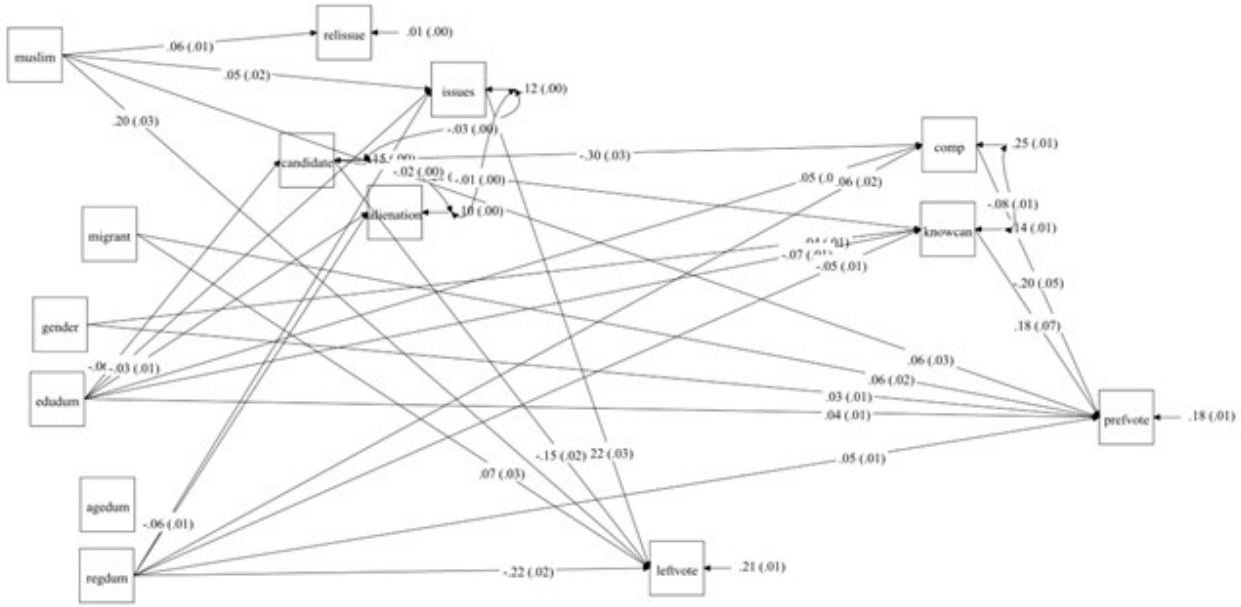
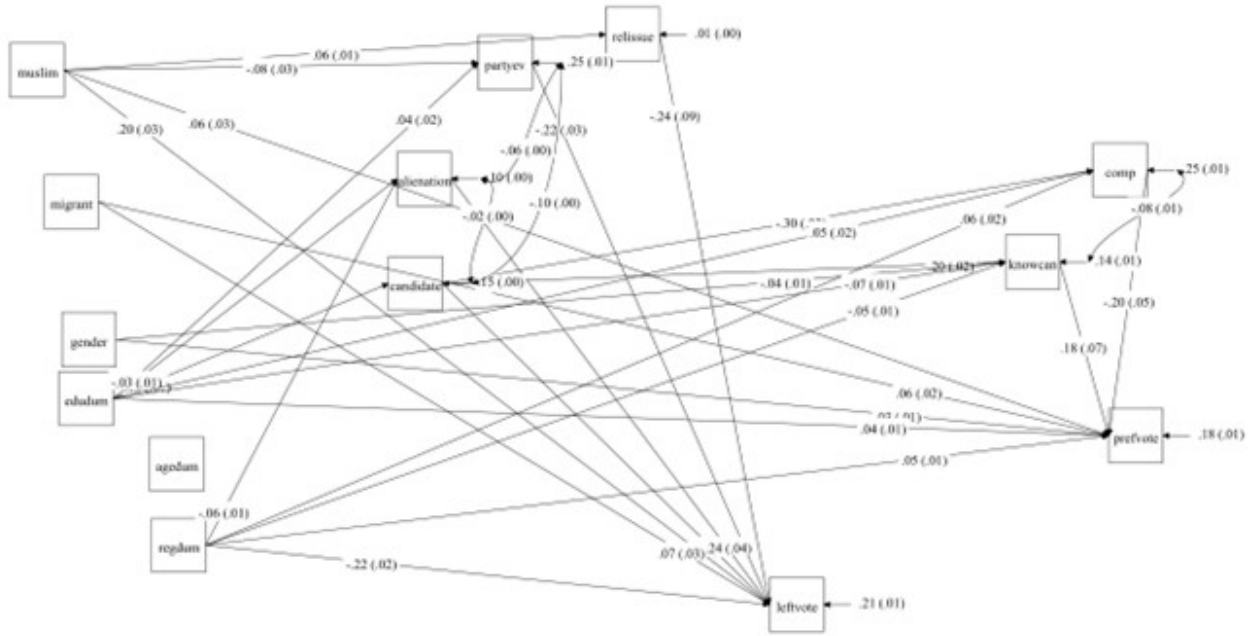


Figure 2B *Mediation analysis explaining Muslims' preferential vote (Path model 2B)*



Model 2A and 2B indeed show that Muslims are more inclined to cast a preference vote in local elections compared with non-Muslims (B = 0.06; S.E. = 0.02; p = 0.02) and, second, those with a migration background more than those without a migration background (B = 0.06; S.E. = 0.03; p = 0.02). However, this effect is not significantly mediated by the Michigan model variables, notably party evaluation (H1b), issues (H2b) and candidates (H3b). We therefore confirm H1b, as party evaluation does not play a significant role in the likelihood of casting a preferential vote for Muslims, and reject H2b and H3b. As for explaining casting a preferential vote, our models show that women, the higher educated and Flemish voters cast more preferential votes than, respectively, men, lower educated and voters in Wallonia and Brussels, as previous studies claimed (Wauters et al., 2020). When focusing on the questioned motivations to cast a preferential vote (Knowing a Candidate, Competences or Personality), we can deduce the following: knowing a candidate personally generally leads to a higher likelihood of voting preferential compared with voting for a candidate owing to their personality (B = 0.18; S.E. = 0.07; p = 0.02). In addition, voting for a candidate because of their competence appears to be less likely to explain casting a preferential vote compared with the personality of the candidate (B = -0.20; S.E. = 0.05; p = 0.02). However, none of these motivations significantly explain Muslims' likelihood of voting preferential vis-à-vis non-Muslims, thus falsifying H3c and H3d. Interestingly, there are no significant indirect effects concerning the Muslim-specific variables political alienation, thus confirming H4b while rejecting H5b as religious issues do not explain Muslims' preferential voting. Our robustness test vis-à-vis Catholic/Christian voters shows similar results (Appendix 2). In the next section, we aim to (further) explore Muslims' motivation to vote (a) for a leftist party and (b) to cast a preferential vote as our last analyses reveal less on the motivations to cast a preference vote.

Qualitative Section: What explains the Leftist and preferential vote of Muslims?

As earlier research revealed, Muslim voters are more likely to vote for leftist parties (Cesari, 2014; Zibouh, 2013), preferential and for Muslim candidates (Azabar et al., 2020b; Heath et al., 2015). In this section, we further disentangle these electoral preferences[16] by focusing on their decision-making process.

It's all about the issues!

When Muslim respondents were queried about their party vote, all but two respondents answered that they had voted for a left-wing party (notably Radical Left, Greens or Social Democrats), pointing to earlier research on Muslims' leftist party preferences. The other two respondents had either voted for a right-wing party or blank. But how can we explain these leftist party preferences? And what considerations do Muslims have concerning their party vote? A few respondents stated that they always vote for the same party at local elections referring to party evaluation. The radical vision of changing the society to be more just spoke to Kamal (35 years, unemployed) as he stated: '*Since 2012, I consistently vote for the radical left',* while Yasmina (41 years, housewife) talked about how she shares the same ideas as the party she voted for and thus feels '*connected*'. Interestingly, Karim (47 years, city official) mentioned that he '*principally vote[s] for the Christian Democrats'* because of their Christian background, reminding him of his own religion. However, a city councilor with a Turkish background (Social Democrats) stood out to him because of his accomplishments at the local level, which made Karim (47 years) vote for the Social Democrats at the 2018 local elections. Interestingly, even these respondents shared that although at the local elections they vote in line with their party evaluation, they sometimes make other choices depending on the level of elections. For instance (Kamal, 35 years) stated to vote for the Greens on the national and European level as they can do more than the radical left party PVDA, because the latter is a small party.

Furthermore, respondents refer to issues such as socio-economic issues and the welfare system but also anti-racism, anti-discrimination and respect for human rights while stressing the need for a more just society. These topics were earlier suggested by Zibouh (2013) and Cesari (2014) as salient issues owing to the sociopolitical position of Muslims influencing their party vote. Issues such as the climate and Palestine were also mentioned, albeit to a lesser extent. Some respondents, mostly higher educated, have

taken the time to immerse themselves into the party positions (and accomplishments) on certain matters on inequality, or issue publics (Popkin, 1991), while others formed an opinion through discussions, short campaign ads and following politicians on Facebook. All respondents addressed to discuss their party preferences with family and (close) friends, or were even asked for advice by family members and friends, with the exception of Muhammed (34 years, security agent). As he voted for the nationalist party N-VA, he stressed that it's impossible to discuss his vote with Muslims because they would exclude and perceive him as '*a traitor'* for having voted for a right-wing party.

Thirdly, almost all spoke about voting for what is better for minorities as a group. Indeed, aiming to explain the voting preferences of voters with a non-western background in Norway, Bergh and Bjorklund (2011) found the strongest support for the group voting thesis claiming that one's ethnic background trumps other concerns when voting. The same goes for our mediation analysis in this article as a strong effect remains of being Muslim on the independent variable *Left vote*. Most respondents also stated that they voted with (full) conviction for a party taking a more radical stance against injustices affecting, primarily, minorities. Interestingly, for some their voting behavior is conditioned by the chance that the party could govern as two respondents refrained from voting for the radical left party PVDA despite supporting their ideas, because they are *'a small political party with a few seats … the chance that something could come out of that …' (Linda, 31 years, nurse)*. Second, earlier negative experiences with parties explain why some refrain from voting for a traditional party, although they did before. One example that was often brought up was the Social Democratic party owing to the implementation of a headscarf ban for clerks in Antwerp, the biggest city of Belgium.[17] This is illustrated by Hakim (29 years, IT consultant), explaining his party vote as follows:

Hakim: I have earlier voted for the Social Democrats, then for the Greens. At the recent local elections, I have voted for the radical left. The first time I voted, I was influenced by my friends and family claiming that the Social Democrats are the best party for ***our community****. Much has happened [in] the last ten years, especially with the ban on veils. I now follow some politicians of the radical left party on social media. [own emphasis]*
Interviewer: What has attracted you to the radical left party?
Hakim: Particularly their discourse against racism. They have never had the chance to govern contrary to the Social Democrats. The Greens also have had the opportunity. … We need people who dare to speak.

[17] In 2007, Patrick Janssens, Social Democratic party, became mayor of Antwerp. One of the first policy measures he implemented was a dress code for clerks, which included a ban on veils. This sparked a debate on the neutrality of civil servants and the role of religion, questioning to what extent wearing a headscarf violates the neutrality of the state.

Clearly, an increasing popularity of the radical left party among Muslim respondents is present. A recent study of Azabar and Thijssen (2020a) in Belgium noticed how the radical left party PVDA gained support from Muslims compared with the local elections of 2012. In the same vein Ezrow (2008) has found that niche parties do better electorally when they promote radical (policy) stances. Or, as Moussa (40 years, unemployed) stated, '*The radical left party is a middle finger to the radical right party. That's why I decided to vote for the radical left party'*.

The Muslim Vote: 'Who Else Can Represent Me?'

Describing their ideal candidates, most respondents stressed willingness to listen to voters, presence among the people and complete transparency about what one can achieve as important assets, pointing to the preference of delegates as representatives. Safa (42 years, researcher) noted, *'Someone who can be among people, can listen and at the same time knows how to play the game. Those are politicians who I respect.'* Muhammed (37 years, security agent) emphasized that politicians should decide on policy matters in the interest of the voters (trustee*)*. Concerning socio-demographic characteristics, some preferred Muslim candidates when available on the list, while others stressed that candidates do not have to belong to a minority group to represent them but emphasized the importance of an open mind set and eagerness to learn.

When respondents elaborated on their actual preferential vote(s), a majority of the interviewees revealed that they had voted for Muslim candidates. Earlier research indeed found that Muslims are more likely to vote for Muslim candidates in urban cities with a Muslim electorate (Azabar et al. 2020b; Heath et al., 2015). A few also referred to well-known candidates such as the first candidate on the list. But why? Are Muslim respondents more prone to vote for Muslim candidates to endorse candidates who look like them (*descriptive representation*), to support *'one of our own' (symbolic representation),* or do they expect a policy that will benefit them (*substantive representation*)?

A few interviewees said they highly value minority candidates as they seem to have overcome barriers such as discrimination and exclusion. For instance, these candidates get the attention of Ayse (24 years, student), who *'knows how hard it is for minorities to move up in the society'. So, they have my respect'*. Although less, voting for *someone of us* to support them occurs (symbolic representation). Wissam (37 years, teacher) also emphasized how she identifies with candidates who look like her, uttering: *'I am a woman of color with a headscarf. You always mirror yourself, so I am delighted when I see that a woman has made it',* referring to the importance of descriptive representation. But most of the time, Muslims believe that Muslim candidates will benefit them.

For instance, Louiza (34 years, housekeeper) noted, '*Maybe, it's a bit discriminatory, but I do prefer minority names on the list. They have my vote, because I know it will be in my favor.'* She went on to express her belief that Muslim candidates would not harm other minorities owing to the shared experiences.

However, a majority of the respondents who voted for Muslim candidates were also critical while expressing their sympathy for Muslim candidates. Some referred to the use of Muslims merely to diversify the party lists or the particracy pointing to the power of political parties in the Belgian system. Ayse (24 years, student) noted that in a particracy *'the people we prefer [Muslims], have less to say within their parties which is disappointing'*. Respondents therefore stated that their support was conditioned not only by minoritized candidates but also by their narratives and actions. In the same vein, Moussa (40 years, unemployed) said he wanted *'a real Muslim'* as a representative who does not discard their Muslimness. This combination of being Muslim and having the right narrative and actions to defend minorities' interests helps Muslims to feel represented in politics. Karim (47 years, city official) provided the following explanation:

[I feel represented] when someone from my own group is part of the politics, but it's not simple. I always give the example of the Turkish councilor in my city. He was affiliated with the Social Democrats and part of the former local government. He really realized a lot. But then he disappeared, and all his work disappeared with him. … I actually have more faith in him than the party. Now there is a new councilor, a new policy, a new idea.

When Karim (47 years, city official) elaborated on voting for someone of '*his own group',* firmly adding, '*Who else can represent me?',* one can ask themselves what he meant by someone *of 'his own group'*. Interestingly, Karim (47 years) has a Moroccan migration background and expatiated on a politician with a Turkish background as someone of '*his own group*', suggesting that the Muslim identity trumps ethnicity when voting for candidates (see also Azabar et al., 2020b). Accordingly, other respondents gave examples of candidates they felt represented them, sharing a Muslim background but differing in migration background. The same goes for Christine (24 years, student), a convert, who voted for a Muslim with a migration background as she felt he would fight against inequalities experienced by Muslims. Indeed, previous studies have claimed the importance of religion as an identity marker, in particular, when Islam has been fiercely debated in the public sphere (Dancygier, 2014; Fadil et al., 2015; Voas and Fleischmann, 2012). Subsequently, these findings show how Muslim voters perceive each other as members of the in-group (Muslims) when casting a vote for candidates.

A few of the respondents stated that it did not matter whether candidates were Muslim or had a migration background, as long as they had principles and were eager to defend the interests of the marginalized and excluded. Marwan (37 years, educational worker) spoke about how he earlier voted solely for Muslim candidates but was disappointed as these candidates followed their party line on some issues although he expected otherwise. Therefore, it is people who '*stand up for principles and for Muslims'* who deserve his vote. In the same vein, Yasmina (40 years, housewife) stated that she was not guided by gender or religion of candidates but that *'the message of candidates is more important'*. Muslims' disadvantaged position and earlier experiences seem to push voters to inform themselves about the policies and stances of (Muslim) candidates.

Conclusion and Discussion

Previous studies have found evidence of Muslims voting primarily leftist and preferential; however, explanations remained unclear. This article addresses this issue and contributes to the literature on minorities' political participation and integration through the exploration of Muslims' electoral choices and underlying motivations. Drawing on exit poll and mock ballot data of the local elections of 2018 and seventeen in-depth interviews with Muslims elaborating on their motivations and decision-making process when voting, we came to the following conclusions.

The leftist party preference of Muslims vis-à-vis non-Muslims is driven by their stronger preoccupation with particular issues and their more limited party evaluation motives. In the interviews, the issues mentioned were related primarily to their precarious socio-economic situation but also addressed their marginalized position caused by discrimination and negative stereotypes in society. Indeed, scholars have suggested that the electoral choices of Muslims could be influenced by motives related to socio-economic issues and equality issues to the detriment of party evaluation (Cesari, 2014; Zibouh, 2013). Our study empirically confirms these assumptions. Moreover, other motivations such as candidates, political alienation or religious issues do not seem to explain the leftist party vote of Muslims. Interestingly, the direct effect of Muslim identification on the left vote is robust and significant, showing that being Muslim relates to voting leftist despite the presence of the mediators and control variables in the model. In addition, the Muslim effect is stronger than the migrant effect, pointing to the salience of Muslim as an identity marker, also in the political arena, as claimed by scholars earlier (Azabar et al., 2020b; Dancygier, 2017).

Second, with regard to preferential voting, we find that Muslims indeed vote more preferential compared with non-Muslims, a trend that points to how marginalized positions could provoke a specific type of political behavior, as André et al. (2017) suggested. Contrary to what we hypothesized, neither the Michigan variables nor the Muslim-specific variables explain the likelihood of preferential voting. But who do they choose to represent them – and why? Our qualitative findings point to Muslims stating that socio-demographics of candidates do not matter when discussing the prerequisites of ideal candidates. However, when asking about their actual candidate choices, almost all voted for Muslims to strengthen the descriptive and symbolic representation, but primarily for substantive reasons. Our findings show that Muslim respondents expect that Muslim candidates will defend their interests, although this idea is nuanced owing to the particracy: parties still have the power, not the candidates. These qualitative findings resonate with earlier studies on the Muslim vote (Azabar et al., 2020b; Heath et al., 2015).

In this study we have relied on self-reported motivations of party vote using open-ended questions, although this approach is often criticized because it allegedly leads to post hoc rationalization and socially desirable answers (Rahn et al., 1994). Yet this is less problematic in exit polls owing to the more limited recall biases. Moreover, we took some precautions, i.e. questions were not obligatory to answer and tested the coherence of the answers. More importantly, not only relying on exit poll data, our interviews further elaborate on Muslims' electoral choices, their considerations and motivations, shedding light on voting leftist (which leftist party and why) and, secondly, to vote preferential (which candidates and why). Nevertheless, our findings could be tested with more objective measures, when the situation permits it, considering that participation of Muslim minorities in survey research is complicated.

Overall, our study shows the importance of examining Muslims' electoral behavior in non-Muslim majority societies as these findings show that, in line with the recent findings of Goerres et al. (2021), Muslims' leftist vote can be explained by the central factors in the Michigan model and not by religious issues. However, the same variables do not explain Muslims' tendency to vote preferential. This study shows that the strong direct effects of Muslim identification on left and preferential voting still leave much to discover about Muslims' political behavior, in particular, Muslims' likelihood of voting preferential. Our qualitative findings point to expectations concerning representation explaining the preference for Muslim candidates. More empirical studies unravelling the preferential vote beyond candidate choices could therefore be fruitful. Second, it would be interesting to research possible differences within the Muslim group (i.e. due to gender or different migration backgrounds), applying a more intersectional approach. To what extent are these differences among Muslims meaningful when casting a vote?

As the social and political position of Muslims in the West is comparable owing to a shared labor migration narrative and scrutiny that Muslims experience, we believe our findings can be extrapolated to other west-European countries, meaning issues drive Muslims' electoral behavior. Yet more research in other countries could strengthen our claim. What we do know for certain is that the stereotype of the politically disintegrated Muslim does not hold water.

CHAPTER

03

Is there such a thing as a Muslim vote?

Chapter 3

Is there such a thing as a Muslim vote?

Abstract

This contribution explores to what extent there is such a thing as a distinct Muslim vote in flexible proportional list systems. We test in a new and reliable way whether the religious belonging and behavioral dimension of Muslim voters play a role in their decision-making process when casting preferential votes in a secular democracy. To achieve this, voter and candidate characteristics are modelled simultaneously in cross-classified multilevel analyses where the decision-making process of voters (the demand side) is studied while taking into account the list composition in terms of individual candidates (the supply side). We use data of an exit poll related to the local elections of 2018 in Belgium, especially at oversampled locations. The analyses show that voters who belong to Muslim faith are more likely to vote for Muslim candidates. Contrary, the behavior dimension of Muslim voters – measured in mosque attendance - has no effect on voting primarily for Muslim candidates.

Keywords: preferential voting, Muslim vote, voting behavior, local elections, exit poll, belonging - behaving

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Introduction

Decades of immigration have changed the ethnic and religious make up of Western democracies. However, this diversity is not always reflected in the political arena. Ethnic and religious minorities tend to be underrepresented in many elected bodies around the world (Dancygier, 2014; Bergh and Bjørklund, 2011; Togeby, 2008; Kymlicka, 1995). At the same time different scholars argue that a better descriptive representation can increase the sense of belonging of (Muslim) minorities to the political community and the acceptance by general public (Sinno, 2012; Phillips, 1995). It also leads to a better communication among different groups in contexts of mistrust (Mansbridge, 1999) and last but not least to a better substantive representation of minority interests (Dancygier, 2014; Just et al., 2014). Electoral studies on descriptive representation of minorities in Western democracies mostly focus on ethnicity as a salient marker for identity instead of religion, but scholars tend to stress that ethnicity is intertwined with religion, particularly Islam (Just et al., 2014; Zibouh, 2013; Sinno, 2012; Fleischmann et al., 2011). Some evidence shows that the Muslim identity is more important than the ethnic identity, especially in societies where Islam is politicized and problematized (Fleischmann and Phalet, 2018; Cesari, 2014; Dancygier, 2014). Maliepaard and Verkuyten (2018:76) state that the majority of west-European Muslims consider themselves primarily a Muslim and only in secondary order a national of the host country.

Furthermore, scholars highlight that little is going to change in the nearby future: religiosity has been found to be a resilient factor across (Just, 2017; Voas and Fleischmann, 2012). This contradicts with the secularization thesis that religion would play a marginal role in modern societies but leans more to Habermas' concept of a post-secular society – and Berger's desecularization thesis (Berger, 1999) - acknowledging the revival of religion in west-European context, especially Islam (Habermas, 2008; Esmer and Pettersson, 2007). Despite the increasing impact of Muslim minorities on the electoral outcomes in West-Europe (Heath et al., 2015; Dancygier, 2014), little systematic research is available on the relevance of Muslims' religiosity on political behavior (Cesari, 2014; Just et al., 2014). Those studies that do exist in the field of political participation and religion focus on the effects of religious belonging on party vote (Michon and Tillie, 2011) or the effects of religious behavior on non-electoral participation (Jamal, 2005; Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008; Jalalzai, 2009; Oskooii and Dana, 2018). However, studies combining the effects of belonging to Muslim faith and the behavioral dimensions (e.g. mosque attendance) on electoral choice are scarce, especially in a context of electoral list systems with extensive electoral choices. Notably, it remains unclear to what extent Muslims are more inclined to vote for Muslim candidates and especially whether this can be explained by a sense of shared religious belonging or by the intensity of their religious behavior?

Additionally, a growing body of literature on voter-candidate similarities demonstrates the preference of voters for representatives who embody their demographic characteristics (Cutler, 2002; Popkin, 1991). They point out that women are more likely to vote for women (Erzeel and Caluwaerts, 2015; Plutzer and Zipp, 1996) and ethnic minorities are more likely to vote for candidates with an ethnic minority background (Teney et al., 2010; Togeby, 2008; Baretto, 2007; Michon and Tillie, 2011). As far as we know, only Heath et al. (2015) study whether Muslims vote for Muslim candidates, using cross-sectional survey data and candidate data focusing on Uttar Pradesh (India) where Muslims feel extremely discriminated and excluded. The study revealed that respondents who belong to Muslim faith vote primarily for Muslim candidates, but in most instances on the condition that these Muslim candidates have a realistic chance on winning. The authors focus only on religious belonging, whereas we also focus on the religious behavioral dimension. Could Muslim candidates - in a post 9/11 era – evoke similar effects in secular democracies where religious conflicts are less violent but where there is nevertheless a fierce debate on the demographic presence and growth of Muslim minorities in Europe (Fadil et al., 2015)? In order to examine this, we look at the case of Belgium. The flexible- list proportional system of Belgium makes it a very suitable case for this kind of research (van Erkel, 2019; Renwick and Pilet, 2016). The context of the city of Antwerp with a large district magnitude and long candidate lists is even more interesting. Furthermore, due to a sizeable Muslim minority, almost all ballot lists contain Muslim candidates. Our main question therefore is: To what extent does the religiosity of Muslim voters explain their preferential voting behavior?

Specifically, our contributions are threefold. First, we fill in the gap on studies on preferential voting more specific of underrepresented groups – notably Muslim minorities in Western industrialized societies. Do they prefer one of their own? Moreover, we distinguish the effects of religious belonging and the religious behavior in terms of mosque attendance. Secondly, while most research addressing religious voting of minorities have dealt with single-member districts, this study focuses on a flexible list proportional system where voters can either vote for a party, or for one or more candidates within a party. Lastly, in line with van Erkel (2019) we model voter and candidate characteristics simultaneously, while other studies generally tend to focus either solely on voters or on candidates. Combining the two simultaneously enables an investigation of the decision-making process of underrepresented voters (the demand side) – in this case Muslim voters - while taking into account the list composition in terms of individual candidates (the supply side). This is crucial in order to control for the fact that Muslim candidates tend to be underrepresented and in general have less political experience and occupy a lower position on the ballot list (van Erkel, 2019). The results of our analyses show that due to the belonging dimension, Muslims are more likely to vote for Muslim candidates. Contrary, the behavior dimension of Muslim voters –in casu attending worship places - has no effect on voting primarily for Muslim candidates.

Literature review

In search for co-religious candidates?

Ample research has noted that religion was one of the primarily sociological determinants of political behavior in the West (Putnam and Campbell, 2010; Verba et al., 1995; Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). However, the declining saliency of the religious cleavage due to secularization and its diminishing impact on politics cannot be discarded although some exceptions to this predictable trend are present, notably in Muslim communities (Esmer and Pettersson, 2007). Several studies articulate the importance of religion for Muslim minorities in secular societies, also in the political sphere (Maliepaard and Verkuyten, 2018; Dancygier, 2014; Fleischmann et al., 2011; Phalet et al., 2010).

Generally, studies analyzing the impact of religion on political behavior focus on one - or a combination – of three distinct religious dimensions namely 1) identification with a particular religion (belonging) 2) the importance in day-to-day life of religion (belief) and 3) the intensity of religious practice in terms of for instance attendance of worship places (behavior) (Dana et al., 2017:173; Voas, 2009; Layman, 1997, 2001). Though the dimensions are related to each other, they constitute distinct aspects of religion. For example, it is possible to speak of non-practicing members of a religious group (belonging without behaving) or differences in doctrinal orthodoxy (belonging with variation in believing) (Kotler-Berkowitz, 2001:524). These instruments originated from measuring Christian religiosity but are slowly translated into Islamic terminology (Voas, 2009; Layman, 2001). However, some scholars argue that the believing dimension – pointing to the incorporation of religious principles in one's day to day life - is not associated with a Muslim's participation (Read, 2015; Cesari, 2013). Moreover, Islam has been referred to as an orthopraxis where the religious practice is emphasized instead of beliefs (Harris and Lam, 2019).

Esmer and Pettersson (2007:9) argue that earlier studies of voting behavior and religion fit into two broad categories. The first category compares the party choice of voters belonging to different religions and denominations, while the second category studies the impact of attendance of worship places on electoral behavior. This study highlights both religious dimensions. Although the behaving and belonging dimensions are likely to correlate, they cannot be substituted for one another (Layman, 2001). We thus distinguish between two possible effects of Muslims' religiosity on casting preferential votes for Muslim candidates: namely the role of religious belonging and the role of mosque attendance (Oskooii and Dana, 2018; Jalalzai, 2009; Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008; Jamal, 2005). Does a candidate's religion matter to Muslim voters?

In general, the literature identifies two logic explanations why candidate characteristics - e.g. religion - are of importance for voters. First, the instrumental logic argues that demographic features provide a low information shortcut to estimating a candidate's policy preference (Cutler, 2002; Popkin, 1991). Voters rely on the social identity of politicians – e.g. age, ethnicity, gender or religion - to estimate the kind of policies they will pursue once elected to office (Heath et al., 2015; Popkin, 1991). In this sense voters expect candidates 'who are like them' to share similar experiences and ideas and therefore to be the best option to represent their interests (Erzeel and Caluwaerts, 2015). Second, according to social identity theory - and the so-called expressive or symbolic logic - voters who identify themselves as members of a social group will behave accordingly by supporting lookalikes or in-group members (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). Casting a vote for someone like you can in this sense be seen as a symbolic action to support the own group. So far, most research point out that sharing visible characteristics drives voters to express a candidate preference (Teigen et al., 2017; Dolan, 1998; Plutzer and Zipp, 1996; Sigelman and Sigelman, 1982).

The role of belonging

Political scientists point to the belonging dimension or the idea of a larger sense of common belonging and identity with those sharing your faith, since it may socialize individuals to certain political and partisan preferences (Kotler-Berkowitz, 2001:524). In this respect, earlier research mentions that those who identify with Muslim faith vote for leftist parties because of minority interests (Bergh and Bjørklund, 2011; Michon and Tillie, 2011). However, it remains unclear whether voters that identify with the Muslim faith will vote for Muslim candidates on the lists of these parties. An interesting study on candidate choice in India, a strongly ethnically divided democracy, presented evidence of Muslims voting for Muslim candidates, but in most instances when they had a chance of winning (Heath et al., 2015). In addition, scholars demonstrate that perceived unfair treatment by Muslims due to religious background goes hand in hand with a higher awareness of their religious identity and thus belonging to a Muslim community (Oskooii, 2015; Fleischmann et al., 2011; Phalet et al., 2010). Consequently, Muslims were more likely to politically mobilize on their Muslim identity (Fleischmann et al., 2011: 643). Hence, Muslim identification plays a pivotal role in explaining politicization and political action. This is in line with the belief in the Islamic concept of the Ummah – a community of believers showing a certain collectivity and sense of belonging - in particular during times of crisis (Maliepaard and Verkuyten, 2018). The idea that their fate is linked makes Muslims evaluate their situation more in communal terms.

The role of behaving

The behavioral dimension, more specific attending worship places, could reinforce socialized preferences since religious attendees are likely to receive political information and cues of co-

religionists (see also Kotler-Berkowitz, 2001) and thus might shape their electoral choice. Furthermore, the feeling of Muslim belonging can be amplified due to the participation in religious activities such as attending mosque activities and services. Joint activities create a strong and visible boundary between the religious in-group and out-group. Previous studies show that citizens with an intense religious practice tend to be less accepting of religious out-groups than those who partake less in religious activities (Verkuyten, 2014; Kotler-Berkowitz, 2001).

Empirical studies of electoral and non-electoral participatory behavior of Muslims focus primarily on the effect of the religious behavior dimension on political participation. Muslims who participated weekly or more in religious activities of their mosque were more likely to report to have voted in the general elections (Moutselos, 2019; Oskooii and Dana, 2018). Moreover, one third of the Muslim respondents answered that the mosque encouraged them to vote (Oskooii and Dana, 2018). These findings make clear that mosque attendance in the US cannot be linked to withdrawal from the electoral process as some may suggest (Oskooii and Dana, 2018). Other research confirms the positive association between Muslims who actively engage with their religious identity and voting (Ocampo et al., 2018) but also points at a stronger belief in political integration in a secular political com- munity among Muslims (Dana et al., 2017). The latter has been explained by referring to a comprehensive review of Islamic doctrines stating that Muslims have "to uphold the social contracts of non-Muslim societies, so long as they are free to practice their religion "(Dana et al., 2017:178). Moreover, multiple studies provide proof that Muslims who attend worship places frequently are politically more active (e.g. protesting, rallying, contacting politicians) than those who do not frequently visit mosques (Dana et al., 2017; Oskooii, 2015; Jalalzai, 2009; Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008; Jamal, 2005). Scholars therefore conclude that for Muslims religious institutions function as a broader group socialization context exerting political and social influence. Interestingly, all these studies are conducted in the US, where religion is more imbedded in society (Cesari, 2014; Esmer and Pettersson, 2007). Less scholarly attention has been devoted to the impact of Islam as minority religion on electoral – in casu preferential - behavior in west-European democracies.

Although a growing body of research finds evidence of religion fostering political participation among Muslims, the understanding of the mechanism supporting those effects remains limited. Moreover, research on the effect of the behavioral dimension of Muslims on preferential voting in west-European democracies is as far as we know non-existent. We therefore seek to examine – using Belgian exit poll data - whether Muslim voters prefer Muslim candidates in a flexible proportional electoral system, and to what extent both the belonging and the behavioral dimension of religiosity is associated with voting for co- religious candidates.

Hypotheses

As earlier depicted, Islam is a visible and politically much debated source of identity playing an important role in shaping people's political behavior in West-Europe. Moreover, anti-Muslim sentiments have been prominent in Europe and are on the rise because of several terrorist attacks (e.g. Charlie Hebdo). Due to the polarized societal debates about religion in West-Europe, religious minority groups have stronger identity feelings, and this is also true for Muslims (Just et al., 2014; Cesari, 2014). Dancygier (2014) even states that the salience of Muslims' religious identities has risen above that of other identities. Mobilization by minority groups is therefore to be expected to function as a cost-reducing strategy (Miller et al., 1981; Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Verba and Nie, 1972). In general, this means that we expect Muslims more likely - than the majority group - to cast a preference vote for a candidate of their own religious group rather than for the party. Although André et al. (2012) establish that the least empowered citizens in terms of education and economic status – in casu Muslims - are also least likely to cast a preference vote, the group consciousness and stronger social identity of this group can compensate for the lack of political resources among members of 'deprived' groups (Miller et al., 1981; Verba and Nie, 1972). Moreover, voting for someone with the same characteristics is easier for visible minorities. We therefore set up our first hypothesis – focusing on demand side - stating that Muslims will be more prone to cast preference votes than non-Muslims. We will further explore to what extent their type of vote is distinguishable.

H1. Muslims will be more prone to cast preference votes than non-Muslims.

When explaining which candidates are electorally popular, data on the level of candidates are useful. Electoral studies have shown the impact of several elements among them gender, ballot list position, familiarity and incumbency in explaining candidates' success (van Erkel and Thijssen, 2016; Put and Maddens, 2015). Available research mentions that the diversity of candidates on party lists in urban contexts increased in urban cities with a large ethno-religious electorate (Geese and Schacht, 2019; Togeby, 2008). Maybe the party selectorate increasingly field minority candidates on their lists because they expect some electoral gain, and to attract the votes of minority groups. Moreover, even some voters of the ethnic majority group may vote for these minority candidates in order to show their support (Heath et al., 2015; Zibouh, 2013; Teney et al., 2010). Consequently, we assume that the Muslim background of candidates will have a positive effect on the number of preference votes they receive.

H2. The Muslim background of a candidate will have a positive effect on (the number of) preference votes he/she receives.

However, even if Muslim minorities vote more preferential (demand side) and Muslim candidates generate more preferential votes (supply side), this does not prove (but merely suggest) the presence of a Muslim vote. More rigorous analysis is needed to explore to what extent religious belonging and behavior explain preferential voting behavior of Muslim minority groups while accounting for the supply side. For instance, minority candidates are almost never first positioned candidates, but ranked lower and therefore lacking political experience. All these features do impact the number of preference votes a candidate receives. When controlling for these factors, a more accurate analysis can be performed.

Based on the social identity theory, we expect voters to feel more solidarity and affection with candidates from their in-group than out- group and therefore be more inclined to vote for someone like them. Moreover, Muslims share a stronger religious identity and feeling of belonging strengthened by the barriers they face. We therefore expect them to support candidates of their own religious group more compared to non-Muslims (Teney et al., 2010; Miller et al., 1981). As far as we know, one systematic analysis focuses on the effect of candidates' religion on candidate choice. Heath et al. (2015) provided evidence of co-religious voting in a large state where Muslims feel extremely discriminated. Moreover, Muslim voters in Uttar Pradesh (India) were more prone to cast a vote for Muslim candidates than Hindus did for Hindu candidates. The latter group voters did not discriminate against Muslim candidates. We therefore hypothesize the following:

H3. Muslim/non-Muslim voters will cast a preference vote for candidates belonging to their respective Muslim/non-Muslim group.
H3a. The effect of Muslims voting for Muslim candidates will be stronger than the effect of non-Muslims voting for non-Muslim candidates.

While Heath et al. (2015) focused on the religious belonging dimension, we also test the effect of the religious behavior dimension, more specific mosque attendance. Earlier research showed that mosque attendance is positively associated with non-electoral participation among Muslims e.g. protesting, donating money, contacting a politician and boycotting products (Oskooii and Dana, 2018; Dana et al., 2011; Jalalzai, 2009; Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008; Jamal, 2005). In addition, several studies declare a positive association between regular mosque attendances and turning out to vote in established democracies, dispelling the myth that mosques are sites of civic alienation (Moutselos, 2019; Oskooii and Dana, 2018). Lastly, the religious belonging dimension may be more salient for Muslims who attend religious and social services regularly making them more likely to vote based on it. Earlier research claimed that citizens who participate more in religious activities have the tendency to exclude religious out-groups (Verkuyten, 2014; Kotler-Berkowitz, 2001). We therefore expect Muslims who spend more time in a mosque, to be more likely to support Muslim candidates.

The Antwerp case

Antwerp is one of the largest cities in Belgium – slightly more than a half million inhabitants - and also the most populous city proper in the entire country. The city has a very diverse population, with more than174 nationalities residing in Antwerp, ranking second as the most multinational city in the world after Amsterdam. Data from 2018 (Stad, 2018) show that Antwerp is a majority-minority city: different ethnic minority groups[18] (50,1%) make up the majority of the local population (see Appendix 1). 1 out of 5 Antwerp inhabitants are estimated being Muslim; however, 'the exact number of people of Muslim culture or Islamic faith living in Belgium today is difficult to determine, as there is no official registration of the population's ethnic and religious ties' (Fadil, 2014: 83). Nevertheless, it is clear that they are a non-negligible electoral minority group.

These ethno-religious minorities are generally characterized by a low social status: low levels of educational qualification, limited labor market participation and high degrees of poverty compared to the majority population. A study of the Open Society Foundation (2011) revealed that although minorities feel themselves belonging to the city of Antwerp, the experienced discrimination is seen as a barrier to full and equal participation for minority communities. Additionally, Antwerp is traditionally the stronghold of Vlaams Belang, one of the more successful far-right parties in Europe (Thijssen and de Lange, 2005). Moreover, the right nationalist party N-VA (also the largest party in Belgium) dominates the local council after decades of control by the Social Democratic party. In addition, the mayor of Antwerp is also the chairman of N-VA. Hence, because Antwerp has become the bulwark of right-wing parties it is a very interesting context to study preferential voting of Muslims.

Furthermore, the Belgian flexible-list PR multi-party system with a long list of candidates with various backgrounds allows voters to cast multiple preferential votes and therefore offers them an extremely broad freedom of choice (van Erkel, 2019; Andre et al., 2012). The presence of long lists – up to 55 candidates in the local elections of Antwerp – offers interesting analytical possibilities. It enables us to take into account a broad range of candidate characteristics that can function as a voting cue. In a low information context, candidate traits seem likely to play their most decisive role (Banducci et al., 2008; Cutler, 2002). Political psychology theories point out that people evaluate candidates based on socio-demographic traits when information is lacking. Better informed voters will gather more information, and will adjust their evaluations beyond these traits contrary to less informed voters. Last but not least, the compulsory voting system in Belgium obliges citizens to vote; also, ethno-religious minorities who may otherwise abstain from voting. These particular elements (e.g. a sizeable Muslim

[18] In this study, ethnic minorities are defined as Antwerp citizens whom at least one of the parents has a non-Belgian birth nationality (Stad in cijfers, 2018)

electorate, the presence of radical right parties, a high rate of diversity in party lists and the flexible-list proportional system) make this a most likely case to find a Muslim vote.

Method and data

We work with data at the level of voters, candidates and more important with a combination of both data to explore whether religious belonging and the religious behavior of Muslims affect voting for Muslim candidates. When defining which candidates are electorally popular, data on the level of candidates are useful. However, these data do not unravel the decision-making process of voters. On the other hand, research based solely on the level of voters without accounting for other differences between candidates is also incomplete. Therefore, we model voter and candidate characteristics together by looking at dyadic relationships (see van Erkel, 2019). Both data on voters and on candidates were gathered.

Demand side

Firstly, we collected exit poll data at the 2018 local elections within an inter-university consortium, which provided us representative and reliable data compared to standard post-electoral surveys. We randomly sampled polling stations where a systematic design was adopted: every fifth voter was asked to participate when leaving the polling station. To make sure we gathered enough respondents belonging to ethno-religious minority groups, we oversampled in 6 out of 14 polling stations by deploying more interviewers in order to get more Muslim respondents. The intensively trained pollsters were equipped with tablets to accurately register preference votes using a mock ballot form. Lastly, we invested in diversity among pollsters to encounter possible language barriers and obtain a higher response rate among minority groups. A total of 34 pollsters were stationed in 14 Antwerp polling stations.

Together with a face-to-face survey (consisting of questions on socio demographic traits, voting behavior, political efficacy and interest) a mock ballot was presented as a tool to record the multiple preferential voting behavior in a reliable way. The mock ballot perfectly resembled the design of lists and candidates as seen on their computer screen in the polling booth. We asked voters about their nationality as well as both their parents' nationality. We coded 0 for respondents with a west-European background, all others were coded 1. The religious belonging[19] (or lack of) is coded 1 if respondents are Muslim, those belonging to all other religions and denominations were coded as non- Muslims 0. To measure religious behavior, we questioned respondents whether they participate in religious and social activities at worship

[19] Would you consider yourself as belonging to any specific religion or philosophical denomination? If yes, which one?

places on a scale of 0 (never) to 6 (once a week or more)[20].

We ended up with a response rate of 51% in Antwerp city resulting in 972 respondents. Our sample contains 49% female and 51% male voters. Approximately 70% of the Antwerp voters casted one or more preferential votes, with the majority of respondents voting for 1 or 2 candidates (86%). 29% define themselves as Muslims when asked about their religious identification, whereas 71% are non-Muslims. The share of Muslims in Antwerp is estimated at 20% in 2016, however since we oversampled in voting districts with more inhabitants with a Muslim background, it is understandable that our proportion of Muslims is higher. We furthermore asked about their religious practice by questioning the frequency of attending worship places. 46% of the Muslims stated that they attend religious services and activities a couple times a month to every week or more compared to 15% of the non-Muslims.

Supply side

Data on candidate characteristics were gathered using official documents: official electoral lists were used containing the candidate's political party and ballot list position. In Antwerp, 12 political parties – with a total of 485 candidates - submitted candidate lists for the 2018 local elections. To retrieve information about incumbency, the formal website of the city council was used next to the website tracking all political mandates in Belgium (http://www.cumuleo.be). Gender and ethnic minority background have been defined by name recognition and background checks thereof via personal websites of candidates, news articles, their political party and their social media (Dancygier, 2014; Erzeel and Caluwaerts, 2015).

In order to identify Muslim candidates, we developed a three-step approach due to the lack of official statistics taking ethnicity or religious belonging into consideration. First, we used an onomastic procedure – using name recognition - to define Muslim minorities (Heath et al., 2015). However, a name alone does not necessarily indicate religious belonging, especially since Antwerp Muslims are mainly but not exclusively of Maghrebian or Turkish descent. Identification can also be based on the self-definition of candidates as being of Muslim culture (Zibouh, 2013). Therefore, background checks of the belonging dimension of candidates were made via websites of candidates, news articles, their political party and their social media. If candidates referred to themselves as Muslims, we confirmed their Muslim belonging. Lastly, where possible we used peer assessment of fellow political candidates: we asked candidates of several political parties if we identified their colleagues rightfully as belonging to Muslim faith or not. We acknowledge that defining the religious belonging of candidates has its limitations,

[20] Except for family or social gatherings like weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services or other activities in a church, mosque, synagogue, …?

however when religious diversity and Islam is so politicized as during the Antwerp local elections of 2018 information about political candidates can be collected by researchers via various (but time consuming) ways.

Our supply side file contains 485 candidates: half of our candidates are women due to the gender quota, 30% has an ethnic minority back- ground, 98 candidates or 20% are Muslim mostly presented by leftist parties (the radical left, the Greens and the social democrats)[21] and smaller new migrant parties such as D-SA and Be. One[22] (see Appendix 2). 24% of the Muslim candidates had already some political experience in local councils, compared to 76% of the non-Muslims.

Combined data

Obviously, both approaches (supply and demand) have distinct limitations. Therefore, in order to really test whether religious belonging and behavior play a role in the decision-making process of Muslim voters, we need to combine both approaches. Combining supply and demand data allows us to test whether religiosity explains voting for Muslim candidates, while at the same time one can control for candidate characteristics, such as the political experience and the position on the ballot list. This is important because Muslim candidates often occupy lower positions on party lists, and in general have less political experience. For instance, none of the political parties in the Antwerp elections had a Muslim candidate positioned first while being the first candidate generates preference votes. An analysis that combines both approaches to some extent is less vulnerable for those measurement issues and enables to tease out the effect of religious voting from other logics such as voting for the first candidate on the list or political experienced candidates. We will therefore integrate supply data in a demand analysis (van Erkel, 2019).

Both datasets are combined by linking every voter to all political candidates within his/her preferred party. So, each voter is in a way split up in as much dyadic pairs as there are candidates on the party list. In our analysis of the Antwerp local election of 2018, focusing only on voters who casted a preferential vote, this resulted in a stacked dataset matrix of 32357 dyadic pairs (lowest level of analysis defining the lines in our data matrix) nested in 485 Antwerp candidates and 608 Antwerp voters. Our dependent variable, a specific dyad, is coded 1 when a voter casted a preferential vote for the corresponding candidate and 0 when a voter did not vote for the corresponding candidate. Our main independent variable is religious

[21] Percentage of Muslim candidates within traditional parties at the 2018 elections in Antwerp city: 26% of the radical left party, 24% of the Green party, 20% of the Social Democrats, 19% of the Christen Democrats, 10 % of the Liberal party, 6% of the nationalist party, 0% of the radical right party

[22] Percentage of Muslim candidates within new (migrant) local parties at the 2018 elections in Antwerp city: 82% of D-SA, 80% of Be.one, 11% of Burgerlijst, 7% of Paars, 0% of BDW.

congruence. When voter and candidate characteristics are similar (both Muslim or both non-Muslim) we coded this variable 1, otherwise 0. We control for supply side features, but also ethnic congruence – a variable that indicates whether voter and candidate share an ethnic minority background or not - in our model since religion and ethnicity are intertwined. We also run interactions with religious practice; a dummy where Muslims who attend mosques 'never to one time a month' score 0 and those who attend almost weekly to more score 1. To explain our dichotomous dependent variable, we use a cross-classified multilevel logistic model as our voter-candidate combinations are simultaneously nested in voters and in candidates. Table 1 gives an example of the data matrix.

Table 1 *Example of data matrix*

Voter	Candidate	Preference vote (yes = 1, no = 0)	Number of preference votes	Muslim voter (yes = 1,no = 0)	Muslim candidate (yes = 1,no = 0)	Religion Congruence (yes = 1,no = 0)	Ethnic minority voter (yes = 1,no = 0)	Ethnic minority candidate (yes = 1,no = 0)	EthnicCongruence (yes = 1,no = 0)	First candidate (yes = 1,no = 0)
1	1	1	2	1	0	0	1	1	0	1
1	2	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
1	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0
1	4	0	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	0
....	...	...								
2	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1
2	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
2	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
...										

Findings

Demand side

With data on the voter level, we can explore to what extent under- represented groups – more specific Muslims – use a (certain kind of) preferential vote more often. In a first stage we use a dichotomous dependent variable: respondents that voted for a list – coded as 0 – and voters who casted one or more preferential votes – coded as 1. A comparison between Muslims (74,8%) and non-Muslims (65%) shows that Muslims make more use of preferential voting than non-Muslims (N = 828, p=0,007, Cramer's V=0,094). Therefore hypothesis 1 can be confirmed: Muslims tend to vote more for individual candidates instead of a party compared to non-Muslims.

In a second stage we use a polytomous dependent variable that goes more detailed into the specific type of preferential vote. van Erkel and Thijssen (2016) pointed out that ballot list position largely explains the success of candidates, notably candidates first positioned on the list (the so-called list pullers) obtain by far the most preference votes. We therefore create a

new variable 'type of preference vote' with three categories namely: vote for list puller only=1, vote for list puller and other candidates = 2, vote for other candidates only = 3. We control for gender, education, age and interest in local politics (commune interest). Because minority group members might be inclined to vote exclusively for candidates such as them – minority candidates – and because generally these minority candidates are not list pullers we expect minority groups to vote disproportionally for other categories than the list puller only. Table 2 presents the results of the multinomial regression with reference category 'vote for other candidates only'. The results show that non-Muslim voters vote significantly more for list pullers only, and for list puller and other candidates compared to Muslims. We can therefore confirm our expectation that when Muslims cast preference votes this is more often exclusively for other candidates only instead of the list puller only compared to non-Muslims. This result hints strongly at the existence of a so-called Muslim vote.

Table 2 *Demand side: Multinomial regression with 'type preferential vote' as dependent variable, reference category 'only other candidates' (N = 972)*

TYPE PV		**B**	**S.E.**	**EXP(B)**
List puller only	Constant	-0,869	0,754	
	Commune interest	0,140	0,052	1,014
	Reference category female voter			
	Male voter	-0,154	0,282	0,857
	Reference category high education			
	Low education	0,143	0,436	1,154
	Middle education	0,761	0,331	2,140
	Reference category 65+			
	Age= 18-34	-0,021	0,537	0,980
	Age=35-44	-0,479*	0,588	0,619
	Age= 45-54	-0,252	0,595	0,778
	Age= 55-64	0,374	0,638	1,454
	Reference category ethnic minority			
	Ethnic majority	0,395	0,408	1,484
	Reference category Muslim			
	Non-Muslim	0,963*	0,454	2,619

List puller and other candidates	Constant	-3,484**	1,148	
	Commune interest	0,214**	0,083	1,239
	Reference category female voter			
	Male voter	0,388	0,390	1,474
	Reference category high education			
	Low education	-0,074	0,577	0,929
	Middle education	-0,004	0,463	0,996
	Reference category 65+			
	Age= 18-34	-0,406	0,646	0,666
	Age=35-44	-0,816	0,704	0,442
	Age= 45-54	-0,927	0,750	0,396
	Age= 55-64	-0,438	0,783	0,645
	Reference category ethnic minority			
	Ethnic majority	0,437	0,588	1,548
	Reference category Muslim			
	Non-Muslim	1,552*	0,793	4,719

*Significance level +p<0.10 / *p<0,05 / **p<0,01 / ***p<0,001. Reference category DV : only other candidates (Nagelkerke R2=0,170, Cox and Snell R2=0,147)*

Supply side

Supply side data can tell us which characteristics of candidates contribute to obtaining more preferential votes. Obviously when you want to evaluate a large number of characteristics you need a large number of candidates. Luckily, in a proportional electoral system with a large number of parties and long lists such as in Belgium (more specific the urban context of Antwerp) this condition is fulfilled. We can therefore easily evaluate whether certain characteristics – such as Muslim background- have a positive effect on the number of preferential votes they received. We will therefore verify if the Muslim background is indeed a salient identity marker in the sense that they generate more preferential votes controlling for other independent variables such as gender, ethnic background, incumbency, political parties, ballot list position, first and last candidates. Earlier literature has found that these variables are important explanations for a

candidates' success (van Erkel and Thijssen, 2016; Put and Maddens, 2015). Ethnic minority candidates are candidates with at least one of the parents born outside West-Europe; incumbency has been defined as candidates who had a political mandate within the previous local (district) councils. Since the threshold of participating during local elections is rather low, we also add a variable defining the traditional parties who generally have a campaign budget and are more familiar to voters compared to the smaller and new local parties. Our dependent variable is the total number of preferential votes a candidate received at the local elections of 2018. Because of the highly skewed DV, a logarithmic transformation is performed.

Table 3 shows the results of the linear regression. When focusing only on socio-demographic characteristics (Model 1), none of them have a significant effect. When controlling for ballot list position, incumbency and traditional party in Model 2, we see a significant effect for the Muslim variable indicating that, ceteris paribus, Muslim candidates receive more preferential votes than non-Muslim candidates. Even when we control for parties in Model 3, this effect stays intact. This finding could suggest that Muslims indeed vote for Muslim candidates. However earlier research found evidence of symbolic voting: a group of ethno- religious majority voters who cast a 'symbolic vote' for a Muslim candidate to ensure diversity in elected bodies. A more fine-grained analysis is therefore needed to examine the preferential voting of Muslims by combining voter and candidate data. This allows us to test the link between candidate religion and voting behavior systematically by considering the alternatives on offer and the moderations of political and social factors.

Table 3 *Supply side: Linear regression with logged total number of preferential votes as dependent variable (N485)*

	Model 1	***Model 2***	***Model 3***
	B	***B***	***B***
	S.E.	***S.E.***	***S.E.***
Constant	2,64***	1,88***	1,81***
	(0,04)	(0,04)	(0,04)
Female candidate	0,01	0,02	0,02
	(0,05)	(0,03)	(0,02)
Ethnic minority	-0,06	0,01	-0,03
	(0,08)	(0,04)	(0,03)
Muslim	0,11	0,24***	0,11***
	(0,09)	(0,05)	(0,03)
First candidate		0,87***	0,87***
		(0,09)	(0,05)
Last candidate		0,20***	0,35***
		(0,10)	(0,06)
Ballot list position		-0,01***	-0,01***
		(0,00)	(0,00)
Incumbency		0,50***	0,31***
		(0,05)	(0,03)
Traditional party		0,93***	1,46***
		(0,04)	(0,05)
R square	0,003	0,681	0,898
Adjusted R square	0,003	0,676	0,894

*Significance level *p<0,05 / **p<0,01 / ***p<0,001. We controlled for political parties*

Combined data

Table 4 shows the results of the cross-classified multilevel logistic regressions, combining voter and candidate data to explain whether a voter casts a preferential vote for that particular candidate or not. In

our first model we add the effect of religious congruence (voting for co- religious candidate = 1, otherwise = 0) as main independent variable. Additionally, we control for several supply side features, namely whether a candidate is positioned first or last on the ballot list (so-called list pullers and list pushers), ballot list position and whether the candidate already had political experience in a local council. At the voter side we control for the number of preference votes casted, to account for the fact that some voters casted more preferential votes than others. Lastly, we control for ethnic congruence to research whether sharing the same religion has a stronger effect than sharing a minority background[23].

Table 4 *Combined data: Cross-classified multilevel logistic regression with DV 'casted a preferential vote' (yes=1, 0=no) (N = 32357)*

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
	B (S.E.)	B (S.E)	B (S.E)
Constant	-4,50*** (0,25)	-4,22*** (0,28)	-4,37*** (0,42)
Religion congruence	0,37** (0,12)	-0,03 (0,21)	0,03 (0,33)
Ethnic congruence	0,22 (0,11)	0,25* (0,11)	0,13 (0,16)
Number of preferential votes casted	0,16*** (0,01)	0,16*** (0,01)	0,15*** (0,01)
Ballot list position	-0,04*** (0,00)	-0,04*** (0,00)	-0,04*** (0,01)

[23] Although, we realize that teasing out the effect of religion from those of ethnicity is quite an undertaking that we do not fully grasp with only controlling for ethnic congruence in our statistical model.

Incumbency	1,37***	1,30***	1,07***
	(0,19)	(0,19)	(0,24)
List pusher	2,42***	2,28***	1,73**
	(0,40)	(0,40)	(0,52)
List puller	3,91***	4,03***	4,20***
	(0,33)	(0,33)	(0,38)
Muslim voter		-0,50*	-0,37
		(0,24)	(0,36)
Muslim voter x Religion congruence		0,86*	1,08*
		(0,38)	(0,48)
Religious practice			-0,59
			(0,19)
Muslim voter x Religious practice			0,65
			(0,83)
Religion congruence x Religious practice			0,56
			(0,80)
Religious practice x Muslim voter x Religion congruence			-0,63
			(0,87)
AIC	5782,25	5780,76	2645,88
BIC	5949,95	5965,22	2845,74
	N 32357	N 32357	N 16104

*Significance level *p<0,05 / **p<0,01 / ***p<0,001. We controlled for political parties. VIF model < 5.*

The first model shows that there is a positive and significant main effect for religious congruence. This indicates that, as we expected, voters are more inclined to cast a preference vote for a candidate when this candidate belongs to the same religious minority/majority group, thereby confirming hypothesis 3. In short, model 1 supports the expectation that Muslim voters are more likely to cast preferential votes for Muslim candidates, and non-Muslim voters vote for non-Muslim candidates. Here we should also

point to the effect of ethnicity. Unlike religious congruence, there is no significant effect for ethnic congruence. This suggests that it is not so much the fact that Muslim candidates share the same ethnicity with the candidate, but really the shared religious belonging that drives the vote of Muslims for Muslim candidates[24]. This outcome is in line with earlier research stating that the religious identity prevails on ethnicity for Muslim minorities in secularized societies where Islam has been problematized.

If we look more detailed into this religious (belonging) congruence effect, we can test the expectation of hypothesis 3 b that this effect is stronger for Muslim voters than non-Muslim voters. To do so, we add an interaction term between religious congruence and Muslim voters in Model 2. The significant positive interaction confirms our expectation and demonstrates that the effect of religious congruence is indeed stronger for Muslim voters than for non-Muslim voters. Actually, in the case of non-Muslims, there is no effect of religious congruence at all, as the main effect of religious congruence in model 2 is not significant. For Muslim voters we do find a positive effect of religious congruence (-0.03 + 0 .86 = 0.83). To get a better insight in the magnitude of this effect, we calculated the predicted probabilities. To be precise, the chance that a Muslim voter casts a preference vote for a candidate increases with approximately 1% if the candidate is also Muslim - increasing from 0.5% to 1.40%. In sum, model 2 demonstrates that whereas Muslims are slightly more likely to vote for Muslim candidates, non-Muslims are not more likely to vote for non-Muslim candidates; controlling for other factors. So, in general non-Muslims do not vote against Muslim candidates. This latter finding is in line with Heath et al. (2015) suggesting that non-Muslims do not discriminate against Muslim candidates and other research shedding light on the symbolic vote.

Lastly, a three-way interaction between religious congruence, being a Muslim voter and religious practice is added to the model, in order to examine whether Muslims who frequently attend religious and social activities at the mosque are more prone to vote for Muslim candidates. The results of model 3 (N =16104)[25] indicate that this is not the case, going against hypothesis 4. Whereas the main interaction between religious congruence and Muslim voters remains significant (as in model 2), the three-way interaction itself is not. This means that the effect of religious congruence is similar – namely significant and positive - for all Muslim voters, independent of their religious practice. Or to put it in other words, religious practice - measured in mosque attendance - does not make Muslims more prone to vote for co-religious candidates.

[24] This insignificant effect is not due to a potential high collinearity between religious and ethnic congruence, as we find no signs of multicollinearity (VIF <5)
[25] Only those who filled in their religious practice are included.

Conclusion and discussion

This study explored to what extent Muslim voters vote more for Muslim candidates, than other voters and whether religious belonging and behavior makes Muslims more likely to vote for co–religious candidates. The local elections in Antwerp – a diverse and urban context – is a very suitable case to evaluate such kind of voting because of a sizeable Muslim electorate, the presence of a successful far right party, a local government dominated by a rightist nationalist party and a PR flexible list system with a wide range of candidates.

Firstly, based on demand side data of an exit poll at the local elections of 2018 – we found evidence of the Muslim electorate casting more preferential votes than list votes compared to non-Muslims. Moreover, for Muslims we see a significant effect in voting for only other candidates compared to the list puller only and list puller and other candidates. Since Muslim candidates are (almost) never ranked first on the list, we can assume that Muslim voters who voted for a Muslim candidate were actively in search for them. Secondly, our supply side analysis points out that Muslim candidates obtain more preferential votes than non-Muslim candidates, when controlling for socio-demographics (gender, ethnic background) and political and social features such as ballot list position, incumbency and party affiliation. Thirdly, the analyses combining demand and supply data support the claim of religious congruence, namely that the belonging dimension makes voters more prone to vote for co-religious candidates. Moreover, we learned that co-religious voting was significantly more present in the group of Muslims than in the group of non-Muslims. Interestingly, non- Muslims do not significantly vote more for non-Muslim candidates[26].

These findings correspond with the study of Heath et al. (2015) in the intensively religious divided context of India. More research could further clarify the intentions behind the Muslim vote: is it based on an instrumental logic, or a symbolic logic or both? Heath et al. (2015) found that Muslims do behave in a Downsian way, and claim that the symbolic logic does not explain the Indian Muslim vote. Our Belgian study argues that the symbolic logic – religious belonging - does explain the preferential voting for Muslim candidates, possibly due to the proportional electoral system where partisan ideology does not outflank individual candidate preferences. Heath et al. (2015) further established that the disadvantaged position of Muslims in India drives the Muslim vote. In this respect, research refers to the 'reactive religious identity' where Muslim citizens feel disadvantaged due to their Muslim identity, and thus more likely to politically mobilize on this excluded religious identity. The question remains

[26] Since attendance of mosques is a gendered religious practice (Cesari, 2014), we performed the same analyses on only the male voters (not shown here). The results were non-significant.

whether proportional representation impacts this reactive religious identity voting. Will Muslims trust elected bodies more when descriptive representation is reached? In other words, does descriptive representation leads to the substantive representation of Muslims' interests and needs?

Finally, regarding the behavior dimension, we do not find evidence of a positive relationship between mosque attendance and voting for Muslim candidates although we hypothesized this could be the case based on electoral studies in the US and studies on non-electoral participation. However, we realize that our finding generates many additional questions. More qualitative research is needed to explore why the intensity of religious practice - in casu mosque attendance - does not lead to votes for Muslim candidates. How do Muslim voters who partake regularly in religious activities evaluate Muslim candidates compared to those who do not participate regularly? Our study was limited to the effects of belonging and behavior dimension. We did not further explore the believing dimension, but encourage further research unraveling the Muslim vote.

CHAPTER 04

The electoral agency of Muslimahs:
an intersectional perspective on preferential voting behavior

Chapter 4

The electoral agency of Muslimahs: an intersectional perspective on preferential voting behavior

Abstract

Muslim women are often portrayed as submissive and oppressed, and blamed for a lack of political agency. At the same time, intersectional studies point out that Muslimahs manifest a pious critical agency while engaging in political activities. Yet, quantitatively and electorally speaking, less is known about gender differences in vote choices of Muslims, notably which candidates they support. This paper addresses this gap in the literature by examining the gendered preferential voting behavior of Muslim minorities at the local elections of 2018 in the largest city of Belgium (Antwerp), based on an innovative analysis of combined demand side exit-poll data with supply side data on the candidate profiles. While our analyses show that Muslims vote more gender congruent and more religious congruent than non-Muslims, this is because male Muslims vote more for male candidates, more for Muslim candidates, and more for the intersection of both of them rather than that female Muslims vote for one of their own. However, this does not mean that Muslim women are not gender sensitive or religiously conscious. Interestingly, Muslimahs do not differ substantially from non-Muslim women in gender congruent or religious congruent voting.

Key words: Intersectionality, Muslim, gender, preferential voting

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Introduction

"representation is vital

otherwise the butterfly surrounded by a group of moths

unable to see itself

will keep trying to become the moth"
Rupi Kaur (2017)

The growing concern with the lack of elected bodies mirroring society's diversity has led to an increase of scholarly literature on minorities' voices in decision-making processes (Wauters et al., 2020; Mansbridge, 1999). Scholars point to the benefits of a 'politics of presence' of minorities in providing minority groups a sense of inclusion and an improvement of the quality of policy output because it accounts for a more inclusive set of political needs and interests (Sinno, 2012; Phillips, 1995). One important precondition to achieve 'descriptive representation' in office, are voters electing candidates that 'descriptively/demographically' resemble them (Mansbridge, 1999). Accordingly, studies have looked into the voter side of political representation by studying voting patterns of marginalized minority groups such as women and ethnic minorities. These studies often evaluate the presence of affinity voting based on the assumption that voters tend to vote for candidates who look like them (Cutler, 2002) especially when they are marginalized (André et al., 2017). In general, the findings demonstrate that they are indeed more likely to vote for candidates alike, also referred to as gender and ethnic congruent voting (Wauters et al., 2020). As for Muslims, while ethnicity and Islam are generally strongly intertwined, the salience of Muslims' religious identity as an identity marker, seems to have risen above that of their ethnic background (Dancygier, 2014; Voas and Fleischmann, 2012). Scholars refer to this trend as the 'ethnicization of Islam' (Fadil, 2005; Kanmaz, 2003).

However, research on Muslims' preferential voting behavior and its intersections with other minority markers is extremely scarce. As far as we know, only Heath et al. (2015) and Azabar et al. (2020) have recently pointed out that Muslim voters are more prone to vote for Muslim candidates in societies where Islam is subject to a fierce debate. Nevertheless, up till now, research on the particularities of intersectional voting behavior of Muslim men and women is almost non-existing. The absence is somewhat surprising since the increasing demographic presence of Muslims in the West has been problematized and is associated with the rising controversy on Muslims' political integration. The alleged incompatibility of Islam and western liberal democracy has been stressed even more since the 9/11 attacks (Statham and Tillie, 2016; Cesari, 2013). Notably, Muslims' gender ideology is often

identified as conservative and thus one of the main challenges to their socio-political integration. As a consequence, Muslimahs are, allegedly, more inclined to vote for male Muslim candidates and thereby discriminate against candidates who resemble them the most descriptively (Dancygier, 2017).

However, intersectional scholars (Salem, 2013; Mahmood, 2005) criticize the wide-spread portrayal of religious women as uniformly oppressed and suffering from false consciousness. In addition, a growing scholarship on Muslim women and their lived realities paint a more complex picture of their political agency and feminist views within an Islamic framework while rejecting the idea that (only) secularism acts as a *guarantor* of women's rights (Abu-Lughod, 2013; Joly, 2017; Tanner Lamptey, 2018).Yet, it cannot be denied that the bulk of this intersectional research uses ethnographic data of a more qualitative nature while focusing on non-electoral forms of political participation. However, we don't know how this political awareness manifest itself in the electoral field. In this respect it would be very good to bridge the gulf between this intersectional literature and the literature on political representation, but also the strongly quantitatively oriented electoral studies.

Interestingly, research on intersectionality and political representation concentrates primarily on the presence and success of female representatives of Muslim origin in assemblies (Celis and Erzeel, 2014; Mugge and Erzeel, 2016). These studies provide an interesting supply side explanation for the relative overrepresentation of female Muslim candidates (compared to male Muslim candidates) by pointing at a strategy of party selectorates to favor female Muslim candidates who do not threaten the power bases of white, male incumbents. However, none of these studies provide conclusive evidence regarding the origins of the votes for these female candidates. Are these candidates supported (primarily) by Muslimahs? Our study addresses this lacuna and diverges from earlier studies on affinity voting since they deal with one single socio-demographic characteristic at a time even though real vote choice is likely to be affected by multiple allegiances related to characteristics such as race, class and gender (Goodyear-Grant and Tolley, 2019).

Our research aims are threefold. First, we focus on a much-disputed but understudied group on the intersection of Muslim belonging and gender, notably Muslimahs, by scrutinizing their voter preferences and reflecting on their power bases in the political system. We hereby highlight not only the voting behavior *between* groups, but also *within* groups in order to properly address intersectionality issues related to Muslim and gender voting. In short, we will study *who* among the Muslim electorate votes for whom reflecting on how these choices affect the nature of minority inclusion. Second, this study wants to look at preferential voting behavior in a reliable way by focusing on the Belgian proportional electoral list system where several parties with long lists seemingly guarantee the necessary religious and gender

diversity among candidates on the lists. This is an ideal context to study intersectional voting because, at least in theory, it gives voters the chance to cast a (multiple) preferential vote(s) based on shared identification independently of their ideological preference. Moreover, we will register the multiple preferential vote in a reliable way by using a mock ballot (questionnaire that perfectly resembles the ballot list) embedded in an exit poll (survey taken immediately after leaving the voting booth). Third, contrary to earlier explanatory designs that exclusively relied on voter (demand) characteristics to explain the voting preferences, we also account for supply side features (see also Azabar et al., 2020). Since female (and) Muslim candidates are generally found lower on the lists and often have less political experience, it is essential to control for variables such as ballot list position and incumbency. Theoretically speaking our analytical approach answers Choo and Ferree's (2010:134) call for cross-classified multilevel studies of intersectionality "capturing both the agency of individuals in making the world they inhabit and the enabling and constraining forces of the world as it has been produced".

We find evidence of Muslims casting a gender and religious congruent vote compared to non-Muslims. However, the propensity to vote religious congruent is lower among female Muslim voters compared to male Muslim voters. More interestingly, female Muslim voters are also less likely to cast an intersectional vote compared to male Muslim voters. This does not mean that Muslim women are not gender sensitive or religiously conscious. In fact, Muslimahs do not differ substantially from non-Muslim women in gender congruent or religious congruent voting. Our study thus stresses the importance of an intersectional approach.

Literature Review

Affinity voting: *between* and *within* groups

In line with Choo and Ferree's (2010) and Weldon's (2008) endorsement of an "intersection-plus" model to study intersectionality, we will not only focus on the interaction effects, *in casu* the intersection of Muslim and gender belonging, but also on the main effects respectively gender and religious congruent voting. Only by looking at the full picture one can prioritize the effects of different inequalities. In this respect we will first look at the evidence regarding gender and religious congruent voting in order to have some baselines to start our discussion of the intersectional vote of Muslimahs.

In Belgium's flexible proportional system, a handful of studies found evidence of gender congruent voting at the municipal elections (Marien et al., 2017) and at the national/European elections (Erzeel et al., 2018). The effect was stronger for men. However, when accounting for supply side features, scholars nuanced earlier findings. Some found that the stronger effect of men voting for male candidates disappeared (Marien et al., 2017; Erzeel et al., 2018), while others even found a moderate effect for

women voting for candidates based on gender (van Erkel, 2019: 10). The supply side characteristics of candidates are crucial in this regard. Not so much the number but the position of women on the list matters (Thijssen, 2013: 159; Marien et al., 2017:328), revealing the structural inequalities at the candidate level imbedded in the political system. Male candidates are mostly ranked as first candidate, occupy more executive mandates and get more media attention, explaining the success of male candidates.

On the other hand, systematic research on the relevance of Muslims' religiosity on preferential voting behavior is scarce (Cesari, 2014; Just et al., 2014). Research tends to focus on the ethnic minority belonging, revealing ethnic congruent voting (Van Heelsum et al., 2016; Teney et al., 2010). As far as we know, Heath et al. (2015) and Azabar et al. (2020) provided the first systematic analyses of religious congruent voting of Muslims. They showed that Muslim voters in India and in Belgium are more prone to cast a vote for Muslim candidates at the elections. Moreover, both studies pointed out that it is important to control for 'electability chances' in terms of variables such as 'ballot position' and 'political experience'.

An intersectional approach

Intersectionality is the phenomenon where social inequalities occur along different intersecting axes. The intersectional approach emphasizes the interaction between different inequality dimensions such as race, gender and religion (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins 2019). It criticizes the essentialist tendency to treat social groups (e.g. women or Muslims) as homogeneous entities with the same specific interests (Collins, 2019; Severs et al., 2016:348) while focusing on privileges and disadvantages associated with the various social identities. For instance, Muslim women have specific interests and needs different from women from the majority and from Muslim men (see also Crenshaw, 1991). So, to approach them solely as women or solely as Muslims, as if there are no differences within groups is beyond accurate. Additionally, scholars refer to 'invisible intersectionality' arguing that a person with multiple subordinate-group identities such as Muslim women become 'invisible' for policy makers relative to those with a single subordinate-group notably women and Muslim men (Crenshaw, 1991; Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008). Scholars developed a critique on how a discourse aimed at either women or Muslims fails to account for respectively religious discrimination and patriarchy in their battle for social justice leading to a reproduction of Muslim women's subordination in both cases (see also Crenshaw, 1991).

Similarly, Joly (2017) argues that although the discourse of discrimination in Britain and France affected Muslim men and women alike, Muslim women suffered additionally due to the prevailing prejudices as women of Muslim background. The author demonstrated that Muslim women are positioned within complex relations (e.g. unequal gender relations intersecting with their religious group and majority society) and found obstacles and facilitators governing their capacity to act politically. Likewise, in Belgium, van den Brandt (2019) elaborated on how Muslimahs belonging to a feminist and antiracist movement (BOEH!) engage in political protest against the ban on veils introduced by the local government for imposing a normative white secular model of emancipation.

Clearly, Muslim women have been the focal point in many public and scholarly debates (re)shaping dominant oppressing systems (Salem, 2013). One repeatedly expressed concern is the conservative gender ideology of Muslim immigrants (Inglehart and Norris, 2003) affecting political behavior. Dancygier (2017) demonstrated that because Muslim candidates obtained more preference votes in Brussels they could leapfrog other non-Muslim candidates on the ballot list. However, male Muslim candidates made relatively greater jumps than female Muslim candidates (Dancygier, 2017:163) which seems to suggest that Muslim voters vote more for male Muslim candidates. According to the same author, Muslims' conservative attitudes towards gender roles could explain why male Muslim candidates outperform their female counterparts at the polls in urban cities. Parties are therefore more inclined to field Muslim male candidates to cater to the Muslim electorate, compromising the ideological integrity of parties in the long run. Dancygier warns against a potential inclusion dilemma in the electoral field due to a trade-off between the inclusion of Muslims and women stating that '*if parties want to aggressively court the Muslim vote, the goal of gender parity will suffer'* (2017:163).

However, recent empirical studies point to the shrinking gap of gender traditionalism between Muslims and non-Muslims when considering subsequent Muslim generations socialized in Western countries (Diehl et al., 2009; Schlieble and Fleischmann, 2013), intergenerational transmission (Kretschmer, 2018) or female Muslims (Röder, 2014; Röder and Mühlau, 2014). The recent findings reject the hypothesis that gender inegalitarianism is inherent to Islam. Interestingly, female immigrants seem to adapt gender egalitarian attitudes more straightforwardly than their male counterparts, as women have a particular self-interest in embracing more egalitarian ideas. On top of these findings, several studies on Muslim women's agency criticize the stereotype of the 'submissive Muslim women' as part of an Orientalist discourse, while stressing the use of Islam as a flexible resource to interpret gender relations (Benhadjoudja, 2018; Schleible and Fleischmann, 2013). In this respect, Rinaldo (2014) introduces a 'pious critical agency' referring to Muslim women as political activists who engage critically and publicly with religious texts demanding a greater equality or rights for Muslim women. Hence, the

question to what extent the interaction of gender and Muslim belonging shapes the electoral behavior of Muslims can provide crucial complementary insights.

Recent studies have already pointed at the importance of integrating the intersectionality perspective in the work on political representation (Severs et al., 2016). As Celis and Erzeel (2014) argue that by selecting young ethnic minority women parties can diversify their lists both in terms of gender and of ethnicity, thereby killing two birds with one stone so to say. Furthermore, parties prefer young ethnic minority women because, by putting them on the list, they can increase the descriptive representativeness of parties without jeopardizing their electoral effectiveness (Severs et al., 2016; Celis et al., 2014). Moreover, these specific profiles could attract the ethno-religious vote, without alienating the majority voters. In connection to this, selectorates might also prefer female Muslims because they can be portrayed as a product of successful social integration. After all, their political engagement seems to contradict patriarchal structures and belief systems constraining women, especially when these candidates are not veiled (Dancygier, 2017: 150, Celis and Erzeel, 2014). In addition, Martin and Blinder (2020) demonstrated that Muslim candidates are penalized, especially when they express support for pro-minority policies.

Based on the aforementioned affinity voting studies and considering the marginalized position of Muslimahs, it seems fair to assume that Muslimahs will be more inclined to vote for *one of their own* when possible. Earlier intersectional research in the US has demonstrated that black women endorse black female candidates over black male candidates (Philpot and Walton, 2007). Evidence further shows that female Latina voters support female (Latina) candidates (Bejarano, 2014) focusing on the US elections of 1982 to 2010. However, simply comparing US and Belgium is beyond accurate due to the different political systems and cultures.

Based on the available research in Belgium, we distinguish two possible explanations for the lack of an intersectional vote among Muslimahs in Belgium. The first explanation refers to Muslims' conservative attitudes that will benefit male Muslim candidates, discriminating against female Muslim candidates. A second explanation relates to intersectional studies on political representation who have demonstrated that parties select a candidate profile complementary to the privileged ones (white male incumbents) in order to not threaten the power status-quo. Depending on the prioritization of the constitutive baseline identities (Gender, Muslim, or their intersection) and the base of comparison (non-Muslim women or male Muslims) this can have different meanings. We will evaluate these distinctive meanings by testing following hypotheses:

H1. Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a female candidate than male Muslims for male candidates

H2. Female Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a Muslim candidate than male Muslims

H3a. Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a female Muslim candidate than male Muslims for male Muslim candidates

H3b. Female Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a female Muslim candidate than male Muslims for male Muslim candidates

H4. Female Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a female candidate than female non-Muslims

H5. Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a co-religious candidate than female non-Muslims

H6. Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a female co-religious candidate than female non-Muslims

The Antwerp case

We focus on the local elections of 2018 in Belgium's largest city, Antwerp, to scrutinize the preferential votes of female Muslims in a proportional list system with compulsory voting. This is an interesting context because, in theory, it is a most likely case to find intersectional voting. The city has about half a million inhabitants with a perfect gender balance and a high diversity rate with more than 174 nationalities (Stad in Cijfers, 2018). Antwerp is a majority-minority city: different migratory minority groups[27] (50.1%) make up the majority of the local population (Stad in cijfers, 2018) (see Appendix 1). Antwerp is also home to a large Muslim community (OSF, 2011) although 'the exact number of people of Muslim culture or Islamic faith living in Belgium today is difficult to determine, as there is no official registration of the population's ethnic and religious ties' (Fadil, 2014: 83).

First, politically Antwerp has become a stronghold of (radical) right-wing parties providing us a very interesting context to study the preferential voting of Muslim voters. The presence and success of the radical right party Vlaams Belang and the right-wing nationalist party N-VA could pressure (female) Muslim minorities to vote for candidates to ensure a policy that does not disadvantage them. Governmental rules restricting religious practices such as a ban on veils and religious slaughter and a troubled relationship with mosque boards could evoke a reaction of Muslims who stress their threatened religious identity and act upon it in order to defend Islam – referred to as reactive religiosity (Nagra, 2011; Voas and Fleischmann, 2012). Similarly, scholars point at the important role of Muslim women

[27] Ethnic minorities are defined as Antwerp citizens whom at least one of the parents has a non-Belgian birth nationality (Stad in cijfers, 2018).

in organizing political protests against the Antwerp local government due to the ban on veils for front office employees, while this government consisted of (female) Muslim councilors (Severs et al., 2016; van den Brandt, 2019). Van den Brandt (2019) argues that the exclusion of Muslimahs in political discussions about their interest and needs, generated Muslimahs' activism insisting that their voices and experiences be recognized by politicians and policy makers.

Second, in the Belgian proportional flexible list system, voters have the opportunity to cast a vote for a party (list vote) or for one or more candidates within the same party (multiple preferential votes). Many studies are confronted with contexts where parties can only field one candidate with the result that the number of female and/or ethnic minority candidates is low. On the contrary, in Antwerp, all traditional parties field a long list of up to 55 candidates containing both male and female Muslims (except for the radical right party Vlaams Belang). Hence, whatever the ideology of voters they can vote for *one of their own*. In addition, candidate lists with up to 55 candidates make it impossible for voters to be totally informed about the different stances of all candidates resulting in a low information context which tend to stimulate 'identity voting' (Wauters et al., 2020).

Third, in 2002 a strict gender quota law regulation imposed an equal presence (50:50) of male and female candidates on party lists, as well as a female candidate ranked as first or second candidate (Meier, 2004). However, in most cases the first position on candidate lists is still preserved for male candidates (Marien et al., 2017). Furthermore, many parties use informal quota with respect to ethnic minorities. In sum, the system of multiple preferential voting in Antwerp (Belgium), the strong diversity in terms of both voter and candidate level, the presence of (in)formal quota and the success of the radical right party– together with the compulsory voting – constitute a context to test the presence of identity voting among (female) Muslims.

Methods and data

Earlier research on preferential voting often relied on candidate survey data in combination with the aggregate voting (supply side) to study the most desirable candidate characteristics. However, these studies could not fully capture the decision-making process of voters. In search for answers on voter-candidate similarities, voter survey data are more suitable (demand side). Yet, as argued by Erzeel et al. (2018) and van Erkel (2019), these demand data need a link with supply side characteristics such as ballot list position. We therefore model voters and candidate traits together by looking at dyadic relationships (van Erkel, 2019: 7). Data were gathered on both levels namely demand side/voters' level and supply side/candidates' level.

Demand side data - An exit poll was organized by an inter-university consortium[28] at the local elections of 2018 resulting in the Belgian Local Elections Survey. In Antwerp, 14 randomly selected polling stations were covered by a team of pollsters, which provided us with more reliable exit-poll data compared to standard post-electoral surveys. On the election day, from the opening at 8h until the closing time at 15h, highly trained interviewers - equipped with a tablet – approached every fifth voter leaving the polling booth. Several measures were taken to reach Muslim respondents. 6 polling stations situated in an area with a large Muslim minority were oversampled by deploying extra interviewers with a Muslim background. A total of 34 pollsters were stationed in 14 Antwerp polling stations. Before the face-to-face interview with voters - consisting of questions on socio-demographic traits, voting behavior and political attitudes - a mock ballot was presented in order to reliably record the (multiple) preferential votes. The mock ballot perfectly resembled the design of the ballot list on the computer screen in the polling booth. Next to asking for their (preferential) voting behavior, the respondents were interviewed about their religious belonging[29], the importance of gender parity in politics[30], and whether respondents, in their preferential voting, are guided by the charisma, the competence or their connection with the candidate[31].

Supply side data - The candidate database is composed of information of official governmental documents containing party lists with the candidate names and ballot list position. In Antwerp, 12 political parties – with a total of 487 candidates - submitted candidate lists for the 2018 local elections. To retrieve information about incumbency – having experience in a local council - the formal website of the city council was used, next to the website tracking all political mandates in Belgium (http://www.cumuleo.be). We used the onomastic procedure (name recognition) in order to code gender. In order to identify Muslim candidates, we developed a three-step approach due to the lack of official statistics taking ethnicity or religious belonging into consideration. Firstly, inspired by Heath et al. (2015) we used name recognition to define Muslim minorities. This makes sense since Antwerp Muslims are mainly of Maghrebian or Turkish descent. However, obviously a name alone does not suffice to reliably code religious belonging. Secondly, the identification was also based on the self-

[28] UGent, UAntwerpen, VUB, UHasselt, ULB, UCL and UNamur
[29] Would you consider yourself as belonging to any specific religion or philosophical denomination? If yes, which one?
[30] On a scale from 0 to 10, how important is it according to you to have an equal share of men and women in politics?
[31] What has been the main reason that motivated you to cast a preference vote for your most preferred candidate? Possible answers are a) the personality/charisma of the candidate (Examples: charisma, honesty integrity, accessibility, kindness) b) the competence of the candidate (Examples: work done as local councilor, alderman or mayor, education, expertise, experience, work ethic, intelligence, pragmatism, vision) c. I know the candidate d. I don't know.

definition of candidates as being of a member of Muslim culture. Concretely, background checks of the belonging dimension of candidates were made via websites of candidates, news articles, their political party and their social media. If candidates referred to themselves as Muslims, we confirmed their Muslim belonging. Lastly, where possible we used peer assessment of fellow political candidates: we asked candidates of several political parties if we identified their colleagues rightfully as belonging to Muslim faith or not. We nevertheless acknowledge that defining the religious belonging of candidates has its limitations. However, when religious diversity and Islam is so politicized as during the Antwerp local elections of 2018, it is a bit easier to collect such information (e.g. Azabar et al., 2020).

Combined data - Linking voter and candidate data ended up in a stacked data matrix (N=32357) with a binary dependent variable indicating whether a voter casted a vote for a specific candidate (no=0, yes=1). The combined stacked data allows us to test whether voters prefer candidates alike, while at the same time controlling for candidate characteristics, such as their political experience and their ballot position. Our main independent variables focus on voter-candidate similarities: Gender congruence (no=0, yes=1), Religion congruence (no=0, yes=1) and the intersection of both identities Religion Gender congruence (no=0, yes=1). When gender or religious background of voters and candidates are similar, we coded 1 otherwise 0. As regards to the Religion Gender congruence, we coded the intersections of gender and religious background of voters and candidates (e.g. female Muslim minority, female non-Muslim majority, male Muslim majority and male non-Muslim majority). We coded Religion Gender congruence as 1 when the intersection of a voter *and* candidate were similar. To account for supply side features, we control for first and last candidate (no=0, yes=1), ballot list position (1 up to 55), incumbency (no=0, yes=1) and party belonging since these factors could explain the success of candidates (van Erkel and Thijssen, 2016). Furthermore, we control for the total number of preferential votes casted since the likelihood that a respondent votes for a candidate increases when more preferential votes are involved (van Erkel, 2019:9). To explain our dichotomous dependent variable, we use a cross-classified multilevel logistic model as our voter-candidate combinations are simultaneously nested in voters and in candidates. Table 1 gives an idea of the structure of the dataset.

Table 1 *Example of data matrix*

Voter	Candidate	Preferential vote (yes = 1, no = 0)	Number of preferential votes	Muslim voter (yes = 1, no = 0)	Muslim candidate (yes = 1, no = 0)	Religion congruence (yes = 1, no = 0)	Gender voter (female = 1, male = 0)	Gender candidate (female = 1, male = 0)	Gender congruence (yes = 1, no = 0)	Muslim gender voter (FM = 1, FnM = 2, MM = 3, Mnm = 4)	Muslim gender candidate (FM = 1, FnM = 2, MM = 3, Mnm=4)	Religion gender congruence (yes = 1, no = 0)
1	1	1	2	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	4	0
1	2	0	2	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	0
1	3	1	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	3	0
1	4	0	2	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	2	0
2	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	4	2	0
2	2	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	4	4	1
2	3	0	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	4	2	0

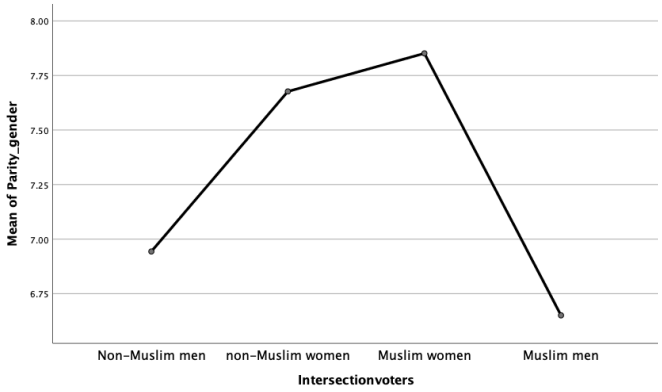
Findings

Descriptive results

Demand side data - We ended up with a response rate of 51% in Antwerp city resulting in 972 respondents. Our sample contains 49% female and 51% male voters. 29% of the respondents consider themselves belonging to Muslim faith. Approximately 70% of the Antwerp voters casted one or more preferential votes, with the majority of those respondents voting for 1 or 2 candidates (86%). Since we are interested in voter-candidate similarities, we only focus on voters who casted one or multiple preferential votes (N=608). This subsample consists of 50% male and 50% female voters. 26 % belong to Muslim faith (or Muslim=1), 74% are non-Muslims. Among the Muslim voters (N=174) 51% are male Muslim voters and 49% female Muslim voters. Interestingly, female Muslims neither significantly use a preferential vote less than male Muslims (compared to a list vote) nor do they use it less than female non-Muslims (see Appendix 2). This finding thus provides a first contradiction for the limited political agency of Muslimahs.

When comparing average support for equal representation of women between the four intersectional groups (non-Muslim men, non-Muslim women, Muslim women and Muslim men), we find a significant difference among groups ($F(3.527) = 4.672$; $p=0.003$). Notably, Muslim men are less supportive of equal gender representation compared to Muslim women ($p=0.035$) and non-Muslim women ($p=0.025$). There is no meaningful difference between female Muslims and female non-Muslims, which goes against the stereotype of the submissive and conservative Muslim women. Interestingly, female Muslim voters even show the highest mean among voters (see figure 1), while Muslim men show the lowest level of support for gender parity in politics. Here we find a second contradiction for the limited political agency of Muslimahs.

Figure 1 *Plot Means of importance of gender parity by the intersection of voters– On a scale of 0 to 10, how important is it according to you to have an equal share of men and women in politics?*



When analyzing the motivations[32] to vote for their most preferred candidate, competences[33] were generally mentioned the most. Interestingly, this motivation was even more important among Muslim women (42%) than Muslim men (37%). On the other hand, charisma[34] was mentioned more by Muslim men (31%) than by Muslim women (24%). Furthermore 13% of Muslim men stated that they knew the candidate compared to 15% Muslim women. An equal share of male Muslims (5%) and female Muslims (6%) stated that charisma *and* competences were important when choosing their most preferred candidate (Table 2).

Table 2 *Motivations to cast a vote for most preferred candidate by Muslim men, Muslim women, non-Muslim men and non-Muslim women*

Motivations to cast a vote for most preferred candidate	**Muslim men**	**Muslim women**	**Non-Muslim men**	**Non-Muslim women**
Charisma	28 (31%)	20 (24%)	25 (12%)	36 (16%)
Competence	33 (37%)	36 (42%)	104 (52%)	100 (45%)
Charisma and competence	5 (6%)	4 (5%)	12 (6%)	20 (9%)
Know the candidate	12 (13%)	13 (15%)	33 (16%)	34 (15%)
Missing/Don't know	12 (13%)	12 (14%)	27 (13%)	30 (14%)
N	90	85	201	220

[32] When multiple motivations were given, and they knew the candidate we analyzed this as 'know the candidate'
[33] Competences is referred to as education, expertise, experience, work ethic, intelligence, pragmatism, vision, work done as local councilor, alderman or mayor
[34] Charisma is referred to as honesty integrity, accessibility, kindness

Supply side data- Our supply side file contains 50% of male candidates and 50% female candidates, due to the strict quota regulations where parties have to maintain a 50:50 gender quota. 20% (98) is coded Muslim. These Muslim candidates were fielded by D-SA (30)[35], the radical left party PVDA (14), the ecologist party Groen (13), the Social Democrats s.pa (11), the Christian Democrats CD&V (10) and Be.One[36] (8). The Liberal Open Vld (6) and the nationalist party N-VA (3) fielded less candidates with a Muslim background. The far-right party Vlaams Belang had no such candidates on their list (see Appendix 3). In short, one out of five candidates are Muslim, confirming earlier studies claiming that when the proportion of the Muslim electorate is sizeable, so will the proportion of Muslim candidates on the lists (Heath et al., 2015; Teney et al., 2010). Interestingly, the high percentage of Muslim political candidates is partly due to new niche-parties focusing on the Muslim electorate. When considering only traditional parties, only 15% (57 of 385) of the candidates has Muslim roots. Analyzing the ballot list position of Muslim candidates makes clear that - considering all parties - 31% of all candidates positioned in the first quintile[37] has Muslim roots. This percentage drops to 25% when focusing exclusively on traditional parties (see Appendix 4). When considering traditional parties, the first Muslim candidate generally obtains a relatively high position on the ballot list but never a top position. Interestingly, the first Muslim candidate is mostly female and ranked 2nd or 3rd on the ballot list. These results are in line with Celis and Erzeel (2014) demonstrating that female ethnic minority candidates get better positions than male ethnic minority candidates since they better fit the vote-seeking and power maintenance strategy of party elites because female Muslim-candidates are perceived as less of a threat.

Combined data - The combined data reveal the casted preferential votes: 48% were gender congruent, 72% were religion congruent (overlapping Muslim/non-Muslim identity). When considering only Muslim voters, 55% of the votes casted were gender congruent and 43% were Muslim congruent. Only 25% of the votes casted can be considered as an intersectional vote notably that gender and Muslim belonging of a voter resemble the gender and Muslim belonging of the candidate. When further exploring the preferential votes – not accounting for supply side features - it is clear that all voters cast a preferential vote most often for a male non-Muslim candidate (see Table 3). Interestingly, with regards to the preferential voting of Muslim women, female and male Muslim candidates are least popular. For male Muslim voters the least preferred candidates are female candidates. Yet, because these descriptive findings do not control for the absolute number of candidates on the lists for the four intersections a multivariate analysis is necessary.

[35] D-SA is a smaller new, local migrant party who presented a list with 37 candidates.
[36] Be.One is a smaller new, local migrant party who presented a list with 10 candidates.
[37] The first quintile consists of ballot position 1 to 11. A list consists of maximum 55 candidates.

Table 3 *Candidate preferences of voters by intersection of gender and Muslim belonging, not accounted for supply side features*

Voters	Candidate preference 1	Candidate preference 2	Candidate preference 3	Candidate preference 4
Female Muslims	Male non-Muslim (38%)	Female non-Muslim (30%)	Female Muslim (16%) + male Muslims (16%)	
Male Muslims	Male non-Muslim (37%)	Male Muslim (31%)	Female non-Muslim (16%) + female Muslim (16%)	
Female Non-Muslim	Male non-Muslim (45%)	Female non-Muslim (32%)	Female Muslim (15%)	Male Muslim (8%)
Male Non-Muslim	Male non-Muslim (45%)	Female non-Muslim (41%)	Female Muslim (11%)	Male Muslim (3%)

Multilevel analyses

Table 4 shows the results of the cross-classified multilevel logistic analysis combining voter and candidate data to explain whether a voter casts a preferential vote for a particular candidate or not, notably with a specific focus on the main effects. The first model presents the main effects of gender congruence (voting for candidates with same gender=1, otherwise 0), whilst also controlling for religion congruence. Additionally, we control for several supply side features, namely first and last candidate (so-called list pullers and list pushers), the ballot position and previous political experience in a local council. At the voter side, we control for the number of preferential votes casted, to account for the fact that some voters casted more preferential votes than others.

Based on prior research we expect voters to cast a gender congruent vote. However, the results of Model 1 do not support this expectation. The main effect of the independent variable gender congruence is not significant. Hence, voters are not more prone to cast a gender congruent vote at local elections (B= -0,07). However, the baseline interaction in this paper is that female voters do vote significantly more gender congruent. The effect for the interaction 'Female voter X Gender congruence' is indeed slightly

positive (B=-0.41 + 0.66=0.25) compared to the negative effect for 'Male voter X Gender congruence' (B= -0.41*). Although, this last effect is statistically significant (p< 0.05), meaning that male voters are less inclined than female voters to vote gender congruent, the effect sizes are modest. The chance that a female voter votes for a candidate increases with 0.25% when the candidate is female while the predicted probability that a male voter votes for a candidate decreases with 0.40% when the candidate is male. The main effect regarding 'Religion congruent' voting in Model 1 is more robust (B= 0.49***). Yet, the interaction effect for 'Muslim X religion congruence' in Model 2 reveals that co-religious voting is significantly more common among Muslims (B= 0.14 +0.80=0.94***) than among non-Muslims (B=0.14).

In Model 3, we additionally test whether Muslim voters are more likely to vote gender congruent compared to non-Muslim voters. Interestingly, the positive effect of the interaction 'Muslim voter X Gender congruence' (-0.25+0.64=0.39***) indicates that Muslim voters are more likely to vote gender congruent than non-Muslim voters (B=-0.25). In Model 3, we also test whether female voters vote more Religion congruent than male voters. Yet, the small effect of the interaction 'Female voters X Religion congruence' (0.83-0.66=0.17) reveals that it is rather the male voter who significantly more often votes religious congruent (B=0.83***). Again, the effects are rather weak.

Table 4 *Multilevel cross-classified logistic model with 'casted a preferential vote for a candidate' as a DV (N = 32357)*

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
Intercept	-4.45***	-3.93***	-4.51***
	(0.25)	(0.30)	(0.29)
Gender congruence	-0.07	-0.41*	-0.25**
	(0.08)	(0.16)	(0.09)
Religion congruence	0.49***	0.14	0.83***
	(0.10)	(0.19)	(0.15)
Number of pref votes casted	0.15***	0.16***	0.16***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Ballot list position	-0.04***	-0.04***	-0.04***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.01)
Incumbency	1.36***	1.25***	1.38***
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.20)
List pusher	2.41***	2.37***	2.44***
	(0.39)	(0.39)	(0.40)

List puller	3.97***	4.21***	3.98***
	(0.33)	(0.33)	(0.34)
Female voter		-0.47**	0.31
		(0.18)	(0.17)
Muslim voter		-0.48*	-0.39*
		(0.24)	(0.18)
Female voter x Gender congruence		0.66*	
		(0.28)	
Muslim voter x Religion congruence		0.80*	
		(0.37)	
Muslim voter x religion congruence			0.64***
			(0.19)
Female voter x Religion congruence			-0.66***
			(0.18)
AIC	5785.50	5634.52	5621.20
BIC	5953.19	5835.00	5821.68

*Significance level +p<0.1, *p<0,05 / **p<0,01 / ***p<0,001. We controlled for political parties.*

Yet, our central hypotheses all revolve around three-way interactions that are often difficult to interpret. In order to make the findings more transparent we will split our analyses in two; one series of analyses for Muslim voters (Table 5; N=8911) and one series for non-Muslim voters (Table 6; N=23390). Based on the results in Table 5 we can test hypotheses 1, 2, and 3. While hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 can be tested by a comparison of the effects in Table 5 and 6. In Model 4 of Table 5, we see that there is a positive effect for gender congruence (B=0.33*) which is in line with the findings of model 3. In other words, Muslims do vote gender congruent. Interestingly, this positive effect cannot be attributed to female Muslims because the effect of the interaction 'Female voter X Gender congruence' in Model 5 (B=0.53-0.36=0.17) is not significant. While the tendency of male Muslims to vote for male Muslim candidates is only significant at the 0.1 level (B=0.53·), we can nevertheless reject hypothesis 1: Female Muslims do not more often cast a preferential vote for a female candidate than male Muslims.

In Model 4 of Table 5 we also see a strongly positive effect for 'Religion congruence' (B=1.32***). As was noticed by Azabar et al. (2020), Muslims are more likely to vote for Muslim candidates. We expect female Muslims to be less likely to vote for Muslim candidates compared to male Muslims, since they are not prototypical members of the Muslim group. The effect of the interaction 'Female Muslim voter X Religion congruence' is non-significant in Model 5 but the main effect of Religion congruence

indicates that male Muslim voters do vote more Religion congruent (B=1.54***) than female Muslim voters. We therefore confirm hypothesis 2 because female Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a Muslim candidate than male Muslims.

Last but not least, in Model 6 of Table 6 we see a negligibly small effect of the intersectional effect 'Muslim congruence X gender congruence' (B=0.04). In general, Muslims do not seem more inclined to vote for an electoral candidate that is congruent both in terms of gender and Muslim belonging. Yet, the results of Model 7 point out that this effect might be different for female and male voters. Based on the affinity voting these, we hypothesized (H3a) that female Muslim voters will be more inclined to vote 'intersectional' than male Muslims. After all, they remain somehow "invisible" since they are neither prototypical members of the first-order social group 'gender' nor of the 'Muslim group'. Accordingly, they will affirm their doubly marginalized status by voting for candidates that share their gender as well as their religion. However, the effect of the intersectional interaction 'Female voter X Muslim congruence X gender congruence' (B=1.11-2.14=-1.03*) is negative and hence definitely smaller than the positive effect for male Muslims (B=1.11·). We thus reject hypothesis 3a which states that female Muslims more often cast an intersectional vote than male Muslims. However, the counterhypothesis H3b expects Muslimahs to vote less intersectional than their male counterparts as female Muslim candidates are specifically chosen by the selectorate to maintain the status quo. In addition, Muslim candidates who want to change the status quo are discriminated against by non-Muslim voters (Martin and Blinder, 2020). Interestingly, the main effect of both Muslim and Gender congruence is significant ($p<0.1$) indicating – with caution - that the propensity to vote intersectional is higher among male Muslim voters than female Muslim voters.

In order to test hypotheses 4, 5, and 6 we compare the aforementioned interaction effects for 'female Muslims' from models 5 and 7 of Table 5 with the corresponding effects for 'female non-Muslims' in models 9 and 11 of Table 6. For instance, based on the results of Model 5 we concluded that the interaction effect 'Female Muslim voter X Gender congruence' (B=0.53-0.36=0.17) was not statistically significant. We can see that the effect of the interaction 'Female non-Muslim voter X Gender congruence' in Model 9 (B=-0.80+1.07= 0.27***) is significant but marginally positive. All in all, we can confirm hypothesis 4 which assumes that female Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a female candidate than female non-Muslims. Interestingly, female voters have an inverse relationship with their male homologues: while male Muslims vote more gender congruent than female Muslims (B=0.53·), male non-Muslims vote less gender congruent than female non-Muslims (B=-0.80***).

Also based on model 5 in Table 5 we noticed that the interaction 'Female Muslim voter X Religion congruence' is not significant but that male Muslims vote more Religion congruent. The results of Model 9 in Table 6 also show that the effect of the interaction 'Female non-Muslim voter X Religion congruence' (B=0.80-0.83=-0.03) is not meaningful at all. Consequently, hypothesis 5 cannot be confirmed as female Muslims equally often cast a preferential vote for a co-religious candidate compared to female non-Muslims. Interestingly, as male Muslims vote more co-religious (B=1.54***) than their female counterparts, the same goes up for male non-Muslims (B=0.78**).

Finally, regarding hypothesis 6 we compare the effect of the intersectional interaction 'Female Muslim voter X Muslim congruence X gender congruence' (B=1.11-2.14= -1.03*) in model 7 with the effect of the corresponding intersectional interaction 'Female non-Muslim voter X Religion congruence X Gender congruence' (B=-0.28-0.40=-0.68) in model 11. Once again, we have to reject hypothesis 6 which posits that Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a female co-religious candidate than female non-Muslims. After all, the effect for female Muslims (B= -1.03***) is clearly smaller than that for female non-Muslims (B= 0.12).

Table 5 Multilevel logistic model with 'casted a preferential vote for a candidate' as a DV, only Muslim voters (N = 8967)

	Model4		**Model 5**		**Model 6**		**Model 7**	
Intercept	-5.35***	(0.46)	-5.58***	(0.50)	-5.59***	(0.52)	-5.26***	(0.51)
Gender congruence	0.33*	(0.17)	0.53+ (0.30)		0.52 (0.36)		-0.04	(0.44)
Religion congruence	1.32***	(0.29)	1.54***	(0.33)	1.50***	(0.41)	0.91+	(0.48)
Number of pref votes casted	0.59***	(0.07)	0.59***	(0.07)	0.59***	(0.07)	0.59***	(0.07)
Ballot list position	-0.06***	(0.01)	-0.06***	(0.01)	-0.05***	(0.01)	-0.06***	(0.01)
Incumbency	0.74*	(0.36)	0.75*	(0.36)	0.78*	(0.36)	0.83*	(0.35)
List pusher	1.67*	(0.79)	1.71* (0.78)		1.68* (0.78)		1.81*	(0.78)
List puller	4.00***	(0.49)	3.96***	(0.49)	3.93***	(0.49)	3.99***	(0.47)
Female Muslim voter			0.49 (0.36)		0.49 (0.37)		-0.09 (0.45)	
Female Muslim voter x Gender congruence			-0.36 (0.51)		-0.37 (0.51)		0.71 (0.72)	
Female Muslim voter x Religion congruence			-0.44 (0.34)		-0.43 (0.34)		0.71 (0.64)	
MuslimGender congruence					0.04 (0.34)		1.11+ (0.61)	
Female Muslim voter x MuslimGender congruence							-2.14* (1.01)	
AIC	1313.60		1317.27		1388.88		1316.39	
BIC	1441.43		1466.40		1474.97		1479.57	

*Significance level +p<0.1, *p<0,05 / **p<0,01 / ***p<0,001. We controlled for political parties.*

Table 6 *Multilevel logistic model with 'casted a preferential vote for a candidate' as a DV, only non-Muslim voters (N = 23390)*

	Model 8	**Model 9**	**Model 10**	**Model 11**
Intercept	-4.34***	-4.34***	-4.32***	-4.37***
	(0.32)	(0.36)	(0.36)	(0.39)
Gender congruence	-0.20*	-0.80***	-0.67*	-0.56
	(0.09)	(0.18)	(0.28)	(0.46)
Religion congruence	0.32	0.80**	0.78**	0.83**
	(0.21)	(0.25)	(0.26)	(0.31)
Number of pref votes	0.15***	0.15***	0.15***	0.15***
casted	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Ballot list position	-0.04***	-0.04***	-0.04***	-0.04***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Incumbency	1.42***	1.32***	1.33***	1.37***
	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)
List pusher	2.71***	2.79***	2.78***	2.84***
	(0.44)	(0.44)	(0.44)	(0.45)
List puller	4.22***	4.56***	4.56***	4.51***
	(0.38)	(0.39)	(0.38)	(0.39)
Female non-Muslim		-0.05	-0.13	0.02
voter		(0.28)	(0.29)	(0.43)
Female non-Muslim		1.07***	1.03**	0.73
voter x Gender		(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.75)
congruence				
Female non-Muslim		-0.83***	-0.73**	-0.92*
voter x Religion		(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.46)
congruence				
Religion Gender			-0.13	-0.28
congruence			(0.24)	(0.50)
Female non-Muslim				0.40
voter x Religion				(0.83)
Gender congruence				
AIC	4373.70	4200.73	4201.67	4203.40
BIC	4526.84	4377.09	4386.00	4395.74

*Significance level +p<0.1, *p<0,05 / **p<0,01 / ***p<0,001. We controlled for political parties.*

***Table** 7 Overview of tested hypotheses*

H1. Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a female candidate than male Muslims for male candidates	Rejected
H2. Female Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a Muslim candidate than male Muslims	Confirmed
H3a. Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a female Muslim candidate than male Muslims for male Muslim candidates	Rejected
H3b. Female Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a female Muslim candidate than male Muslims for male Muslim candidates	Confirmed
H4. Female Muslims less often cast a preferential vote for a female candidate than female non-Muslims.	Confirmed
H5. Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a co-religious candidate than female non-Muslims.	Rejected
H6. Female Muslims more often cast a preferential vote for a female co-religious candidate than female non-Muslims	Rejected

Conclusion and discussion

Do voters cast a vote based on gender, Muslim belonging and/or a combination of these marginalized identities? Our study goes beyond a 'single-axis' approach and scrutinizes Muslim women's preferential behavior by shedding light on the complexity of electoral candidate preferences in Antwerp (Belgium) using the theoretical framework of intersectionality of gender and religion while considering a secular context. We do so based on accurate exit poll data delivering a detailed insight on the preferential votes of an understudied and much-disputed group, Muslimahs. Our findings provide new and crucial insights

in Muslims' preferential behavior which could have implications on strategies of political parties concerning which candidates they should field at local elections.

Our analyses show that Muslim voters cast a gender-based vote. First, we find evidence of female Muslim voters to be less likely to vote gender congruent compared to male Muslims (H1). Second, Muslims do vote religious congruent, but again, female Muslims vote less for Muslim candidates compared to male Muslims (H2). More interestingly, based on an intersectional approach to affinity voting, we hypothesized that female Muslim voters – due to their double marginalized identities- will be more inclined to vote 'intersectional' than male Muslims (H3a). Clearly, this is not the case. We even find -with caution- the contrary, notably that male Muslims are more likely to vote intersectional than female Muslims (H3b).

So why do Muslim women do not vote for candidates alike? Are they, in the words of Kaur, butterflies who mimic moths? Not exactly, in terms of their preferential voting, Muslimahs are sensitive to their own femininity as well to their Muslim identity. Yet, this does not lead to more voting for Muslimah candidates. In this study we referred to two possible explanations. First, Dancygier (2017) argued that female Muslim voters will prefer male Muslim candidates due to their conservative religious views, our analyses suggest that this is not the case in Antwerp, Belgium. Moreover, support for an equal share of women and men in elected office is even higher among female Muslim voters than among female non-Muslim voters (fig.1). Our findings are rather related to research of Celis and Erzeel (2014) implying that female Muslim candidates are mostly chosen to not turn off the non-Muslim majority electorate and to enhance the internal gender and ethnic diversity instead of Muslimahs' interests and needs. Moreover, Martin and Blinder (2020) stated that Muslim candidates who want to change the status quo are discriminated against by non-Muslim voters.

Consequently, it is possible that the double disadvantage is not expressed via a vote for Muslimahs, but rather via a vote for candidates who do not look like them but act for them. Do Muslimahs doubt about the descriptive-substantive link regarding to these representatives (Schwindt-Bayer and Mishler, 2005)? The assumption is then that the Muslimah candidates do not fully represent the Muslimah interests. In other words, to what extent is the reluctance of Muslimahs to vote for Muslimah candidates, based on the perception that this does not lead to increased policy responsiveness? For one, the fact that Muslimahs are active in protests against the local government related to policy issues that specifically affect female Muslims, such as the ban on veils, seems to go against the assumption that they do not have particular intersectional interests. However, the doubts regarding the descriptive-substance link by Muslimahs, could also be based on the perception that most Muslimah representatives do not share their

interpretative horizons. Moreover, if Muslimah candidates are often selected by party selectorates because they are perceived to be less fanatical and more acceptable for non-Muslim voters this is not completely illusive (Celis and Erzeel, 2014). In sum, the absence of an intersectional vote on the part of Muslimahs does not necessarily amount to the absence of intersectional awareness. To the extent that Muslimah representatives are perceived as less convincing to serve the gender cause than other women and less convincing to serve the Muslim cause than other Muslims, they could be seen as rebels without a cause. Yet, more in-depth qualitative data on motivations (not) to vote for Muslimah candidates is pivotal in order to better explain the absence of an intersectional vote among Muslimahs. Moreover, earlier literature stressed how Muslim women engage as political activists led by a pious critical agency (Rinaldo, 2014). Scholars (Salem, 2013; Mahmood, 2005) point to the need to reconceptualize the notion of agency into the understanding of Muslim women's lives, which is lacking within Western feminist frameworks. In this respect, we encourage further explorations of how Muslim women's political agency is shaped in non-Muslim societies and the challenges they pose to more secular/liberal interpretations of women's agency (see also Mahmood, 2005).

Our study illustrates the complexity of voters' political choices being shaped by their membership of multiple groups and suggest scholars to not only study differences *between* groups but also *within* groups. The intersectional approach highlights which groups within minority groups are represented, and who has been forgotten leading to ever marginalized positions in society and politics (Collins, 2019). Our study reveals that the fact that a voter has the double disadvantage of belonging to two minority groups at the same time, does not necessarily lead to cross-sectional preferential votes for candidates belonging to both minorities. Yet, this does not mean that Muslimahs are not intersectionally aware because it is wrong to posit a one to one relation between an intersectional perspective and descriptive representation in terms of the intersection. In the end, the importance of intersectionality is that one goes beyond the difference between 'the' moth and 'the' butterfly.

CHAPTER

05

Religion works in different ways: An intersectional approach to Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation

Chapter 5

Religion works in different ways: An intersectional approach to Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation

Although a growing body of research addresses the role of religion in the political engagement of Muslims, a dearth of studies scrutinizes whether intersecting power dynamics (i.e., gender and religion) shape Muslims' political participation. In this study, we apply an intersectional approach to study whether religious indicators (mosque attendance, religious salience and religious discrimination) shape the (gendered) participatory patterns of Muslims. Drawing on ESS data of six countries (Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands, Italy, UK and France), we find religious attendance to dampen and religious salience to heighten Muslims' non-electoral participation. Religious discrimination seems to have no effect. Although Muslims' religiosity is gendered, our study finds no effects hereof on political participation. Further research unraveling the motivations of Muslims' noninstitutionalized forms of participation are encouraged.

Key words: mosque attendance, discrimination, religious salience, noninstitutionalized participation, intersectionality, Muslims

Reference: Azabar, S. and Van Aelst, P. (2023). Religion works in different ways: an intersectional approach to Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation. *Acta Politica*

Introduction

Although it was long thought that the salience of religion would decline in modern societies, Muslims have challenged the secularization thesis (and still do) as scholars point to Muslims' religiosity as a resilient factor across generations (Esmer and Pettersson, 2007; Voas and Fleischmann, 2012; Just et al., 2014). This holds even more in non-Muslim societies where Islam is highly politicized and subject of fierce debates. Indeed, scholars have expatiated on how Islam has been (and still is) problematized and framed as an obstacle to Muslims' political integration in West-Europe, stereotyping Muslims as the dangerous Other opposing democracy and western values (Fadil et al., 2015; Said, 1979; Selod, 2018; Cesari, 2014). Being Muslim is thus seen as incompatible with modernity, situating Muslims as outsiders of a modern national imaginary (Fadil et al., 2015; Cesari, 2013; Sinno, 2009). Academic work refers to this othering of Muslims as a form of structural racism, notably Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism (Selod, 2018; de Koning, 2016; Bayrakli and Hafez, 2019).

Questioning the idea of the Muslim-as-the-Other, research has focused on whether Islamic religiosity is positively associated with political participation in western countries. For instance, previous studies have provided evidence of religious indicators (i.e. mosque attendance, religious salience, religious discrimination) to shape the political participation of Muslims. Scholars showed how regular mosque attendance enhances overall political participation in democracies such as the US (Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008; Dana et al. 2011; Jamal 2005; Schoettmer, 2015) and the UK (Oskooii and Dana, 2018; Sobolewska et al., 2015) while scarce research on religious salience does not influence political participation in the US (Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008). As for Europe, exceptional research found a positive effect of worship attendance on both institutionalized and noninstitutionalized participation for all immigrants (i.e., Christians, Muslims), whereas religious salience increases only the noninstitutionalized engagement of second generation Muslims (Just et al., 2014). Furthermore, limited research has shown that religious group discrimination can politicize, but also depoliticize Muslims' noninstitutionalized engagement (Fleischmann et al., 2011; Oskooi, 2016; Finlay and Hopkins, 2020; Najib and Hopkins, 2019).

All in all, systematic analyses assessing the gender differences in Muslims' political participation - and to what extent religious indicators contribute to differences in Muslim men's and women's political behavior – is still lacking (with the exception of Read, 2007). Informed by intersectional theory, this study pays attention to how Muslim men and women in the US are differentially located, differentially identified, and therefore differentially evaluate these locations and identifications shaping their political engagement (Collins, 2019; Crenshaw, 1989). The intersectional approach thus emphasizes studying the

interaction between multiple forms of oppression such as race, gender and religion (Crenshaw, 1991; Collins 2019). It criticizes the essentialist tendency to treat social groups (i.e., women or Muslims) as homogeneous entities with the same specific interests and political behavior (Collins, 2019; Severs et al., 2016:348) while focusing on privileges and disadvantages associated with the various social identities. To put it differently, research has shown that religious dimensions are gendered (Nyhagen, 2019; Trzebiatowska and Bruce, 2012; Perry, 2014; Fraile and Sanchez-Vitores, 2019; Kittilson and Schwindt-Nayer, 2012), but less studies are available on how these gendered differences shape one's political participation. So, more intersectional research is needed to shed light on the specificity and gendered participatory patterns of Muslims, a prime example of a disadvantaged minority group. In contrast to the voting behavior of Muslims (Dancygier, 2017; Azabar and Thijssen, 2021), the legal forms of noninstitutionalized participation, and drivers hereof, have received little scholarly attention (Peucker, 2018; Finlay and Hopkins, 2020). This article therefore aims to answer the following question**:** How do (gender differences in) religious indicators shape Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation?

Drawing on the 2018 ESS-survey, our research addresses this gap by focusing on Muslims in Western Europe (Belgium, Netherlands, France, Italy, Great-Britain and Germany) mainly composed of (descendants of) immigrants of Turkey, Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia) and Pakistan due to labor migration and family reunification. More important, all countries have a wide spread anti-Islam discourse where debates about Muslims' political integration, religious dress restrictions and 'Muslim terrorism' have become mainstream (Cesari, 2013).

We contribute to the growing but still limited systematic literature in several ways. First, we focus on a much-disputed but understudied group, notably Muslim women by scrutinizing (the drivers of) their noninstitutionalized participation. Our intersectional approach thus stresses the interaction between different inequality dimensions such as gender and religion going against essentialist views. In short, applying a more holistic approach, we will study whether different dimensions of religious identity (mosque attendance, religious salience and religious discrimination) affect the noninstitutionalized participation of Muslim men and women. Previous studies have pointed at the gender gap in attitudes and participation without paying attention to intersection i.e., gender and religion of minorities in the West. In our study, we do so. Second, studies on Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation mostly rely on ethnographic data of a more qualitative nature (Harris and Roose, 2014; Peucker, 2018), whereas our study applies a quantitative approach on what shapes the noninstitutionalized engagement of Muslims men and women. Third, we explore to what extent the patterns of political behavior among Muslims in the US are comparable in Europe, where research on the participation of the fastest-growing religious

group is rather limited. Esmer and Pettersson (2007) have pointed to differences concerning views on secularity: religion in the US is more embedded in society compared with a more secularized Western Europe. However, US Muslims are historically, socially and politically differently located compared with Muslims in Europe (i.e, societal norms, welfare state, political system, migration background).

In what follows we provide an overview of scholarly work on the gendered drivers of Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation. We elaborate on data and methods, presenting the intersectional analyses and end with a conclusion on whether gender differences in religiosity impact noninstitutionalized participation of Muslims.

Literature review

Van Deth (2016:3) defines citizens' participation in politics as '*any voluntary, non professional activity concerning government, politics, or the state'*. Ample research refers to a distinction between electoral, or institutionalized participation (e.g. voting, contacting an elected official, being a member of a political party) and non-electoral or noninstitutionalized participation (Barnes et al., 1979; Stockemer, 2014). Regarding the latter, we refer broadly to all forms that are noninstitutionalized, including former 'unconventional' forms (e.g. demonstrations), but excluding illegal acts of civil disobedience or political violence (e.g. occupying building or damaging property).

Both institutionalized and noninstitutionalized participation are seen as 'legitimate' and 'normal' mechanisms to communicate citizens' interests and needs to political decision makers (Norris et al., 2005; Stockemer, 2014; van Deth, 2014). Scholars argue that citizens' participation is crucial for the stability and legitimacy of democracies as people's sense of having a stake in the system makes it possible to channel their demands in legal and peaceful ways, in particular when considering marginalized groups (Just, 2017:2; van Deth, 2016; Verba et al., 1993). Generally, variation in participation is not perceived problematic if it is a free and voluntary choice (Marshall, 1950; Verba et al., 1993). However, concerns do arise when abstention of political engagement is related to systemic individual or group-level characteristics uncovering structural inequalities in society. In this respect, studies have problematized the lower voter turnout and lower political engagement of Muslim minorities compared to the majority group while being underrepresented in elected office (Cesari, 2014; Fraga, 2018).

However, more insights into the drivers of noninstitutionalized participation among disadvantaged groups is needed while "revealing that power works in uneven and differentiated ways" (Misra et al., 2020:3). Intersectionality therefore stresses how interlocking systems of power (e.g., sexism, racism,

classism, heterosexism) are interconnected and should therefore be understood in relation to each other (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 2020). These intersections create unique dynamics affecting one's experiences with inequalities in life. For instance, Muslim women have specific interests, needs and experiences different from women from the majority *and* from Muslim men (see also Crenshaw, 1989). So, to approach them solely as women or solely as Muslims, as if there are no differences within groups is beyond accurate (Azabar and Thijssen, 2021). Similarly, Joly (2017) argued that although the discourse of discrimination in Britain and France affected Muslim men and women alike, Muslim women suffered additionally due to the prevailing prejudices as women of Muslim background. The author demonstrated that Muslim women are positioned within complex relations (i.e., unequal gender relations intersecting with their religious group and majority society) and found obstacles and facilitators governing their capacity to act politically. Finlay and Hopkins (2020) studied how the intersection of gendered Islamophobia, class and the Scottish context shapes Muslim women's engagement. All in all, a growing body of (mostly qualitative) research expressed that being Muslim and women generally results in a marginalized social positioning, where multiple discriminations are highly pertinent in shaping Muslims' women participation (Finlay and Hopkins, 2020; Joly, 2017; Najib and Hopkins, 2019). But to what extent do these differences in religious indicators influence Muslims' non-electoral participation?

In the following sections, we provide an overview of academic research on religious attendance, religious salience (Jamal, 2005; Oskooii and Dana, 2018; Peucker, 2018) and religious discrimination (Oskooii, 2016; Finlay and Hopkins, 2020) stressing the differences alongside gender that could shape Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation. To fully gauge the role of religiosity in Muslims' political participation, studying multiple indicators of integration is necessary to provide a comprehensive overview of how different religiosity dimensions relate to political participation (i.e. Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008; Just et al., 2014) while previous studies focused on either one or two dimensions (Jamal, 2005; Oskooii, 2016).

An overview of religious indicators as drivers of noninstitutionalized participation

Religious behavior

How can religious behavior influence Muslims' noninstitutionalized political participation? Research agrees on two ways notably the institutional and attitudinal effects for the enhancement of political and civic engagement (Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008; Jamal, 2005). First, in line with the idea of civil organizations and institutions as mobilizers, attendance at religious institutions can help increase citizens' civic skills and political efficacy (in particular for those with a lower socio-economic status),

and thus increase noninstitutionalized participation (Brady et al., 1995). Furthermore, religious leaders can also directly encourage adherents to participate politically (Sobolewska et al., 2015). Second, visiting worship places can amplify the group consciousness and sense of group identity that is often needed to get politically involved (Oskooii, 2016; Calhoun-Brown,1996; Brady et al., 1995) in particular when related to politicized minority groups such as Muslims. Joint religious activities at mosques create a strong and visible boundary between the religious in-group and out-group strengthening the idea that Muslims' fate is linked due to shared political concerns, while at the same time clearly visualizing a community of believers – *the Ummah* (Maliepaard and Verkuyten, 2018).

Multiple studies in the US have provided proof of mosque-goers to be politically more active (i.e., protesting, rallying, signing petitions) than those who do not frequently visit mosques (Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008; Dana et al., 2017; Jamal, 2005). For instance, Jamal's examination of American Muslims' political behavior and their levels of political participation showed that mosques operate as '*a mobilization vehicle and school of civic participation'* (Jamal, 2005: 521). Dana et al. (2011:515) further explored whether Muslims themselves perceive mosques as institutions fostering political and social integration: 69% Muslims who never or rarely attended mosques perceived mosques as catalysts, while 88% Muslims who regularly to always attended mosques responded positive. As a consequence, those who are involved in the mosque report to participate significantly more in noninstitutionalized modes of participation (i.e, donating money and attending a community meeting) than those with no connection with mosques. In sum, the overall picture of political engagement of mosque-goers is not one of withdrawal or alienation. However, less systematic research on how mosque attendance influences participation is available in Europe. Not only is religion more imbedded in the United States, the general level of religiosity is also much higher than in Europe where religion (especially Islam) is seen with unease in the public sphere (Cesari, 2014; McAndrew and Sobolewska, 2015).

Just et al. (2014) examined the influence of religious attendance on the general political participation of religious actors (both Christian and Muslim immigrants) relying on European Social Survey data, acknowledging that worship attendance has the capacity to mobilize religious groups. However, the authors have not looked at Muslim groups separately. Sobolewska et al. (2015:287) established that when the religion of ethnic minorities is politicized (i.e. Muslims and Hindu) and Muslims regularly attend religious institutions, Muslims show a higher engagement in political activities. The authors conclude that religious attendance bolsters the psychological resources and a perception of racial prejudice that directly contributes to noninstitutionalized participation. Similarly, Oskooii and Dana (2018) found mosque attendance to enhance political participation compared to Christian adherents. Thus, it seems plausible that the same mechanisms will be at work in the countries under investigation.

McAndrew and Sobolewska (2015) exceptionally did not find evidence of mosque attendance enhancing noninstitutionalized political engagement among Muslims in Great Britain. However, based on the aforementioned studies, we formulate hypothesis 1a as following:

H1a. *Regular mosque attendance will enhance noninstitutionalized participation among Muslims*

Surprisingly, previous research did not account for mosque attendance as a gendered religious practice (with the exception of Read, 2007). Scholars have shown that despite the rise of women participating in mosques, these spaces still remain 'bastions of male dominance' (Gilliat-Ray, 2010:202; Nyhagen, 2019; Jabarkhail, 2020). The prioritization of male space and needs conditions women's participation in the mosque because not all mosques have segregated physical spaces for women as hegemonic Islamic norms require (Ahmed, 1992; Gilliat-Ray, 2010; Jabarkhail, 2020). Additionally, even if mosques have women's groups engaging in mosque activities, they are required to ask for permission of the male dominated mosque boards for any activities they want to pursue. Studies also emphasized how women's engagement with mosques "*represents a complex discursive positioning which simultaneously reproduces and challenges established forms of male power"*, while pointing at Muslim women's political activism beyond mosques (Nyhagen, 2019:2; Nyhagen, 2008).

Although acknowledging the inclusive mosque initiatives (see for an overview Nyhagen, 2019), mosques in general remain characterized by patriarchal gender regimes as the participation of women depends on the willingness of men in the mosque board. For instance, Muslim women attending mosques accept that the imam traditionally has to be a man (Nyhagen, 2019; Jabarkhail, 2020). Van Klingeren and Spierings (2020) recently expatiated on how communal religiosity affects the adoption of progressive gender equality attitudes negatively for Muslim women in Europe, whereas individual religiosity had such an effect on men. The authors ascribe these findings to sermons emphasizing the role of women as caretakers. They conclude that "*the connection between religiosity and gender equality attitudes is highly gendered and not very straightforward"* (2020: 3093). In a similar vein, Glass (2022) reveals that Muslims' support for public-sphere equality and sexual liberation increases, but the support for progressive family roles decreases over time. This could potentially influence political participation of Muslim men and women differently. Accordingly, Read (2007) examined the political engagement of Arab-American Muslims in the US assessing whether and how gender shapes their political activities. Although Muslim men and women both showed high levels of political involvement, the empirical study found mosque attendance in general to positively influence political participation. However, accounting for gender differences, mosque attendance positively influences Muslim men's political engagement, whereas for Muslim women mosque attendance is negatively related to their political participation. She

explains this difference by arguing that frequently attending mosque services teaches Muslim men and women different aspects appropriated to traditional gender roles. In sum, we expect that the effect of mosque attendance of women on noninstitutionalized participation will be different from men.

H1b. *The effect of mosque attendance on noninstitutionalized participation is stronger for Muslim men compared with Muslim women.*

Religious salience

With regard to religious salience, our understanding is much more limited. There are indications that some Muslim subgroups do oppose participation in democratic societies referring to as *haram* (forbidden), although they constitute a minority position among those who belong to Muslim faith (March, 2009). Since the late 1990s, *the fiqh al aqqiliyat* - Islamic jurisprudence for Muslims in non-Muslim states - gained popularity due to contributions of well-known Islamic scholars such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Taha Jabar al-Alwani promoting an Islamic doctrine encouraging Muslims to contribute to the wellbeing of all citizens (Peucker, 2018). Ramadan (2013) even frames Muslims' active citizenship as desirable and expected since it is in line with *"doing good"* as the Quran orders. Muslims should be politically active, not only to defend Muslims' interests but also *"to act for more justice"* (Ramadan, 2013:194). In their political activity, the theologian assists that western Muslims should remain true to the Islamic principles, but in accordance with the realities of life in Western democracies (Schoettmer, 2015). What does empirical research tell us about the nexus between political participation and religious salience? All in all, religious salience seems to show mixed effects, though a difference in conceptualization of religious salience across the studies could (partly) explain the divergent outcomes.

Religious salience - measured as *How important is religion in your life?* - is not significantly correlated with political participation (Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008; Dana et al., 2011) whereas Just et al. (2014) found religious salience to foster participation only for second generation Muslims (Just et al., 2014)[38]. More in-depth qualitative research (Harris and Roose, 2014; Peucker, 2018) on Muslims' motivations uncovers Muslim faith as an important driver for their active citizenship. In a study of Harris and Rose (2014:808), respondents articulated that they had a *"special obligation as Muslims to help others or make the community a better place"*. Accordingly, Peucker (2018) concluded in his research that Muslims perceive their civic and political engagement as a religious duty, whereas others refer to serving the humanity as a salient aspect of being a Muslim. In sum, although not all studies point in the same

[38] Religious beliefs are measured by "How religious are you?"

direction, based on the above-mentioned literature we expect Muslims who report a higher religious salience to be more likely to participate in noninstitutionalized actions.

H2a. *A higher religious salience will enhance noninstitutionalized participation among Muslims*

Interestingly, the impact of gender differences in religious salience on participation is less studied, although multiple studies established women to show a higher level of religiosity than men (Pew research, 2016; Trzebiatowka and Bruce, 2012; Tony and Davie, 1998; Read, 2007). Scholars have explained this religious gender gap due to differences in existential security: women are more vulnerable than men to the hardships of poverty, poor health and physical safety resulting in a higher priority to security and thus religion (Norris and Inglehart, 2008; Voas et al., 2013). In sum, a higher religious salience is associated with political engagement among Muslims; and Muslim women are more religious than Muslim men. However, in our intersectional analyses, we do not expect differences between men and women with regard to the effect of religious salience on political participation. We thus hypothesize that the effect of religious salience on participation will show no differences between Muslim women and Muslim men.

H2b. *The effect of religious salience on noninstitutionalized participation shows no differences between Muslim women and Muslim men.*

Religious discrimination

In a post 9/11 era characterized by an entrenched anti-Islam discourse, Muslims are frequently perceived as a threat to social cohesion and liberal democracy. This othering of Muslims as outsiders of a national imaginary, is perceived as a form of structural racism or Islamophobia (Selod, 2018; de Koning, 2016; Fadil et al., 2015). Several reports state that Islamophobia has even worsened since 9/11, "*if not reaching a tipping point"* referring to a rise in hate crimes and discrimination against Muslims in the domains of education, employment and housing (Bayrakli and Hafez, 2019; EUFRA, 2017; Gündüz, 2010). In addition, Shaheed (2021), UN Special Rapporteur, recently denounced how states have responded to security threats by adopting policies that disproportionately target Muslims. This raises the question to what extent discrimination informs and shapes Muslims' noninstitutionalized engagement.

The few scholars that looked into this, have argued for a nuanced picture of how Muslims' feelings of discrimination influence political behavior. For instance, Oskooii (2016:613) encourages scholars to evaluate the nexus between discrimination and participation more in-depth due to its importance and multidimensionality. He made a distinction between political or institutional discrimination (discriminatory policies or activities by the state) and societal discrimination referring to interpersonal

discrimination, concluding that institutional experienced discrimination heightens political activism. In contrast, discriminatory interactions in public or private setting decreases the likelihood to engage politically. Fleischmann et al. (2011) revealed that discrimination politicizes young Muslims by increasing their willingness to engage in political action for social change. Similarly, McAndrew and Sobolewska (2015) found that those who perceive Muslims as the recipients of prejudice were more engaged in political actions.

We thus expect that Muslims' group discrimination operates as a driver to engage politically. In line with the group-level threat theory (Leighley and Vedlitz, 1999; Oskooii, 2016) Muslims can perceive the growing criticism and negativity towards their religion as a threat to their in-group, which in turn fosters greater political awareness and thus political participation in order to defend groups' interests (Oskooii, 2016; Fleischmann et al., 2011). Shared unequal treatment fosters a sense of commonality translating into political viscidness on a number of specific policy issues (Oskooii, 2016:618). Furthermore, scholars have demonstrated that unfair treatment due to religious background goes hand in hand with a higher awareness of their religious identity, a stronger feeling of belonging and group consciousness which results in a higher political mobilization (Fleischmann et al., 2011; Oskooii, 2016; Phalet et al., 2010). We therefore formulate following hypothesis:

H3a. *Experiencing religious discrimination will enhance noninstitutionalized participation among Muslims*

Recent studies have referred to distinct experiences between Muslim men and women as the latter group experiences multiple discriminations based on intersecting stigmas such as gender, ethnicity and religion, also referred to as gendered Islamophobia (Perry, 2014; Weichelselbaumer, 2019; EUFRA, 2017). Muslim women are rejected and reviled by majority groups on the same basis as all Muslims, yet they are also seen as not fitting in the western ideal of womanhood (Perry, 2014:6; Cesari, 2014). Thus, the intersecting spaces Muslim women occupy, make the religious discrimination they experience distinct from Muslim men, and their experienced gendered violence different from other women (Perry, 2014; Crenshaw, 1989).

Several reports highlight that Muslim women are subjected to a higher rate of discrimination and hate crimes than their male counterparts (EUFRA, 2017; Read, 2007; Bayrakli and Hafez, 2019), i.e., the Islamic veil and dress which makes them easily identifiable as Muslims. Thus, Muslim women bodies have become a political battleground in European countries characterized by religious dress restrictions that have affected women's daily lived experiences. Additionally, previous intersectional studies have criticized the widespread portrayal of Muslim women as lacking a political agency while discussing

obstacles and facilitators governing their capacity to act politically (Joly, 2017; Abu-Lughod, 2013). As we previously hypothesized discrimination to invoke political participation, we expect that the more discrimination experienced the higher the odds to engage in political actions to change the narrative. We thus expect the following:

H3b. *The effect of religious discrimination on noninstitutionalized participation is stronger for Muslim women compared with Muslim men.*

Next to religious indicators, we also pay attention to political attitudes, such as political interest and political trust. Overall, studies reveal that citizens who are less engaged in the political realm show, on average, a lower political interest and political trust. In addition, some studies refer to how women show a lower political interest and trust than men (Fraile and Gomez, 2017; Fraile and Sanchez-Vitores, 2019; Kittilson and Schwindt-Nayer, 2012; Kittilsonn, 2016; Ferrin et al., 2020; Hooghe and Marien, 2013; Campbell and Winters, 2008). This difference in political attitudes can be attributed to a variety of factors i.e., differences in gender roles and socialization patterns arguing that young men are encouraged to be interested in politics, but young women not. Moreover, scholars have stipulated that citizens may opt for noninstitutionalized forms of participation owing to a lack of trust in electoral forms (Hooghe and Stolle, 2004; Hooghe and Marien, 2013; Stolle et al., 2005). In this study we will control for these political items.

Method and data

We consider Muslims living in western democracies as a distinct social category, and we do so for multiple reasons. Muslims in Europe are the fastest-growing and second largest religious group estimated at 4% of the total population in Europe (EUFRA, 2017). However, the exact number of Muslims living in Europe today is difficult to determine, as an official registration of the population's ethnic and religious ties is lacking (Fadil, 2015: 83). Previous studies in Europe mention the high salience of religion for Muslims and a higher rate of religious behavior compared to non-Muslims (Dancygier, 2014; Cesari, 2014; Fleischmann, 2022). Needless to say, that the concept of Muslim refers to a complex and controversial social category. So, we "do not consider 'Muslim' to necessarily indicate a religious identity, but an identity that may have religious, racial, political, or cultural dimensions" (Sinno, 2009:70). Furthermore, a report of the European Agency for Fundamental Rights (2017) demonstrated that Muslims are on average characterized by a low social status: low levels of educational qualification, a limited labor market participation and high degrees of poverty compared to the majority population. Those who have a job are employed in low qualified and low paid jobs (EUFRA, 2017).

Together with an anti-Islam discourse, debates on the role of religion and Muslims' (political) integration are mainstream on the political agenda in Europe.

To address what shapes and informs the noninstitutionalized participation of Muslims, we use the most recent wave of the European Social Survey (ESS) – 2018 (round 9). This project is well known as it contains rich data measuring respondents' religiosity and different forms of political participation thoroughly. In addition, the survey is conducted in an identical manner focusing on a broad range of European countries facilitating comparative studies (Just et al., 2014:132). We therefore selected six West-European countries with sufficient data on Muslim respondents to conduct statistical analyses. Additionally, in all countries a similar anti-Islam discourse characterized by debates about Muslims' political integration, religious dress restrictions and "Muslim terrorism" has become mainstream (Bayrakli and Hafez, 2019). Respondents were coded as Muslims if they responded to belong to Islam as religion.

Dependent variable - For the dependent variable, the following question was posed: *There are different ways in trying to improve things in (country) or help prevent things from going wrong. During the last 12 months, have you done any of the following?* The noninstitutionalized modes of participation we account for are *signed a petition, taken part in lawful public demonstration, worked in an organization or association, wore a campaign badge or sticker, boycotted certain products* and *posted or shared anything about politics online* (Cronbach's alpha= 0.7). We further construct a dichotomous variable referring to respondents who have not participated (noninstitutionalized participation=0) and those who have participated in "at least one noninstitutionalized political activity in the past 12 months" (noninstitutionalized participation=1).

Independent variables - We rely on three survey items to measure our main independent variables concerning religion, notably respondents' religious attendance, religious salience and religious discrimination. First, religious attendance is measured using the following question: *Apart from special occasions such as weddings and funerals, how often do you attend religious services nowadays*? Responses were recoded from 1 (every day) to 7 (never) to 1 (never) and 7 (every day). Muslim men attend worship places the most frequent: 48% Muslim men report to attend mosques every day to weekly compared with only 30% women ($t=7.043$, $df=1141$, $p<0.001$).

Second, self-reported religious salience of Muslim respondents – *How religious are you? (*0-10) - shows a mean of 7.4 (s=2.28). Moreover, half of Muslim respondents have indicated that religion is very important (value 8 to 10). Muslim women seem to self-report a higher religious salience than Muslim men, albeit at the 0.1 level ($t=-1.326$, $df=1120$, $p<0.1$). These descriptive results confirm previous

studies on the salience of Muslims' faith (Cesari 2014; Dancygier, 2014), and Muslim women in particular (Pew Research, 2016; Trzebiatowka and Bruce, 2012).

Next our independent variable gauging religious discrimination. To gauge religious discrimination, we rely on the following question in the survey *On what grounds is your group discriminated against*? Among Muslims, 26% experienced religious based discrimination and were coded as religious discrimination=1, otherwise 0. Muslim women reported religious discrimination significantly more than Muslim men (29% compared to 23%, Cramer's V= 0.11; $p<0.05$).

Control variables We control for a range of variables successfully identified as significant predictors of noninstitutionalized political participation. The literature on political participation is quite extensive, so we limit our set of control variables to the main empirical contributions. The first set relates to socio-demographics variables: gender (0=male, 1=female), age as a continuous variable, education measured in three categories (1=low educated, 2=middle educated, 3= high educated) and feeling about household income (1= very difficult, 2= difficult, 3= coping, 4= living comfortably) as we expect more resources will mobilize Muslims (Ayers and Hofstetter 2008; Oskooii and Dana 2018; Inlgehart, 1977; Read, 2007). We also control for respondents born in the country or not (no=0, yes=1) as a proxy for second generation Muslims. Being born in the country could point to language proficiency and citizenship status which on their turn affect participation positively (Just et al. 2014; Read, 2007). A second set of variables focuses on the political attitudes of Muslim respondents. Political trust is measured as the sum score of three measurements of trust notably *trust in the parliament* (0-10), *trust in politicians* (0-10) and *trust in politics* (0-10) (Cronbach's alpha=0.89). Comparing between Muslim men and women, we find no significant differences in political trust. We furthermore take political interest into account (1=not at all interested, 2 =hardly interested, 3= quite interested, 4= very interested) as a salient predictor of political engagement. Muslim men seem to be more interested in politics than Muslim women ($t=2.224$, $df=114$, $p<0.05$). Lastly, a fixed control for countries is applied (1=Belgium, 2= Germany, 3= Netherlands, 4=United Kingdom, 5=Italy, 6= France). In all analyses, we used weighting as suggesting by the ESS Weighting Guide to account for differences in population size across countries[39].

[39] The used weighting variable corrects for differential selection probabilities within each country as specified by sample design, for nonresponse, for noncoverage, and for sampling error related to the four post-stratification variables, and takes into account differences in population size across countries.

Findings

Descriptive results

We weighted the data to account for differences in population size across countries. Our Muslim sample (N= 484) consists of 56% men and 44% women. With regard to our dependent variable, Muslim women (47%) report a higher participation rate, than Muslim men (39%) (Cramers' V=0.080, p<0.01). Among the different modes of Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation, *boycotting certain products* (20%), *signing petitions* (20%) and *posting/sharing anything about politics online* (18%) were the most popular, followed by *working for an organization or association* (12%). Lastly, the least performed political activity among Muslims were *wearing a campaign badge or sticker* (8%) and *participating in a demonstration* (6%). We also looked at gendered differences as intersecting identities could shape the nature of political actions performed by Muslim men and women (see Table 1). We performed cross-tabulation analysis to test whether gender differences occur among Muslims. Muslim women seem to use social media for political reasons significantly more than Muslim men. Furthermore, Muslim women demonstrate significantly less than their male counterparts. Research suggests that this is because women don't always feel safe in public spaces compared with men (Valentine, 1990; Finlay and Hopkins, 2020; Najib and Hopkins, 2019).

Table 1 Different forms of noninstitutionalized participation by Muslim men and women (N=484)

	Muslims (N=484)*	
	Muslim men	**Muslim women**
	(N=272)	**(N=212)**
Boycotting certain products	19%	21%
Signing petitions	20%	21%
Posting/sharing anything about politics online	**15%**	**22%**
Working for an organization or association	**14%**	**10%**
Wearing a campaign badge or sticker	9%	8%
Participating in a demonstration	**8%**	**4%**

**The perceentages in bold point to significant geder differences among Muslims*

Multivariate analyses

In what follows, we will present a stepwise model with only religious variables (Model 1), the second model with sociodemographic variables added (Model 2) and the third model accounting for political attitudes (Model 3) for Muslims in general. In Model 4 we present the model with interactions. All models showed a good fit and were tested for multicollinearity (VIF<3).

We hypothesized to find a positive effect due to the bulk of studies in the US and UK stating that mosque attendance fosters political participation (H1a). Additionally, religious salience (H2a) and religious discrimination (H3a) are expected to foster noninstitutionalized participation among Muslims. Remarkably, Model 1 shows Muslims who visit mosques more often, are more likely to participate less ($B=-0.22$, $p<0.01$) going against our expectations and previous studies in the US (Jamal, 2005; Oskooii and Dana,). Religious salience indicates a positive and significant effect ($B=0.13$, $p<0.05$) related to noninstitutionalized participation. Although religious discrimination shows the highest coefficient ($B=0.53$), it shows a significance at the 0.1 level. In Model 2, with sociodemographic variables added, we find no significant effects for resources such as a higher education and income fostering participation. Gender, age and born in the country (a proxy for second generation) also do not reveal any significant effects. Because of institutional constraints, ethnoreligious minorities can be hampered to vote due to a lack of citizenship, however this obstacle is less prevalent when considering noninstitutionalized participation thus possibly explaining the non-significance of born in the country. With regard to the religious indicators, mosque attendance ($B=-0.15$, $p<0.1$) and religious salience ($B=0.12$, $p<0.1$) both show a small significant effect, albeit at the 0.1 level. The results indicate that Muslims who are highly religious are more likely to participate as we have hypothesized (H2a). Frequent mosque-goers are more likely to not participate, which goes against our hypothesis (H1a). In addition, experiencing discrimination does not heighten nor lower the odds to participate in nonelectoral participation.

Lastly, in Model 3, we test whether Muslims' political attitudes affect noninstitutionalized participation. We indeed find an effect for political interest positively related to noninstitutionalized participation: Muslims who are hardly, quite or very interested in politics are more likely to participate compared with Muslims who are not at all interested in politics. For political trust, we do not find a significant effect on political participation. Although religious attendance still shows a negative effect, it is not significant. We thus reject H1a expecting Muslims who frequently go to mosques, to be more likely to participate. In the same vein, for Muslims experiencing religious discrimination, we do not find an effect (H3a). However, in our last model, highly religious Muslims are more likely to participate in nonelectoral forms of participation ($B=0.17$; $p<0.05$), confirming hypothesis 2a. Furthermore, political interest shows a

significant effect explaining Muslims' likelihood to participate in noninstitutionalized activities compared with Muslims who are not at all interested in politics. Interestingly, resources such as education and income seem to not influence nonelectoral participation of Muslims. In Model 3, there are no significant differences between Muslims living in Germany, Italy and UK compared with Belgium whereas Muslims in the Netherlands and France are more likely to participate in nonelectoral activities than Belgian Muslims.

Table 2 *Logistic regression to explain Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation (N=484)*

	Model 1	**Model 2**	**Model 3**
	B (S.E.)	B (S.E.)	B (S.E.)
Constant	-0.44 (0.46)	-1.37 (0.96)	-2.16 (1.08)*
Religious indicators			
Religious attendance	-0.22 (0.08)**	-0.15 (0.09)+	-0.13 (0.09)
Religious salience	0.14 (0.06)*	0.13 (0.07)+	0.17 (0.07)*
Religious discrimination	0.51 (0.32)+	0.40 (0.35)	0.26 (0.34)
Country			
Germany		0.62 (0.40)	0.48 (0.46)
The Netherlands		0.94 (0.41)*	0.92 (0.45)*
UK		-0.29 (0.50)	-0.15 (0.49)
Italy		-0.92 (0.49)	-0.73 (0.53)
France		0.81 (0.34)*	0.92 (0.38)*
Sociodemoghraphics			
Gender		0.01 (0.30)	0.21 (0.32)
Age		0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)
Born in country		0.13 (0.31)	0.18 (0.31)
Education			
Middle		0.16 (0.34)	0.15 (0.35)
high		0.52 (0.39)	0.24 (0.40)
Feeling about households' income			
Coping			
Comfortably		-0.04 (0.66)	-0.10 (0.64)
VERY COMFORTABLE		0.03 (0.63)	0.09 (0.62)
		0.91 (0.67)	0.88 (0.66)
Political attitudes			
Political interest			
Hardly			0.66 (0.50)
Quite			1.85 (0.51)***
Very			2.01 (0.66)**

Political trust			-0.04 (0.02)
AIC	***492***	***476***	***452***

*Significance levels p<0.001***, p<0.01**, p<<0.05*, p<0.1+. Weighted. Reference category a) low education b) not at all interested c) difficult d) Belgium*

As previously stated, intersectional analyses could improve our understanding of gendered political patterns among Muslims. As Muslim men and women have shown differences in religious predictors owing to their different social locations, this could impact Muslim men's and women's noninstitutionalized participation. Table 3 presents the results of our full model with interactions to analyze whether gendered differences with regard to the main explanatory variables influence noninstitutionalized participation of Muslims.

Interestingly, the effect for the interaction between Religious attendance and Gender is negative (B= -0.03-0.22= -0.25) however, the effect is not significant. We therefore have to reject H1b suggesting that mosque attendance has a stronger effect on Muslim men's participation compared with Muslim women. One could argue that if Muslim women participate in mosque activities, a spillover effect is present which clarifies that they do not participate less compared with their male counterparts. Next, we expected no difference between Muslim women and Muslim men with regard to the effect of religious salience on noninstitutionalized participation (H2b). Indeed, the interaction effect *Religious salience X Gender* is nonsignificant. Lastly, the interaction effect *Religious discrimination x Gender* shows a negative effect for Muslim women experiencing discrimination, but it is - against our expectations - nonsignificant, we therefore cannot confirm H3b. Our overall results studying intersectionality (i.e., gender and religion), do not show differences of effects of religious indicators on participating in nonelectoral activities. However, our previous descriptive findings do show that Muslim women and Muslim men rather differ in nature of activities (i.e., respectively use of social media and demonstrations).

Table 3 *Logistic regression to explain Muslims' gendered noninstitutionalized participation (N=484)*

	Model 4
	B (S.E.)
Constant	-2.29 (1.15)*
Religious indicators	
Religious attendance	-0.03 (0.11)
Religious salience	0.09 (0.09)
Religious discrimination	0.52 (0.49)
Country	
Germany	0.48 (0.45)
The Netherlands	0.90 (0.47)+
UK	-0.19 (0.50)
Italy	-0.66 (0.54)
FRANCE	0.96 (0.38)*
Sociodemoghraphics	
Gender	-0.25 (0.99)
Age	-0.00 (0.01)
Born in country	0.25 (0.32)
Education	
Middle	0.18 (0.36)
High	0.22 (0.40)
Feeling about households' income	
Difficult	-0.01 (0.66)
Coping	0.10 (0.65)
Comfortably	0.84 (0.68)
Political attitudes	
Political interest	
Hardly	0.71 (0.49)
Quite	1.86 (0.51)**
VERY	2.04 (0.66)*
Political trust	-0.02 (0.03)
INTERACTIONS	
Religious attendance X GENDER	-0.22 (0.19)
Religious salience X GENDER	0.18 (0.14)
Religious discrimination X GENDER	-0.46 (0.71)
AIC	**455**

*Significance levels p<0.001***, p<0.01**, p<<0.05*, p<0.1+. Weighted. Reference category a) low education b) not at all interested c) difficult d) Belgium*

Conclusion and discussion

This study scrutinized the (gendered) participatory patterns of Muslims, focusing on religious indicators in a less studied context, notably West-Europe, in a quantitative manner. Overall, our findings show that religion and political attitudes help to explain the noninstitutionalized participation of Muslims.

First, we revealed that, mosque attendance seems to dampen Muslims' likelihood to participate in noninstitutionalized forms of participation, whereas religious salience enhances participation for Muslims in general. Thus, the more frequent Muslims visit mosques, the less likely they will participate in noninstitutionalized activities. Second, the higher the self-reported religious salience, the higher the likelihood to participate in noninstitutionalized activities. The latter is in line with qualitative research describing how Muslims respondents are inspired by Muslim faith to do good for the community (see Peucker, 2018). Interestingly, religious discrimination does not explain the likelihood of Muslims to participate. This could be explained by how Islamophobia has many effects, notably not only invoking but also decreasing Muslims' participation. More research is needed to disentangling Islamophobia and impact hereof on Muslims' resistance practices.

Our intersectional analyses show no differences of the gendered religious indicators explaining Muslims' political participation. Although the interaction effects of religious attendance and religious discrimination show negative coefficients for Muslim women, these are not significant. We expected Muslim women to benefit less of mosque attendances as they are not members of the mosque board, and thus would benefit less of the skills compared with Muslim men, and also because they are more perceived as caretakers for children. Second, Muslim women are more visible as Muslim and as women, thus we expected them to be more vulnerable to explicit discrimination (i.e. racism and sexism) and therefore would participate more. However, both hypothesis are rejected. Lastly, the hypothesis suggesting that the effect of the religious salience of Muslim men and women on political participation is not different, can be confirmed. The effects of sociodemographic variables do not show any significant differences which can be interesting, as previous research has stated that education, and income foster participation. We do not find evidence hereof explaining Muslims' noninstitutionalized engagement. In addition, whether you are born in the country (a proxy for second generation Muslims) does not drive noninstitutionalized participation. Due to institutional constraints, ethnoreligious minorities could not engage in voting, while no such barriers are present when engaging in other political acts. Lastly, Muslims' participation in Western Europe seems to be similar across countries. The few country

differences found, notably Muslims in the Netherlands and France are more likely to engage with noninstitutionalized activities than Belgian Muslims, deserve further attention.

Naturally, our study has some limitations. We were unable to assess whether Muslims of all migration backgrounds would show similar results. Following intersectional theory, differences could occur however less research is available scrutinizing the role of race/ethnicity. Jamal (2005) pointed to the effect of religious attendance to differ among Muslim subgroups. For instance, for Arab-American Muslims, mosques performed as sites of political enhancement, whereas mosques had no effect on South Asian Muslims. Muslims are a heterogenous group with different migration backgrounds and thus different democratic experiences and views. How these experiences relate to noninstitutionalized participation could be subject of follow-up research. Secondly, research that provide in-depth insights explaining the different dynamics of mosque attendance in the US and West-Europe are encouraged. To what extent does the role of religion in society or the historical background of establishing mosques in the West explain the divergence in mosque attendance? Furthermore, due to the scant research on the impact of religious salience, more research to clarify when, for who and how religion matters is needed. Are Muslims inspired by the Islamic doctrines endorsed by theologians or are there other mechanisms at play?

Lastly, although ESS-data aims to meet the high standards of data collection, we acknowledge that there are limits in reaching a representative Muslim sample in Europe. Moreover, the exact number of Muslims in most European countries is difficult to determine, as there is no official registration of the population's ethnic and religious ties. More attempts to achieve reliable quantitative data on Muslims in order to scrutinize whether their voices are been heard in secular democracies are - without a doubt - a must. We hope this study provides a fruitful starting point to tackle these intriguing follow-up questions to better understand a growing but often contested religious minority in Western democracies.

CHAPTER

06

Muslims in Belgium ‘talk back’:
Claiming visibility and presence through counterpublics

Chapter 6

Muslims in Belgium 'talk back':
Claiming visibility and presence through counterpublics

Abstract

Previous studies focused on how Muslims' racial experiences are situated within race scholarship, however less research is available on how Muslims challenge the discourse that marginalizes them. This paper addresses how Muslims 'talk back' (hooks, 1989) by exploring (1) the forms of noninstitutionalized participation Muslims engage with, and (2) what shapes these noninstitutionalized political activities. Drawing on findings from seventeen in-depth interviews conducted with self-identifying Muslims in Flanders (Belgium), I find Muslims participating in a myriad of ways to resist processes of (spatial) Othering. Second, Muslims talking back is being shaped by a complex interplay of family socialization, Islamic faith and Islamophobia, thus generating 'subaltern counterpublics', hereby challenging the hegemonic assumptions of public spaces as white, masculine and secular. The findings highlight Muslims' political agency and engagement opposing the notion of the secular public sphere and its embeddedness in the nation state as part of a politics of belonging.

Keywords*: Muslims, talk back, counterpublics, Islam, Islamophobia, political agency,*

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Introduction

"If we [Muslims] stay on the sideline, nothing will change. They [dominant group] will keep talking about us, and not with us. Muslims therefore must be involved in politics."

(Houssein, 29y)

In a post-9/11 era, Islamic faith has undisputedly become the key site for the demarcation of boundaries between the majority population and Muslim minorities across western Europe. This is reflected in public discourses portraying Muslims as Europe's ultimate Other while framing Islam as an obstacle to Muslims' political integration in secular West-Europe, even before 9/11 (Statham and Tillie, 2016; Ahmed and Matthes, 2016; Fadil et al., 2015; Said, 1979; Cesari, 2014; Ismail, 2008; Islam, 2020). Schinkel (2018:2) identifies this dominant discourse as 'part and parcel of the problematization of immigrants and their children, and hence it becomes intricately tied to racist discourses and practices'. Indeed, this discourse has facilitated restrictions on Muslims' religious practices in public spaces. For instance, Belgium was among the first countries in Europe to adopt a legal ban of face covering (burqa) and to pursue a general ban on veils in public schools and (parts of) the labor market i.e. city officials in urban cities (Brems, 2020; Mescoli, 2019). Next to these exclusionary policies, reports show how Muslims are victims of Islamophobia (or anti-Muslim racism) in domains of employment, education and housing (Bayrakli and Hafez, 2019; Günduz, 2010) pushing Muslims into the marginal spaces of society.

An exploration of how Muslims challenge this marginalization and what shapes their political resistance is therefore useful because political participation is an indispensable feature of democracy deemed crucial for its legitimacy and stability (Cesari, 2014; Peucker, 2016:2). Scholars have stressed the incorporation of marginalized minority groups as one of the major tasks faced by contemporary democracies to avoid 'the tyranny of the majority' (Verba et al.,1995; Fraser, 1990; hooks, 1989). Accordingly, citizens can communicate their needs and interests to political decision-makers and beyond through institutionalized and non-institutionalized engagement, as both are perceived as 'legitimate' and 'normal' mechanisms (Norris et al., 2005). As multiple research has been conducted on Muslims' electoral participation in Belgium (self-citation omitted, 2021; 2022; Zibouh, 2014), this paper will address Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation posing following research questions: Which forms of noninstitutionalized participation do Muslims engage with? (RQ1) And second, what shapes these noninstitutionalized political activities (RQ2)?

This paper thus contributes to the growing but limited literature (O'Loughlin and Gillespie, 2012; Van Es, 2019) on how Muslims challenge the discourse and practices through which they are marginalized (see exceptions Peucker, 2018; 2021; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Van Es, 2019; Najib and Hopkins, 2019). This political resistance is interpreted as a process of spatial reorientation where Muslims aim to move into more public and visible spaces – through political acts - not only as a response to Islamophobia pushing them into the marginal spaces of society (Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Najib and Hopkins, 2019; van den Bogert, 2021) but also as a way of making Muslim spaces dismissing the image of Muslims as outsiders (see Sunnier, 2021; Chiodelli, 2015; Najib and Hopkins, 2019).

Drawing on hooks' talking back (1989) and Fraser's counterpublics (1990), this article accounts for the intersecting power dynamics and hegemonic discourses that marginalize Muslims. As Fraser (1990) criticizes public spheres characterized by patriarchy and classism, hooks (1989) – as a Black woman – also accounts for racism. Nevertheless, both scholars stress how the dominated are not powerless, and thus able to resist – but not annihilate - domination. hooks (1989), an intersectional scholar, refers to talking back as to 'make oneself heard' in the political arena and to seek inclusion to participate on equal terms as others (hooks, 1989). Similarly, Fraser (1990) has pointed at subaltern counterpublics as spaces constructed by subordinated groups in response to the experienced exclusion from the public sphere. Indeed, the Habermasian public sphere rooted in the Enlightenment has been applauded, but also criticized because the mainstream enjoys privileges, discriminating against other groups (i.e. women, Black women, Muslims) through a normative construction of the public sphere as masculine, white and secular (Muller et al., 2021; van den Bogert, 2021; Fadil, 2013).

Throughout the paper, I adopt a sociological definition of 'being Muslim', so I "do not consider Muslim to necessarily indicate a religious identity, but an identity that may have religious, racial, political, or cultural dimensions" (Sinno, 2009:70). To put it more clearly, citizens who self-identify as Muslims are defined as such. In the following sections, I elaborate on the concepts talking back and subaltern counterpublics, review the literature on Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation and dwell on the method and data. I end with a conclusion and discussion on the challenges of Muslims engaging with the politics of belonging.

Literature review

Talking back and subaltern counterpublics in racialized societies

The scholarly work of hooks (1989) and Fraser (1990) provides a better understanding of oppression, but also offers theoretical frameworks on how the marginalized (i.e. (Black) women) challenge the existing oppressive hierarchies. hooks' work (1989) centres around (theorized) personal experiences in private and public spaces where she, as a Black woman, was ordered to keep silent whether in family, communities or societal context. She expatiates on 'talking back' as speaking as an equal to those in power and thus 'an act of resistance, a political gesture challenging the politics of domination that would render us [the marginalized] nameless and voiceless' (hooks, 1989:8). Being silenced, and thus not being heard, is to be pushed to the margins of society, a society where the illusion of free speech reigns according to hooks (1989).

In a similar vein, Fraser (1990:57) criticized Habermas' notion of the public sphere - depicted as bourgeois and masculinist – because it not only rested upon, but was characterized by significant exclusions (in particular gender and class) although Habermas conceptualized the public sphere as accessible and open. The feminist author rejects Habermas' notion of interlocutors deliberating as if they were social and economic equals, implying that social equality is not a necessary condition for political democracy (Fraser, 1990). Previous scholarly work established how political equality is considered to be intrinsic to democracy, implying that all citizens should have an equal opportunity to influence the decision-making processes through which policies are formed, in particular when they are subjected to these policies (Verba et al., 1985; hooks, 1989; Holm, 2019; Fraser, 1990). Fraser expatiates how excluding social groups from the public sphere invokes the formation of competing counterpublics, stressing that there never was one single unitary public only conflictual and antagonistic publics (Kampourakis, 2016). Although hooks (1989) and Fraser (1989, 1990) do not explicitly include Muslims talking back or counterpublics, surely these concepts encompass the possibility.

In this line, scholars (Ismail, 2008; Göle, 2002, Fadil et al., 2015; Fadil, 2013) have highlighted how debates about Islam in West-Europe take place assuming the white, masculine and secular nature of the public sphere as an achieved consensus (Muller et al., 2021; van den Bogert, 2021; Fadil, 2013), therefore silencing Muslims by neglecting their needs and interests. Göle (2002:178) points to the 'unspoken implicit borders and the stigmatizing exclusionary power structure of the secular public sphere' problematizing Muslims' self-representation and visibility of Islam in the public sphere. Accordingly, Ismail (2008:25) criticized how subjects of the public sphere are presumed to be rational,

non-marked, equal and universal referring to the underlying premises of neutrality and equality invoking the idea that the secular public sphere needs to be defended against what is perceived as Muslims' excessive claims. Similarly, Sunnier (2021) argues that – in many policy reports - Islam is conceived as a foreign trait (i.e. migrants' religious baggage) which explains why requests or initiatives to make space for Islam are considered not conducive for integration (see also Griera and Burchart, 2021).

This article expands the criticism to assumptions of the public sphere not only dominated by gender (i.e. masculinist), race (white) and class (bourgeois) but also by non-religion (i.e. secular), and thus sanctioning particular subjects and invalidating others. This approach requests an intersectional lens, notably accounting for how social inequalities occur along different intersecting axes such as race, gender, religion and class revealing the multiple inequalities people encounter (Crenshaw,1991; Severs et al., 2016, hooks, 1989). To remedy these complex political inequalities, both scholars (hooks, 1989; Fraser, 1990) interpret exclusion and marginality as a site of radical resistance, generating (multiple) counter-hegemonic discourses. While hooks (1989:9) urges people to construct a new language understood as an 'oppositional discourse', Fraser (1990:67) speaks of the formation of subaltern counterpublics as spaces "where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counterdiscourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs". As one is a member of multiple social groups, one can also be part of multiple counterdiscourses stressing self- identification and self-representation as 'the expression of movement from object to subject – the liberated voice' (hooks, 1989). Fraser (1990) also points to a nexus of multiple publics - of which some are dominant and others subordinated - competing to advocate their interests and needs to wider audiences. So, subaltern counterpublics can be perceived as beneficial to those who are excluded to withdraw and organize (i.e. to formulate interests and needs), but also as a way to have a voice in societies characterized by inequality (i.e. to direct those interests and needs towards wider publics), and thus talk back (Fraser, 1990:68; hooks, 1989; Holm, 2019).

Scholarly work on Muslims' political engagement and the role of Islam and Islamophobia

Previous studies sought to explain the structural exclusion of Muslims through a wide-spread racialized discourse stereotyping Muslims as the dangerous Other, and thus a threat to secular western democracies (Fadil et al., 2015; Said, 1979; Selod, 2018; De Koning, 2016). Accordingly, the alleged incompatibility of Islam with secular and liberal democratic principles (and thus modernity) has become a common argument in the public rhetoric to legitimize an Islamophobic agenda rejecting Muslims as full members of the society (Selod, 2018, Peucker, 2018; 2021; Mescoli, 2019). This is reflected in how new socio-

geographical realities (i.e, the growing presence and visibility of Muslim shops, mosques, halal restaurants) but also the demographic growth and presence of (visible) Muslim bodies navigating through public spaces stir a number of controversies related to Muslims' space making (Fadil et al., 2015; Chiodelli, 2015; Sunnier, 2021; Najib and Hopkins, 2021; Najib, 2021; van den Bogert, 2021; Griera and Burchart, 2021).

Belgium is no exception herein (Mescoli, 2019; Fadil et al., 2015) as anti-Muslim feelings are widespread and more intense than anti-foreigner feelings (Spruyt and Elchardus, 2012). In a 2018 Ipsos survey, 35% Belgians stated that Muslims are part of the national community while 40% answered negative and 27% responded 'not sure' (Ipsos, 2018). In this perspective, scholars stress how Muslims are accused of being alien bodies to the nation , or as Puwar (2004) mentions 'space invaders', and burdened with the demand of integration and assimilation showing the unequal relation between Muslims and the dominant majority (Bracke and Hernandez Aguilar, 2021; Sunnier, 2021). In a similar vein, van Es (2019:149) established that even when Muslims speak, for instance to denounce violent extremism, the dominant majority seems to believe Muslims should take greater efforts to gain trust from the non-Muslim majority. The author concludes that the main responsibility for removing prejudices and suspicions of the dominant majority lies with Muslims. Moreover, the rising success of nationalist and radical right parties in Belgium, together with restrictive policies concerning Muslim practices (e.g. the ban on head scarves at schools and the burqa in public places, the ban on religious slaughter) speak volumes (Brems, 2020).

Scholarly literature is therefore emerging on the repertoire of Muslims' noninstitutionalized political participation defined as 'any voluntary, nonprofessional activity concerning government, politics, or the state' (Van Deth, 2016:3). Much of this scholarship established how Muslims are politically engaged in a variety of modes of participation (e.g. boycott, demonstrations, petitions) to challenge the exclusion of Muslims (Mustafa, 2015; Finlay and Hopkins, 2019; Peucker, 2018; 2021). Recent studies have elaborated on modes of political engagement initiated by young Muslims, referring to 'new grammars of action' (O'Toole and Gale, 2013)[40] and a 'Do-It-Yourself citizenship' (Harris and Roose, 2014). O'Toole and Gale (2013) found evidence of young Muslims working rather ad hoc with political institutions, but merely to achieve their goals while gradually moving towards more personal and informal political actions. Furthermore, young Muslims deploy social media, blogs and other creative

ways such as music and poems to express their political views as equal participants in a collective space that they can control (Martiniello, 2018; Harris and Roose, 2014).

Previous (quantitative) studies on what shapes Muslims' nonelectoral participation established religiosity as a mobilization vehicle in overall political participation such as voting, but also boycotting, donating money and demonstrating on the streets. Religiosity, measured in mosque attendance and religious beliefs, has the capacity to mobilize Muslims due to the acquirement of skills and a group consciousness heightening their participation (Jamal, 2005; Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008; Oskooii and Dana, 2018). To put it differently, US Muslims who attend mosques more often, and identify themselves as highly religious participate more in non-electoral actions. Qualitative research further established how Islamic faith engages Muslims to do good and contribute to Muslim communities as well as the society at large as they perceive this attitude as a fundamental aspect of lived religiosity (Peucker, 2016, 2018; 2021). In addition, faith provides a sense of belonging and moral meaning to the life Muslim citizens lead, which undoubtedly inspires also their political behavior as citizen. In this regard, Mustafa (2015:102) revealed that Islam can be perceived as inherently supporting an active citizenship because it urges Muslims to belong and to contribute to the community and society they are part of. Islam functions thus as a set of guiding principles about values, culture and ethics in daily life shaping Muslims' worldview. These studies offer a counter-narrative to the allegedly hampering effects of Islamic faith on Muslims' citizenship in liberal democracies.

Secondly, studies have focused on the ramifications of Islamophobia as it 'fundamentally contradicts with the core principles of substantive equality and full citizenship for all in a liberal democracy' (Peucker, 2021:25; Finley and Hopkins, 2019; Mescoli, 2019). Interestingly, Oskooii (2016) found that structural discrimination motivates Muslims to 'talk back' in order to engender change whereas interpersonal discrimination decreases the likelihood to engage politically. Mustafa (2015:109) referred to Muslims' participation as a form of 'psychological needs to express their frustrations and anger'. Accordingly, Torrekens' study (2013) described how Muslims raised their voices through petitions and negotiated urban spaces after local authorities in Brussels invoked procedural and administrative criteria to deny certain demands, pushing them to marginal spaces of society. Sayyid (2010) refers to these exclusionary practices as an externalization of Islamophobia: a racist practice that aims to stifle and contain an engagement with politics informed by an Islamic discourse. Relying on Foucault's notion of resistance, Finlay and Hopkins (2020:560) describe Muslims' actions as a way to 'gain control of their identities' and 'resist how hegemonic powers seek to control them'. In the same vein, Van Es (2019) studied Muslim women who monitored their everyday interactions to break negative stereotypes about Muslim women, acting as 'ambassadors' of Islam. Although Islamophobia can engender powerful forms

of resistance, studies also refer to how it can marginalize Muslims' political agency as injustices perceived by Muslims can increase fear for public space owing to an expected hostility, thus limiting Muslims' mobility (Finlay and Hopkins, 2020:564; Peucker, 2021; Najib and Hopkins, 2019). Furthermore, scholars have found that Muslims, who were pushed out of public spaces due to a ubiquitous securitization agenda, made them sometimes retreat into Muslim only spaces as alternative and safe spaces (O'Loughlin and Gillespie 2012; Mustafa, 2015; Peucker, 2019; Najib and Hopkins, 2019).

What follows is a brief description of Flanders as research context before elaborating on the findings because political behavior 'is largely determined by the social context of which you are part of' while at the same time 'contributing to it and affecting others' (Mustafa, 2015:13).

Flanders (Belgium) as research context

The Muslim population of Belgium is estimated at 7,6% of the total population (Pew research center, 2017) mostly residing in urban areas of Flanders and Brussels[41]. The majority of Muslims are guest workers and their offspring from Morocco and Turkey gradually transformed to a new religious and cultural minority settled in Belgium (Fadil et al., 2015). Whilst migration has always been part of human history, it remains one of society's most controversial topics resulting in the popularity of anti-migration parties at recent national elections in Europe. For instance, in Flanders (Belgium), the nationalist party (NV-A) and the radical right party Vlaams Belang, have persuaded almost half of Flemish voters at the national elections of 2019.

Second, Islam is an officially recognized religion in Belgium, however not prompted by 'any idea of accommodating Islam but by Belgium's diplomatic interests' to secure oil contracts with Saudi Arabia (Torrekens, 2015: 156). However, due to this recognition, Muslims may enjoy benefits such as financial support of the government and teaching of Islam in public schools. Yet paradoxically, restrictions on Muslims' religious practices are present such as religious dress restrictions, an embargo on religious slaughter and barriers to officially (and thus financially) recognize mosques (OSF, 2011; Zemni, 2012; Brems, 2020). Moreover, Belgium is among the worst performers in Europe when it comes to education and employment of non-European migrants, the group to which most Muslims belong (Brems, 2020). Generally, Muslims in Belgium belong to the working class, have low skill levels and work in poor

conditions for low wages in precarious jobs. Studies on poverty also show a higher poverty risk for citizens with a non-European migration (48%) background compared to native Belgians (12%) which ultimately affects Muslims' wellbeing (Fadil *et al*., 2015). In sum, Muslims find themselves on the short end in multiple domains requesting research on how Muslims aim to better their position through political participation.

Method and data

This study is part of a larger project studying Muslims' political agency against the background of a racialized environment, notably Belgium where the public debate around Muslims is characterized by exclusion and hostility towards Muslims (Mescoli, 2019; Fadil et al., 2015). The project entails a more comprehensive overview of Muslims' political participation, through the study of both institutionalized and noninstitutionalized political participation (and beyond). This particular study focuses on the latter examining (1) the forms of noninstitutionalized participation initiated by Muslims, and (2) what shapes these forms of noninstitutionalized political engagement.

I conducted 17 in-depth interviews with Muslim citizens in Belgium who have voted[42] at the local and national elections in respectively 2018 and 2019. Voting in Belgium is compulsory. Respondents were recruited by asking several community organizations such as student organizations, mosques, civil society, organizations for converted Muslims and youth organizations to forward the call[43] broadly in search for Muslim participants. Second, snowball sampling was applied, next to purposive sampling as mostly higher educated Muslims replied to the call. Seventeen interviews were conducted with thirteen second or third generation[44] Muslims with a Moroccan background, two with a Turkish background and two converts with an ethnic majority background. Nine of them have defined themselves as women, seven as men and one as non-binary. Five respondents have finished secondary school (low educated) while 12 respondents are students or have already completed higher education. All participants live in an urban context and 7 out of 17 respondents volunteer in a collective i.e. a youth organization, anti-racist movement, feminist collective or mosque.

[42] Within the larger project, Muslims' electoral choices were examined using an exit poll. To give more meaning to these findings, Muslims' electoral choices (party and candidate) have also been questioned in the interviews, next to their noninstitutionalized forms of participation.

[43] The call to attract respondents was presented to five acquittances who were Muslim and lower educated, in the personal network of the author, to give feedback and decrease potential barriers.

[44] When both or one of the parents/grandparents are born in a non-EU country, we refer to the participants as respectively second and third generations. One of the participants is actually 1,5 generation as she herself was born in Morocco, but migrated as an orphan to be raised by a family member in Belgium.

The interviews were conducted between February and April 2021 with the permission of the participants taking on average 1 hour 45 minutes[45]. Participants were questioned about their personal political biographies notably how they describe and evaluate current politics, the issues that concerned them and engagements herein, the range of political activities – both institutionalized and noninstitutionalized - they have participated in and their motivations to do so. Lastly, I queried them about the role of religion in their participation. Due to Covid-19 measures, half of the interviews were conducted in person with respect for all the applicable measures, the other half took place online using Skype or ZOOM. The names of the participants were altered in order to preserve anonymity. The transcribed interviews were analyzed with NVivo thematically linked to their repertoire of engagements and the mobilizing forces to engage with political actions. Other data were coded inductively in order to further shed light on Muslims' activities in a racialized environment to explore the multiple ways Muslims resist oppression. All interviews were conducted by the author who is Muslim, and wears a headscarf, which could generate a sense of familiarity and openness towards Muslim participants who themselves are consistently scrutinized because of being Muslim. Creating a safe space is necessary due to the intimate questions posed, and could be easily captured by someone perceived by participants as a member of the *in-group*. However, this could also lead to an overreporting of religiously inspired motivations or socially desirable answers. To mitigate these possible biases before and during the interview, some precautions were taken. First, at the beginning the author emphasized that she was interested in participants' individual narratives owing to the large diversity that Muslim communities entails, next to stating that all data will be treated confidential. Furthermore, to respect their agency, each respondent could withdraw at any moment without explanation as the data belonged to them. A contract was signed by both researcher as participant with the abovementioned agreement. Second, with regard to the interview, questions on their political participation in general and specific experiences hereof were posed first, followed by their motivations to participate and ending with how they perceive being Muslim to avoid (religious) priming. The author made sure to also question other motives than religious ones, however participants brought up several motivations themselves.

In what follows I elaborate on how Muslim participants perceive and understand political participation while discussing (daily) acts of resistance. Furthermore, I explore what informs talking back and the formation of counterpublics notably a complex interplay between family upbringing and socialization, Islamic faith and Islamophobia.

[45] Permission was granted by the Ethical Commission of the university where the author is affiliated.

Findings

Muslims' understanding of political participation

All participants defined participation as more than electoral participation echoing the extensive literature on how other repertoires of tools and actions are considered as 'normal' to make oneself heard (hooks,1989; Fraser,1990; Verba *et al*., 1995:37; O'Toole and Gale, 2013). Safa (42y, researcher) voiced that political participation is about voting but *"it's also about politicization. It's about trying to put topical issues on the agenda [of policy makers]",* a statement reflecting existing power struggles of minorities (Fraser, 1990; hooks, 1989). She further elaborates on how mainstream politics excludes Muslims' voices pointing at the lack of (descriptive) representation. Scholarly literature has indeed pointed at the salience of elected bodies mirroring society's diversity for the legitimacy of our democracy and sense of belonging, in particular for marginalized groups such as Muslims *(*Mansbridge,1999; Cesari 2014; self-citation omitted, 2020). Respondents mainly ascribed the lack of Muslim representation to how society is characterized by Islamophobia hampering (and thus silencing) Muslims' participation in the political arena.

In addition, Muslim participants criticized the widespread anti-Muslim rhetoric in society iterated by mostly (but not only) center and right-wing politicians leaving them with little expectations with regard to mainstream politics tackling inequalities, although their trust in democracy as a political system remains. Interestingly, all interviewees denounced how they are perceived as 'out of place', more specifically as 'the Other', 'the migrant', 'the Muslim', 'the non-citizen' or 'the non-integrated' showing the strong impact of racialized environments on Muslims' belonging disrupting their belonging. To change this narrative, most respondents encourage participation outside the mainstream politics – or to talk back to those in power – as a way to slowly build up a 'counterpower' through own communities (Boussetta, 2000; hooks,1989). Similarly, Fraser (1990) argues that counterpublic spheres arise because of social inequalities that disturb deliberation, even in the absence of formal exclusions.

Which forms of noninstitutionalized participation do Muslims engage with?

As a consequence of the exclusionary norms and practices within the mainstream electoral arena, Muslims turn to a wide range of nonelectoral actions and topics to talk back, referring to how they want to do things differently compared to their (first generation) parents. For instance, a few interviewees have contacted politicians to problematize the lack of attention for the needs of elderly Muslims, the experienced inequalities in education and housing or negotiate with local governments about issues

concerning the local mosque or youth organization, thus transforming the public sphere with their specific claims and needs to be answered not only concerning faith issues, but more so on basic needs and equality. Others have participated in demonstrations to urge politicians to take measures against (the combination of) racism and sexism, ethnic profiling or demanding to take a firm stance against Israel. Participants stated that first generation parents did not have the resources (i.e. such as knowledge of language, higher education, financial means) to resist their exclusion while they perceive themselves as more able to change the status quo. Thus, one can ascribe young Muslims' political activities to a process of spiritual home-making owing to the settling of Muslims in Europe hereby rejecting the perception of Muslims as outsiders, whereas first generation Muslims were occupied with building up institutional and legal arrangements (i.e. mosques) (Sunnier, 2021; Chiodelli, 2015). Indeed, Pedziwiatr (2010) argued how Muslim elites, constructing an Islam of European born citizens, describe themselves as Muslim citizens while demanding equal rights.

Furthermore, two participants volunteering in a mosque, stated to cooperate with local politicians at the local elections by giving them a free pass to visit their mosques heightening politicians' visibility among their followers in exchange of attention to mosque's needs i.e. access to venues, subsidies and permissions for activities. Through this collaboration with mostly leftist and center local political parties, Muslims could encourage politicians to account for Muslims' needs that are mostly neglected. Second by portraying Muslims not only as adherents of an Islamic faith, but also as voters or local inhabitants could benefit Muslims' inclusion as they become less threatening for instance by co-organizing local community fairs embedding the mosque and Muslims in the neighborhood. Thus, through lobbying Muslims try to find a way to make themselves seen and heard in a certain way, while at the same time aiming to resist hegemonic powers that try to control and silence them (Finlay and Hopkins, 2019). As for the latter, both participants mentioned how they felt governed as these collaborations with local political parties but also community fairs and meetings felt in a sense obligatory owing to conditions related to official recognition of mosques opposed by the government. Additionally, they also referred to going along in order to prevent hostile policies (i.e. additional governmental controls of safety issues, noise disturbance, parking issues). Accordingly, Griera and Buchardt (2021) have shown how unequal access to public spaces among different religious minority groups can be explained by the working of urban regimes.

More time-consuming and structural activities relate to taking a seat in an advisory board of the local government or engagement in (migration) fora addressing the intertwinement of public spheres and the state (Fraser, 1990). For instance, Fatima (40y, educational worker) talked about a decolonization project where she volunteered to advise the local government on tackling racism and was delighted

when she noticed that some of the recommendations were adopted. These positive experiences of truly 'being heard' (hooks, 1989) can restore the distrust in governmental bodies and further encourage participation. Indeed, Fatima spoke about how these successes gave her hope concluding that participation matters to resist marginalization. According to Fadil et al. (2015:239), local authorities set these consultative bodies up 'to keep certain Muslim claims outside the polarized political arena' creating an alternative public sphere where new Muslim representatives emerge. Scholars refer to these actors as emerging new elites socialized in western countries tackling issues faced by their communities affecting their sense of belonging (Pedziwatr, 2007; Boussetta, 2000; Stockemer, 2022). However, Fraser (1990) describes these (counter)publics as weak publics, because their influence is limited opposed to strong publics who not only discuss matters but also take decisions.

What shapes Muslims' noninstitutionalized forms of political participation? Family, socialization and their complex interplay

Family socialization and access of media

Exploring narratives through recalling their personal political biographies, participants spoke about their upbringing and political debates shaping their political engagement. Although family socialization is not distinctive of the majority population, it may play a different role regarding the topics and actions minorities engage with. In particular when it concerns the first-generation immigrants lacking education and local political knowledge, as they 'neither fully belong to the receiving society nor to the sending which they have left' (Pedziwiatr, 2007:28). As first-generation immigrants cherished the hope of return, they seemingly were less inclined (or expected) to talk back contrary to younger generations who perceive themselves as citizens (Martiniello, 2010).

Nevertheless, by frequently watching Arabic news channels such as Al-Jazeera reporting on the wars in the Middle East (e.g. Palestine and later Iraq and Afghanistan), Muslim parents have introduced their children to international media channels and geopolitics. For instance, Redouan (31y, IT worker) recalled how his father watched the news about the Middle East and the role of the West herein, followed by debates among friends and family. As a 10-year-old, he attended political discussions that have shaped his political interest and critical attitudes towards (international) conflicts and mainstream media. Although he now engages in discussions with friends about international issues, he is less keen to converse with non-Muslims, because they share other opinions about the role of the West in international conflicts. This silencing of minorities – due to a mainstream narrative upheld in the public sphere - has been criticized by hooks (1989) and Fraser (1990).

Parents who are highly politicized may foster civic and political orientations facilitating engagement in politics (see Neundorf and Smets, 2017) shaping also the modes of political activities and topical issues. As a consequence of migrant parents and use of international media, all participants have participated in activities with an international focus such as protests to demand a certain peace policy (i.e Palestine, Afghanistan), signing petitions against the interference of western countries in Muslim countries or boycott products and services supporting Israel (e.g. Israeli dates and Coca Cola). Local spaces and identities are therefore shaped by global and local issues due to their upbringing, having access to other media narratives that do not resonate in the mainstream public spheres. The connection with global events lies therefore in the oppression they experience in the local generating counterpublics transcending national boundaries. This resonates with an engagement that is not strictly instrumental as the impact can be discussed when individually signing petitions and boycotting products. Some explicitly emphasized the usefulness of these tools questioning *"what could one achieve individually?"* while urging for collective action (Karim,47y, city official). However, for some, these activities work as a valuable tool to express anger, frustration or discontent (see also Mustafa, 2015) while others pointed to the easiness and little investment of time and energy to sign petitions or boycott, in particular concerning more international issues.

However, not all participants remember the Al Jazeera channel. Maryam (28y, community worker) elaborated on her father not being *"the classical dad"* with *"the loud Al Jazeera on the background"* compared to the fathers of her peers. She proudly talked about how her father was civically engaged within the Muslim community, but also broader in society, and how he tried to help others regardless their religion, class or gender. Seeing him as the caring person in her life, he inspired her to do to good. While reflecting on his influence on her political engagement Maryam brought up that she had discussions with him about "*how to organize society and which role we could play"* at a later stage. Only then she realized how informed he was about a lot of political issues and the Islamic framework he maintained herein. She now firmly stands for principles as justice for all, stating that all oppression should be tackled leading to an active and intersectional engagement with regard to gender, race, religion and class issues.

Maryam is also an allrounder who has organized or supported several protests concerning Palestine, ethnic profiling, refugees and Black Lives matter, strives for better social housing in encounters with politicians, takes a prominent role in debates on feminism, LGTBQI rights and climate issues. She referred to how the normalization of far-right discourses do not only affect Muslimness, but also being a women and advocate of human rights. She therefore searches for alliances with other oppressed groups

to strengthen their resistance to enlarge the effects of resistance. Talking about her privileges (i.e. being higher educated and having a decent pay), Maryam (28y) shows how one can take up different positions contesting the access to the public sphere not only shaped by being Muslim but also by a diversity of identities such as class, gender, youth and education. Put differently, Muslims do not act as Muslims only (Willemse and Bergh, 2016) but also as women, students, employees etc.

She further stresses that social media operates as a new public sphere where everybody can speak up and address politicians and political parties, but also fellow citizens, on a more accessible way. Recent studies established how Muslim women indeed (re)shape the discourses on Muslim women through social media, demonstrating their agentic abilities through alternative self-representations countering the dominant portrayals of 'the oppressed Muslim women' (Hijri, 2021; Islam, 2020). In addition, liking and sharing political messages to hold politicians accountable or influence others is perceived as a powerful tool, as minorities don't have easy access to regular media channels (Fraser, 1990). As regular media produce a negative portrayal of Islam; social media can be deployed to counter widespread Islamphobia but also 'classism and sexism' as it's a public sphere that young Muslims can control. Moreover, through connecting with people (mostly Muslims) over the world, social media allows to share information and strategies to challenge oppression on a more international level. Interestingly, second-generation interviewees seem to use social media only as an information tool while expressing their gratitude to younger Muslims using social media more extensively as a tool of resistance. Social media thus play a prominent role for younger participants pointing to the interdependency and interconnection of local and global issues because problems (such as the negative portrayal of Islam) are perceived as neither only global or local.

Muslim political agency: a good Muslim equals a good citizen

As all respondents had a religious upbringing, they mostly referred to Islamic faith as a (central) framework teaching to be righteous, to help others and contribute to the Muslim community and larger society while stressing the importance of self-development as a good human being, diversity and freedom of choice. However, not only Islamic faith but also democratic and humanistic principles such as being a good citizen informed their engagement. This idea of Muslims as good citizens reveals the unease about the belonging of Muslims in racialized societies as they have to prove their worth targeting mainstream dominant publics, who on their turn are not too keen to include Muslims in the public sphere. As a counternarrative, Maryam (28y, community worker) shared how she, together with fellow Muslim activists, believes that it's an Islamic responsibility to fight -all- inequalities pronouncing the following:

"*I believe I have these capacities [from Allah] because this is what I have to do. I know I can talk, although I have some things that I can do better […] I believe that's [to fight injustice] the reason why I am here. Allah is all about justice and you have to bring that justice into life, that is our role"*.

Interestingly, while talking about her engagement, she got emotional as she mostly talked about her engagement in a secular language due to its domination in the public sphere demonstrating how Muslims not always contest but also reproduce a secular public (see also Fadil, 2013). Expressing her views through what God expects made her reflect on the core of her engagement. Although her near family members question the impact of her political engagement, she stated that *"maybe it's true, but on yawm al qiyama [Judgment Day] I can say to Allah that I did my best"*. Despite the differences among Muslims being more spiritual or religious practicing (i.e. five pillars), almost all interviewees referred to a Muslim duty *"to do good"* claiming that Islamic practices in everyday life, or lived religion (see Hall,1997), seek to contribute to Muslims' wellbeing and better society for instance by tackling inequalities and the exclusion of (other) minoritized groups i.e. women and refugees, and most topical the poverty issue emphasizing that everybody has "*the right to be"* (Safa, 42y, researcher*)*. In a similar vein, Redouan (31y, IT worker) believes religion brings inspiration to solve societal problems stimulating to talk back uttering that *"religion is a translation of how God wants us to live here on earth. How God wants us to act righteous. If we follow [God's guidance] we will achieve a diverse and tolerant society"*. Some even voice that the current political issues (i.e. poverty, sexism) are due to not appreciating religious visions on solidarity. These religious narratives go against the secular public sphere urging to keep religious views, in particular Islamic, out of the public sphere (Ismail, 2008).

Second, Muslims seek to oppose the so-called dichotomy religious/secular, private/public, particularly in a post 9/11 era which made their exclusion a public issue. Earlier research stressed the entwinement of the religious and secular in everyday experiences of Muslims' participation (Harris and Lam, 2019:628). This resonates with Frasers' (1990) and Hanisch's (1969) feminist work on *the personal is political* stressing that personal issues are political issues in need of political intervention. For instance, some respondents claimed that the fierce debates on how Muslim women dress and present themselves in public spaces (referring to the burqa and headscarf ban in Belgium) demonstrate how governmental institutions and companies try to control Muslim women's bodies, and silence them by making them invisible in public spaces through a ban on veils in the public sphere. Although the idea of a secular public sphere has been taken for granted, tensions invoked by Muslims practicing religion challenge this secular notion (Ismail, 2008; Fadil, 2013).

Muslim political agency, or an explicit reference to Islam as an inspirational source to act, also aims to benefit the large Muslim community (Ummah) as Nadia (24y, food deliverer) pronounced "*You are Muslim, I am Muslim, so we have to have each other's back*". Sayyid (2010:89) voices that 'it would be difficult to imagine how one can be a Muslim without regard to the rest of the Ummah'. This outspoken solidarity within the Ummah finds its roots in the wide-spread marginalization of Muslims (i.e, foreign policies) leading to a stronger connection with the faith group and perceived obligations as their grievances are not properly addressed building up group resentment (Sayyid, 2010). Similarly, Houssein (29y, IT worker) reflected on the injustices Muslims in the world have to endure pointing at e.g. Palestine, he is therefore convinced that young Muslims need a safe space due to the discrimination in society. He therefore established a youth organization within the mosque, together with his brother, sharing their knowledge and (coping) strategies with young Muslims building up counterpower in Muslim communities as a way of talking back. He is convinced that "*If we [Muslims] stay on the sideline, nothing will change. They will keep talking about us, and not with us. Muslims therefore must be involved in politics.*" Scholars pointed to how the state and powerful institutions aim to control Muslims and enforce a specific behavior (Finlay and Hopkins, 2020; Bracke and Hernandez Aguilar, 2021).

Islamophobia engenders, but also constrains participation

Personal and collective experiences with injustices such as discrimination, alongside a consciousness of how the political terrain has been altered by 9/11, is pushing Muslims into the margins of the public sphere. This process of silencing can increase the participation among Muslims aiming to move into more public and visible spaces (Finlay and Hopkins, 2020; Peucker, 2021). Safa (42y, researcher) told about how she could not grasp what was happening when she was younger and experienced hostility at school, feeling not seen nor heard. The death of an Islamic Studies teacher, Mohamed Achrak[46], due to a racist attack in Antwerp was a wake-up call. She then felt the urge to tackle structural forms of racism as a moral duty (by organizing lectures, debates, writing opinion pieces), because the wider public did not acknowledge the exclusionary norms and practices affecting Muslim minorities. The same goes up for some interviewees, all high educated, who talked about their jobs as a way to engage in improving the position of Muslims in society. Thus, it seems that not only voluntary political actions but also the choice for a job is perceived as a way to put an end to the structural discrimination marginalized minorities undergo, which can be seen as a political engagement. As Fatima (40y, educational worker) states "*It is also in my choice for work that is a big part of it [political participation].*" Although some interviewees previously ignored exclusion as a coping strategy, they stress that young people should get

[46] The court ordered to intern the perpetrator as they ruled that not racist motives but mental illness explains the murder.

the tools to understand racism and talk back as Islamophobia threatens one's future. This shift from an object to a subject talking back to dominant discourses engenders a multiplicity of public spheres where people can belong to different counterpublics owing to their multiple subjectivities (hooks, 1989; Fraser, 1990).

Second, even if interviewees choose to participate and not be silenced, discrimination seems to shape the way they do so. For instance, Linda (31y, nurse) reflected on how a friend reacted on her conversion to Islam shouting that Muslims are all about *"bombs and terrorists"*. She therefore only participates in signing petitions and boycotting products - actions that can remain relatively unseen to her direct network - to avoid Islamophobic reactions which is only possible as she is perceived as non-Muslim by others. She furthermore refrains of sharing her Muslimness with colleagues voicing as follows: *"I am not going to tell [that I am Muslim], because I am scared of hitting the wall because they will look at me in a different way […] It sometimes bothers me. Maybe I will grow out of it. But for now, I can't handle the confrontation"*. This intersection of being a woman, Muslim and converted makes clear how Islamophobia is not only gendered, but affects (converted) Muslims differently. For some respondents, all Muslim women, Islamophobia affects the type of political actions such as protests due to fear of violence although they value the powerful and strong manner to 'talk back', and the accompanied energy due to the gathering of people with the same interests. Fatima (40y, educational worker) recalls her first and only protest focusing on the occupation of Palestine. However, since she participates in an advisory council, she believes that discussing "*the matters at the table"* is more beneficial and safer for her. Moreover, she voices that although protesting is a way to participate, earlier cases of ethnic profiling hampers her to engage with this specific act. Fatima reveals "*I have three boys, the oldest one is 16. I see children who look like him getting hurt badly by the police. So, protesting does not appeal to me."*

Third, Islamophobia seems not to only engender, and shape participation but also constrains participation. Ayse (24y, student) talked about how she continuously feels othered and seems not to belong here, but she believes *"that doing nothing is harming yourself. There is no other option than to stand your ground."* She continues by pointing out that by being visible as a Muslim in an Islamophobic context is hard enough, and she for now chooses not to engage in political actions because she is "*not in a good place"*. Social psychologists have drawn a direct link between societal discrimination and mental health impairments such as depressions, feelings of inferiority and powerlessness (see Oskooii, 2016). Such negative psychological mindsets make victim's less inclined to engage in society due to a state of 'false consciousness': the feeling that one is not capable to initiate political and social changes. So, not only (material) resources such as time, skills and money are important but also the 'psychological fortitude to confront the status quo' (Oskooi, 2016:614). But interestingly, when discussing the private

and societal backlash she experiences about her headscarf, she reflects on how her presence itself affects dominant publics. Whenever she is in a public space, she feels that her presence shows *"that they cannot ignore us, and have to accept us"* concluding that *"by just being present, you have a political influence"*. Due to Islam but moreover female Muslim bodies are so politicized *"just being"* present as a Muslim woman is a political act "*because we stand out with our headscarves",* thus claiming visibility and presence in the public spheres.

All in all, participation among minority groups is invoked by a comparative inequality (towards majority) and disadvantage. As interviewees were mostly questioned and negatively perceived due to their Muslim identity, it is at the heart of their participation to tackle theses injustices. As Modood declares, young generations will mobilize around Muslim identities, especially when these "identities are the basis of discrimination and structural inequalities" (2012:46). These politics, also referred to as identity politics, will persist as long as minority group-based interests and claims of equity remain (Peucker, 2016).

Conclusion and discussion. Challenging the exclusion from public spheres, while seeking inclusion.

Relying on the conceptual frameworks of hooks (1989) and Fraser (1990), this study aimed to provide a more in-depth understanding of how Muslims 'talk back' in racialized environments generating counterpublics, opposing the claim of a single public sphere upholding 'the common good'. This article contributes on how an assumed secular public sphere embedded in a nation state privileges the mainstream group and excludes Muslims' transnational approach, thus shaping Muslims' talking back and counterpublics.

This research revealed how Muslims distrust mainstream politics but believe in democracy, and thus complement the mandatory voting with 'regular' political actions (boycotting, petitions, demonstrating) and more intensive activities as lobbying and having a seat in advisory boards aiming to destabilize existing power structures in public debates. Although scholars (Verba et al.,1995, Deth, 1994) refer to participation as voluntary activities, the findings argue that paid work may function as an everyday form of political resistance for some Muslims. Moreover, Muslims interviewees also referred to what can be perceived as subaltern forms of participation (Martiniello, 2018): being a good citizen, politicizing younger Muslims to act against oppression but also female Muslim bodies being hypervisible in the public sphere could be perceived as 'talking back', and thus a political act reclaiming visibility and

presence in public spheres. All in all, interviewees counter the public narratives of politically disengaged and alienated Muslims participating through a myriad of ways.

Second, this article found evidence of a Muslim political agency guiding them to do good benefitting not only Muslims, but also the broader society while challenging the (imposed) dichotomy private/religious and public/secular. This complex interplay between a salient Muslim political agency and an Islamophobic environment stresses the difficulties affecting Muslims' sense of loyalty, safety and belonging. Lastly, the upbringing of interviewees took place surrounded by international media such as Al Jazeera strengthened by the idea of shared grievances, grants them with multiple perspectives and narratives on international conflicts informing and shaping their everyday politics in society. This globalized perspective further shapes young Muslims' tools, such as social media, to deconstruct hegemonic powers, while they solidarize with Muslim peers over the world as their connection lies in the oppression they experience. This finding has implications for the notion of the public sphere due to being situated within borders of the nation, while Muslims' engagement challenges this notion due to transnational experiences.

However, limitations are present regarding interviewees' migration background as most of the participants had a Moroccan background and mostly higher educated. Further scrutinizing the political agency of Muslim minorities by applying an intersectional lens (i.e. focusing on ethnicity, class and generations) could be subject of a follow up research. Future research may address whether Muslims mobilize effectively across ethnic, generational and class lines relying on a politicized Muslim identity, thus enhancing our understanding of Muslims' political agency. Second, as public spheres are characterized by racism, sexism, class oppression and the long legacies of colonialism, research on (possible) emerging political alliances would be beneficial in and how marginalized groups work together (and under which conditions) to contest oppressive discursive discourses. Third, as young respondents shared how social media can be an empowering tool for those who are silenced, scrutinizing 'newer' forms of political actions tackling political inequalities is suggested as a future research avenue. Moreover, an in-depth research of more hidden and everyday forms of participation, maybe not fully acknowledged as political could be also a fruitful endeavor to improve our understanding of how political inequalities are being tackled beyond recognized forms of political participation.

CHAPTER 07

Good Muslims, Good Citizens?

An intersectional approach to Muslims' hidden resistance tactics.

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An intersectional approach to Muslims' hidden resistance tactics.

Abstract

This paper explores Muslims' political endeavors, aiming to tackle their marginalization in a secular racialized environment. Drawing on critical race scholarship (Du Bois,1999), resistance studies (de Certeau, 1980; Scott, 1995) and lived experiences captured by in-depth interviews with Muslims in Belgium, we focus not only on widely recognized forms of political action but also on everyday tactics enacted by Muslim citizens to challenge the status quo. We find Muslims aiming to counter racialization by everyday practices of resistance such as reversing the Muslim gaze, modeling their religious behavior and building up a counterpower. Second, this study shows the salience of Du Bois' notion of double consciousness – or Muslims seeing themselves through the eyes of the dominant group – shaping subordinate forms of political resistance.

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Introduction

"Where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault, 1978:95–96)

In the post-9/11 era, Muslims are mainly stereotyped as the *dangerous Other* opposing democracy and western values (Fadil et al., 2015; Said, 1979; Islam, 2020). Being Muslim is thus seen as incompatible with modernity, situating Muslims as outsiders of a modern national imaginary. Academic work refers to this *othering* of Muslims as a form of structural racism, Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism, including Muslim experiences with discrimination in race scholarship (Garner and Selod, 2015). Or, as Sayyid and Vakil (2010:276) phrase it: "Religion is 'raced', and Muslims are racialized." Owing to enduring and widespread racialization in the continent, (radical) right-wing parties in Western Europe have called for restrictions on the number of immigrants in order to protect the dominant culture (Verkuyten et al., 2019), whereas left-wing parties frequently take positions conflicting with the religious interests of Muslims (Bray, 2011).

Muslim minorities are therefore required to negotiate their space in secular liberal democracies. Given that Muslims are the fastest growing religious community in the West and tend to be negatively framed and discriminated against (Meer, 2010), research is needed on how Muslims cope with the political challenges they encounter, and how they aim for recognition as co-members of a polity. As previous research has focused on recognized forms of political participation, such as electoral and nonelectoral actions (Moutselos, 2020; Azabar and Thijssen, 2021; Ayers and Hofstetter, 2008), this paper pays special attention to everyday resistance tactics enacted by the subjugated. Scholars have shown how everyday resistance to regimes of power can develop among ordinary people despite repressive social environments (Scott, 1985; Johansson and Vinthagen, 2019). The myriad ways in which subjugated people undermine power through everyday actions are often poorly understood as a form of politics, in particular when neglecting the different positionalities that can lead to distinct repertoires of resistance (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2019:ix).

The main research question is thus the following: Which everyday tactics do Muslims employ to resist being marginalized in racialized societies? I first explore what informs these (hidden) forms of resistance tactics, using Du Bois' concept of double consciousness in a racialized environment. These insights reveal how Muslims see themselves through the eyes of the dominant majority, which influences their political behavior. I investigate this behavior in a more secularized environment, Belgium, where religion in general (but Islam in particular) is viewed with more suspicion, and where there is a wish to relegate religion to the private sphere (Mescoli, 2019). Previous studies on Muslims' participation

accounting for religiosity were mainly conducted in the UK and US, where religion is not only more embedded in society, but also general religiosity is relatively high.

Drawing on seventeen in-depth interviews with self-identifying Muslims, I unpack Muslim minorities' resistance practices while accounting for their impaired civic status in Flanders (the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium). Although it is one of the smaller countries in Western Europe, with an estimated 7.6% of the population identifying as Muslims (Pew Research Center, 2007), Belgium is a well documented case due to the institutional situation of the country, in which Islam has been recognized as an official religion since 1973 (Maréchal et al., 2003). Furthermore, the recent international conflicts resulting in the departure of five thousand Europeans to the Middle East between 2012 and 2014 have also highlighted Belgium as one of the countries with the highest ratio of "foreign fighters" in Europe (Sealy and Modood, 2020). The attacks in Paris and Belgium in 2015 and 2016 have furthermore reinforced the debates on Muslims, heightening the securitization of Islam, which in turn has intensified the portrayal of Muslims as terrorists. Moreover, despite longstanding institutional recognition, the visible presence of Islam in the public sphere is seen with unease in Belgium, contributing to (policy) restrictions on Muslim religious practices, such as a ban on veils and religious slaughter (Fadil et al., 2015; Mescoli, 2019). Concomitantly, anti-migration parties (and right-wing policy measures) questioning the compatibility between Islam and the West are gaining popularity in Flanders. Belgium is also among the worst performers in Europe when it comes to education, employment and poverty (risk) among people with a migration background, the group to which most Muslims belong (Brems, 2020). To be clear, in this paper I do not consider the category *Muslim* to necessarily refer to a pious disposition, but rather understand it – in the line of Sinno – as "an identity that may have religious, racial, political, or cultural dimensions" (Sinno, 2012:2). I therefore use the notion of Muslim and Muslimness interchangeably to refer to a subject position that is at the heart of the mechanisms of othering and which also deeply impacts how people come to understand themselves. This does not, however, preclude the coexistence of this notion of Muslimness with other modes of subjectivation (i.e., gender, ethnicity, faith)(Meer, 2010; Islam, 2020).

My contributions are twofold. First, inspired by the work of Nasar Meer (2010), I draw on W.E.B. Du Bois' notion of double consciousness to examine how Muslims experience processes of racialization in Flanders (Belgium). I hereby acknowledge how intersectional subjectivities are informed by the dialectic between the individual and society in a gendered racialized environment, and thus how power relations inform the multiple identity locations. Second, as previous studies on Muslims' political participation focused mainly on (non)institutionalized political participation or public resistance, I highlight the subordinate forms of political resistance, over and above recognized modes of political

participation. I employ the notion of everyday resistance practices as theorized by de Certeau (1980) and Scott (1985) to document these. As they focused on class struggles in their work, I pay special attention to Muslims' everyday resistance as intersected with, for example, gender, religion and ethnicity.

The findings show that Muslims engage in everyday resistance tactics to rearticulate the widespread gendered and racialized constructions imposed on them by the dominant group. This occurs firstly through an *reversion of the (Muslim) gaze*, as Muslims gather information about the dominant group in order to understand and challenge their marginalization. This reversion of the gaze influences Muslims' counternarratives. Secondly, the Islamic repertoire is actively brought to bear to counter negative stereotypes (i.e. actively referring to how Islam promotes cohesive and constructive values), but simultaneously concealing one's Muslimness from non-Muslims to avoid exclusion takes place. These different resistance tactics are informed by intersecting powers and Muslims' positionalities. Thirdly, Muslims invest in building counterpower and counterspaces through intergenerational transmission and the cultivation of alternative sites of engagement. These tactics, or coping strategies, of Muslims are shaped and influenced by what Du Bois identified as a double consciousness: Muslims seeing themselves through the eyes of the dominant group. All in all, the study shows that Muslims resist the discourses and practices that marginalize them by employing covert political actions.

Literature review

Muslim resistance in a gendered racialized environment

Previous studies have interpreted racialization as a process of "ascribing sets of characteristics viewed as inherent to members of a group because of their physical or cultural traits" (Cainkar and Selod, 2018:170; Garner and Selod, 2015). For instance, Muslims have been constructed as the backward and dangerous Other, and thus the antithesis of the West, due to their Islamic faith. In a post-9/11 society, these racialized images are still vividly present and have been intensified under the guise of the *War on Terror*. Additionally, scholars have argued that racialization processes are gendered: as terrorism resulted in the criminalization of Muslim men as (potential) terrorists, Muslim women are perceived as oppressed and a cultural threat to the Western ideals of gender equality. This gendered and racialized discourse is strengthened even further when visible markers are involved, such as a long beard, Islamic dress or a veil, making Muslims more vulnerable to anti-Muslim racism (Abu Lughod, 2002; Islam, 2020). Subsequently, several international organizations have condemned the discrimination in the labor

and housing market pushing Muslims to the margins (Bayrakli and Hafez, 2019; EUFRA, 2017). The question which remains is whether and how Muslims aim to navigate and cope with these challenges. In the following sections, I draw on the critical work of Meer (2010, 2019), engaging with Du Bois' double consciousness to unravel how these racialized processes affect Muslim subjectivities (and their political actions) as they are formed through interaction with the environment. Second, I elaborate on the influential work of de Certeau (1980) and Scott (1985) on more hidden and everyday acts of resistance practiced by the subjugated.

Du Bois' double consciousness and Muslims

Several scholars working on Muslims' subjectivities in the UK and US have been drawn to Du Bois' double consciousness to understand the formation of the Muslim self in a racialized context (Meer 2010, Tibi 2020). Du Bois coined the term *double consciousness* in the context of race relations in the United States. In his work *Strivings of the Negro people* (1999), he presents Black Americans' (double) consciousness as an internal struggle to reconcile being both Black and American, by referring to a "*two-ness - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, … He [the African-American] simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows*" (Du Bois, 1999). According to the author, implicit and explicit power relations impede this process, as on the one hand one's Americanness can point to citizenship, while on the other hand one's Blackness otherizes and situates the same individual outside the nation (Du Bois, 1999). This duality leads to "always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" (Du Bois, 1999:364), as our idea of ourselves – who we claim to be – is formed from the dialectic between how we *see* ourselves and how we *think* other people see us.

This duality has equally been found to be present in how Muslims relate to themselves in European contexts. Scholars have argued that Muslims find themselves in a paradoxical position of "being intimately part of a polity while excluded from its public culture", owing to a widespread negative portrayal of Muslims (Meer, 2010:43). This duality informs and shapes Muslims' interactions with (and claims of belonging to) Muslim communities and the nation, affecting their political participation and social integration (Meer, 2010; Islam, 2020). Du Bois' metaphor of the *Veil* – or the racialization that Muslims endure - is described as a one-way mirror through which the (Muslim) minority sees the majority, whereas the (dominant) majority sees only their own reflection and thus their "rightful" dominance. Van Es (2019:377) explains how this stereotyping of Muslim minorities is "a process of

boundary drawing between a modern, enlightened and emancipated Dutch [West] 'us', and a backward, traditional and patriarchal Muslim 'them'''.

More recently, scholars have also viewed Du Bois' double consciousness through an intersectional lens, stressing the salience of oppressing systems in addition to racism, such as patriarchy affecting minority women differently from minority men, and thus referring to a triple consciousness (race/religion-nation-gender) (Tibi, 2020). They have also explored how Muslim women internalize hegemonic discourses of the veil/Veil and try to break the "oppressed Muslim women" stereotype. Being highly aware of how they are perceived – or what Du Bois described as a gift *and* burden when speaking of the second sight – Muslim women continuously reform the images imposed on them by the majority groups in their everyday interactions (Islam, 2020: 442; van Es, 2019). Although the transformative potential of these everyday practices has been neglected, a renewed interest in de Certeau's and Scott's work emphasizes that resistance can take very different forms, even mundane practices of accommodation and non-confrontation integrated into daily life (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2019:9, Murru & Polese 2020).

Everyday resistance practices

Following resistance scholars, we define everyday resistance as "a pattern of acts (practice) done by someone subordinated in a power relation and that might (temporarily) undermine or destabilize (some aspect of) dominance" (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2019:9; Scott, 1985). These forms of politics are informal and non-organized, also referred to as infrapolitics or invisible politics (Scott, 1985), but are barely recognized as politics, compared to collective resistance (e.g. demonstrations). In his prominent work, Scott (1985) makes a plea for acknowledging everyday tactics as real politics. The author studied the hidden tactics of Malaysian peasants in a rural class conflict, such as pilfering, sabotage and slander used to survive and challenge the domination of the elite, because overt rebellion was at times too risky for the peasants.

Similarly, de Certeau (1980) unraveled the everyday tactics of the ordinary class (or consumers) as repeated maneuvers challenging the power structures that discipline lives (or strategies) in liberal-democratic contexts. In his theoretical work, he emphasized how the repertoires of resistance take place in enemy territory. He highlighted the vital role of power relations in constraining the forms of resistance (*who resists what, how, where and when*), stressing how power and resistance are entangled in multiple and complex ways. In addition, echoing previous research, I argue that visible forms of resistance may feed into infrapolitics and vice versa (Johansson and Vinthagen, 2019; Scott, 1985). In short, these two forms of resistance – public and hidden – are not mutually exclusive, but could rather be seen as

complementary. While the previously cited studies focused on class struggles when identifying patterns of hidden political acts of the subjugated, I study Muslims' everyday tactics to mitigate domination in secular societies.

The available research on Muslims' (hidden) resistance tactics documents how Muslim women contest and challenge anti-Islamic discourses on Islam, Muslims and Muslim women (Marouka, 2008; van Es, 2019; Tibi, 2020). For instance, van Es (2019) showed how Dutch Muslim women active in religious organizations act as ambassadors of Islam, by monitoring their own behavior in everyday interactions with non-Muslims and representing themselves as modern and emancipated, thus countering the "oppressed Muslim women" narrative. She documented how her female interlocutors emphasized having a paid job or told their non-Muslim acquantances how their husbands had cooked a nice meal (van Es, 2019:381). With these subtle actions they aim to reshape the dominant view of the gender relationships within Muslim communities. These "weapons of the weak" (Scott, 1985) or "tactics as art of the weak" (de Certeau, 1980) are individual and non-organized acts influencing (but not fully altering) power relations (Scott, 1985; de Certeau, 1980; Johanssen and Vintagen, 2019). As these tactics are contextualized and thus depend on the environments which Muslims are navigating, I expand on the research context in the following section.

Flanders (Belgium) as a research context. From ethno-cultural to Muslim, but always the Other

The majority of Muslims in Belgium are Moroccan or Turkish labor migrants and their descendants who moved to the country in the '60s, although in the last decade this reality has been altered by the influx of Muslims from Syria, Palestine and Afghanistan. Muslims make up about 7.6% of the total citizenry (Pew Research Center, 2007), and are mostly working-class and employed in low-skilled jobs (Fadil et al., 2015:224). Flanders is Belgium's largest and most prosperous region, with a highly diverse population. Migration to Flanders was linked to the employment possibilities of the port in Antwerp, the coalmining region of Limburg and small scale industries in the province of East Flanders. The history of Flanders has also been marked by the distinct presence of far-right and nationalist ideologies, through the far-right party Vlaams Belang and the nationalist conservative party NV-A. Vlaams Belang (previously named Vlaams Blok) was created in 1978 when it split from the Flemish nationalist movement and developed an anti-immigrant agenda. The New Flemish Alliance party (N-VA) was formed in 2001 and also occasionally competes with the Vlaams Belang on anti-migrant positions, even though it purports to have a more "moderate" agenda. The debate around migration and integration of Muslims in Belgium has become increasingly polarized (Loobuyck and Meier, 2014), and is currently one of society's most controversial topics, resulting in the popularity of nationalist (N-VA) and radical

right (Vlaams Belang) parties at the 2019 national elections in Belgium. Overall, the narrative of Muslims, and thus their demographic growth, as "a problem" is gaining the upper hand (Mescoli, 2019).

Since the institutional recognition of Islam as an official faith in 1974, the social and political position and cultural representation of Muslims has shifted from an ethno-cultural form of othering to a religious form of othering. While Muslims such as the Moroccans or Turks were initially viewed in the '70s and '80s in terms of their ethno-cultural characteristics, this gradually changed with the Salman Rushdie affair and the growing debates on the integration of Muslims focusing on practices such as the headscarf – thus constructing an imaginary around Muslims as religious others (Mescoli, 2019; Fadil et al., 2015). This process escalated further after 9/11 with the growing securitization of Islam. Belgium had its own share of terror attacks, and is a much debated case due to having the highest ratio of foreign fighters in Europe (Sealy and Modood, 2020). There is widespread discomfort and questioning as to whether Islam is compatible with Western values; this has strengthened the idea of Muslims as a potential threat whose actions have to be monitored closely (Mescoli, 2019). This discourse has facilitated restrictions on Muslim religious practices, such as a general ban on the burqa, on veils in schools and in some areas of the labor market, and barriers to the official recognition of mosques, which have to pass a security screening by government institutions (Brems, 2020). In addition to these exclusionary policies, reports point to Muslims as victims of discrimination in the fields of employment, education and housing. European Muslims seem to be overrepresented in low-paid jobs and unemployment, with below-average levels of education and living in poor housing conditions, thus facing barriers to engagement with wider society (OSCE, 2018; EUFRA, 2017).

Method and Data

This study is part of a larger project studying Muslims' political engagement in Belgium (self-citation omitted, 2023), aiming to gain a better understanding of how racialized environments shape Muslim subjectivities, and the (hidden) resistance tactics they employ. I conducted seventeen in-depth semi-structured interviews[47] with self-identifying Muslims living in Flanders. In search of participants who self-identify as Muslim citizens, I asked several organizations (e.g. youth, feminist, student, poverty organizations and mosques) to put out a call for participants through their communication channels. I then used snowball sampling, asking the first interviewees whether they knew Muslims in their network

[47] Permission was granted by the Ethical Commission of the university to which the author is affiliated.

willing to participate. Additionally, I used purposive sampling to ensure the presence also of participants with a lower level of education.

Thirteen second or third generation[48] Muslims with a Moroccan background, two with a Turkish background and two converts with an ethnic majority background agreed to participate in this study. Nine defined themselves as women, seven as men and one as non-binary. The majority, twelve participants, are studying or have finished their higher education whereas five participants obtained (only) their secondary degree. The conversations took on average 1 hour 45 minutes (February- April 2021), exploring narratives through their personal (political) biographies, e.g. how they describe and evaluate the current political and social environment, their (un)conventional political participation, challenges they see and whether/how they try to change things. Lastly, I asked them about their (multiple) identity, with a focus on Muslimness due to the politicization of this aspect. Due to Covid-19 measures, half of the interviews were conducted in person, respecting all the applicable conditions, the other half took place online using Skype or ZOOM. The names of the participants were altered in order to preserve anonymity. All interviews were transcribed and coded through a thematic analysis in order to structure the analysis and narratives.

All interviews were conducted by the author, who is recognizably Muslim as she wears a headscarf; this could generate a sense of familiarity and openness towards Muslim participants, particularly those who feel othered. Questioning participants on sensitive topics and possible trauma requires a safe space; this could be achieved more easily by someone perceived by them as a member of the *in-group* who can relate to their experiences. However, it could also could prevent participants from fully explaining their experiences because they assume these are *obvious facts*. The interviewer therefore stressed at the beginning of each interview that although some things might seem clear, more questions would be asked to verify whether the interviewer interpreted the responses correctly.

[48] When both or one of the parents/grandparents were born in a non-EU country, I refer to the participants as respectively second and third generation.

Findings

Double consciousness and Muslim consciousness: a gendered and racialized environment

The majority of the interlocutors experience their environment in Flanders as one where Muslims are dominantly seen as the Other. They perceive this othering as one of the main obstacles and challenges they face in society. This has created a sense of alienation, as they do not recognize themselves in these negative perceptions of Muslims. For instance, Moussa (40y), a Muslim with a Moroccan background, unemployed and volunteering in a mosque, explained that he does not feel welcome in Belgium:

"I don't feel good here [in Belgium] ... For instance, if we want something concerning Islam, then it's always 'no, we [non-Muslims] don't go there'. Take the example of ritual slaughter; they keep hammering, and do not recognize mosques and all these other signals. Those signals make clear that they [non-Muslims] don't want us [Muslims] here."

As the interview evolves, Moussa expands on his experiences with prejudices and racism at work owing to his Muslimness, explaining that he feels part of the underclass, firmly concluding*: "They hate us, because we are Muslim."* Although this comment was strongly formulated, almost all respondents shared this feeling of being rejected by the majority from being full members of society. He furthermore discusses the fierce debates on religious issues and society's fear of Islam, while contesting the hegemonic anti-Islamic discourse. Moussa is aware of how he is perceived as a dangerous Other, a potential terrorist dressed in a white abaya (a traditional Muslim garment) with a long black beard, claiming "*it's the way I look*"– something W.E.B. Dubois described as The Veil. Talking about how the dominant group fears Islam and Muslims as violent and oppressive, he states that [Islam] is *just* a conviction. In a similar vein, Muslim women described how people see them as "the oppressed Muslim women", without any agency . Wissam (38y), who wears a headscarf and works as a policy officer, elaborated on how she is continuously aware of and affected by the negative portrayal of Muslim women:

"You are always perceived as the oppressed woman. Frankly, it's tiring. Your opinion is not heard … How are Muslim women represented? As the oppressed women that need to be saved by a white man. That's the image that reigns: we always need to be saved. That has to disappear, because people believe what they see on TV. They all are getting the wrong image of us."

By referring to "the wrong image", Wissam emphasizes how non-Muslims do not see Muslims for who they truly are, but mostly through dominant representations. This is in line with earlier observations that draw on Du Bois' double consciousness (Meer 2010, Du Bois, 1999).

As some of the interlocutors were converts to Islam, they shared how their conversion dramatically altered the way they were perceived. While they initially "belonged" to the dominant society, this privilege was suddenly suspended as they became recognizable Muslims who became associated with the trope of the *oppressed Muslim women*. This change in perception particularly takes place when they wear a headscarf or explicitly out themselves as Muslim. Linda, a 31-year-old nurse, explained this: "*When you wear a hijab, you throw away your white privileges"*. Thus, Muslims' racial experiences, and therefore experiences of Islamophobia, can differ depending on the visibility of their Muslimness. Although a growing body of research explores how Islamophobia affects Muslims differently (i.e gendered Islamophobia), expanding the interlocking systems of oppression (i.e. ethnicity) highlights not only the complexity of racialized processes affecting Muslims differently (i.e. converts), but also the ways in which they can navigate or challenge oppression.

Muslims' everyday tactics to counter domination

Due to their racialized experiences, Muslims stated that political engagement is needed to change the dominant narrative. The means and extent of this engagement varies among participants, depending on their gender, age, education, class position, resilience, insight into the complexity of Belgian politics and whether they believe that their acts could bring substantial changes. Similarly, Oskooii concluded that "any act of resistance is more likely to occur among individuals who not only have the material resources, but also have the psychological fortitude to confront the status quo or unwelcomed changes" (2016: 614).

Most interviewees were in some way involved in countering the negative portrayal of Muslims, through demonstrations, petitions, op-eds in newspapers, advisory councils or debates to inform society about their experiences and the real world behind the Veil. The interviewees seemed to be always informed of the majority's view in their mobilizations and activities, having the dominant group continuously in mind. Some interviewees described how careful they were in their (daily) interactions with the dominant group, so as not to strenghten the widespread stereotypes about Muslims. For instance, although Safa (42y) stressed the importance of mass media for being seen and heard by the dominant group, she also pointed to the hostility she experienced, as the media framed her as either the oppressed or the dangerous Muslim woman. Her conclusion was: "*It takes a lot of energy, and at the end the impact is not that big*.

So why the effort?". She thus prefers environments where the focus is not on her Muslimness, but rather on her research, which enables her to help to eliminate inequalities experienced by elderly people with dementia. She thus aims to challenge the imaginary boundaries between Us and Them, which are responsible for the current inequalities. These modes of participation are rather overt and more visible than the hidden resistance tactics which scholars aim to study (Scott, 1985; de Certeau, 1980). In the following sections, we aim to gain a better understanding of Muslims' everyday practices challenging power structures.

Reversing the gaze

Some participants aim to tackle negative portrayals of Muslims by gaining knowledge about how the majority society thinks about them. Participants believed that the mainstream media, together with political discussions about specific issues that concern them, can deliver insights into the mechanisms of racialization. Aiming to navigate power structures that are impossible to ignore, Ayse (24y, student) explains how important her education at the university was, in order to learn "*how these (racialization) processes work. I thought that I should at least have to know how things work behind the scenes [Veil], so that I would feel less powerless. And it did. So, I don't regret it."* Similarly, Kamal (35y), a university-educated man who spent years volunteering and working in civil society organizations, reflects on his use of the media:

"*Yes, [I follow media] every day. I check websites of newspapers and the public broadcast. That's the worldview of the elite. Through mainstream media, you know how the elite thinks. Keep your friends close, but your enemies closer. You have to know what the elite thinks. Sometimes it's nonsense, because we live in a right-wing society. But we have to try to penetrate through their worldview and strategies."*

Interestingly, when talking about the elite who produce the power structures, he describes them as the enemy. This highlights an overall understanding of this environment as hostile and unsafe. However, rather than putting him off, he demonstrates a continuous engagement with the medium in a vein that is similar to what de Certeau described as a tactic. The tactic here is to observe the mass media in an ethnographic way – to "know how the elite thinks" – which, in turn, makes it possible to invert that gaze. The observed becomes the observer. Previous scholars have built upon Foucault's notion of the panopticon (a prison design in which all prisoners can be watched by a single guard), revealing how Muslim minorities experience continuous scrutiny and discipline themselves due to an internalization of the gaze (Van Es, 2019; Islam, 2020). An inversion of the gaze to objectify the dominant majority may not, of course, be as powerful as overturning it, but objectifying it and turning it into a "site of investment" becomes a strategy which allows Kamal to navigate it. In her study of Norwegian Muslims,

van Es (2019) documents how her female interlocutors strategically navigated this panoptical gaze. They were hyper aware of the fact that their words and deeds could at any time be linked to the Islamic faith.

As Muslims feel persistently scrutinized, Ayse, a 24-year-old student, experienced her presence in the European district in Brussels on a school outing as if she did not belong in this white, male environment. However, she experienced her bodily presence as a way of resisting the marginalization of Muslims: "*You feel watched [due to my headscarf]. But it's like telling [the dominant society] that I am here, they can't ignore us."* An element which is visible and perceived as negative is used as a hidden transcript to reject how her body is othered. This example also shows how visible minorities (i.e veiled women) can disrupt and invade male-dominated and white hegemonic spaces by their mere presence (Puwar, 2004). The author asserts that spaces are not neutral, as gendered and racial power structures are produced and experienced, expatiating on how minorities challenge the power dynamics. Following van Es' analyses, we argue that the fear of being judged and excluded due to their Muslimness also shapes religious practices, as Muslims reflect on how their actions will be perceived by the majority group.

Doing Da'wa: Modeling proper Islamic behavior

Generally, participants mentioned opportunities embodying their strivings for recognition, emancipation and equality, which shape the self and their worlds. As an example, Karim (47y), who works for a municipal authority, presented himself as *"a devout Muslim"* who negotiates the concessions he has to make as a Muslim. As a Muslim, he believes that he should avoid gender-mixed places or places where alcohol is served unless his job requires him to be there. Due to the hostile context, he therefore advises Muslims to carefully consider the balance of power, and to make sacrifices in everyday interactions. Karim states the following: " *Sometimes you have to adjust, because you have no other option. I , for instance, can't demand to only willing to share my office with men. You know that's not possible… Or not attend a reception at work because there will be alcohol because our religions says so. In a way, we - as Muslims - have to adjust to these situations."*

Karim's view echoes that of many other interlocutors who expressed a deep awareness and carefulness about how their conduct reflects upon other Muslims. They are not only seeking to make their own life easier but also that of the Muslim community, since the actions of an individual Muslim reflect on all other Muslims; Islam is viewed as, in essence, homogenous and the action of one person can be oversimplified as representing the actions of all Muslims. This is akin to what Mayanthi Fernando described as "the burden of representation" (Fernando, 2015). Thus, Muslims aiming to shift boundaries, Us vs Them, have to persuade the dominant group of the uselessness and inaccuracy of constructed boundaries while at the same time staying true to being Muslim, and still balancing this with living in a

secular society. They look for the middle ground, strive to combine two subjectivities that are perceived as clashing (see also Du Bois, 1999).

As subordinate groups are deemed to negotiate their space in the public sphere, most interviewees agreed that Muslims should do good even when hampered by tension and exclusion. One key principle is to stay polite in interactions discussing injustices, while doing one's utmost to refrain from aggressive discussions or attacking the other person. These discussions can create awareness of Muslims' racial experiences, as the majority are oblivious of the racialized world. Muslim participants underlined the importance of everyday encounters in which they seek to reflect as little as possible the constructed racialized projections of the dominant group . Karim (47y) stresses the following:

"*The way I interact with people is very important to me. I don't have to, but I want to give the example of what being Muslim truly is. If I talk to my neighbor, if I am out on the streets, in my conversations or in my interactions with people to show what a Muslim truly is, because I know they predominantly see me as Muslim. I am not going to be the one who for instance is going to steal, fight or something like that. To me that's not what Muslims do. It's about living together, as the prophet informed us. That's what we try to do … So, it comes down to the following: if Flemish people see you, at the end they should have a positive image of Muslims.*"

This notion of being Good Muslims, or good citizens inspired by Islam, in everyday life is viewed by some participants as crucial to tackle dominant narratives on Muslims and to achieve recognition for who Muslims truly are. These daily acts and gestures of Islamic practices that are not quite political enough to be perceived as such, or infrapolitics (Scott, 1990:183), can slowly break down the negative portrayals surrounding Muslims. Moreover, since participants are aware they are perceived as representatives of Islam, this will affect how they view their engagement: how they behave or react will also affect other Muslims. Accordingly, Wissam (38) explains:

"We have to do what the prophet Muhammed summoned us to do. Be good. Not only towards Muslims, but also your whole attitude. There is a hadith, that I can't recall literally. But it's your attitude, akhlaq, that you have to show to everyone. It's about how to represent Muslims. A lot of people don't know anything about Islam. Through your behavior, people can get a whole other image of Islam. That's important. Do something about your behavior. For instance, we have the same neighbors for over 30 years. With Easter, they send us Easter eggs, and with Islamic feasts, we send them cookies. [..] Let them see another image than what they see on TV."

In the last sentence, Wissam summarized what Muslims ought to do: to show an image which differs from the dominant stereotypes, through their everyday religious conduct. Being a Good Muslim goes back to Prophet Mohamed – showing patience and meeting hate with love, and thus imitating the Prophet's behavior during his hardships, emphasizing religion as peaceful (Ellefsen and Sandberg, 2021). In addition, since her religious beliefs are visible – Wissam wears a headscarf – she feels the burden to give the best possible impression of Muslims. Taking cookies to the neighbors can therefore be understood as a *political* gesture, aiming to convey an image of generous and caring Muslim women. This image is not seen on television and thus challenges oppressive narratives.

Paradoxically, despite the importance of Islam for the participants, converted Muslims stated that they are reluctant to self-present themselves as Muslims (i.e. converts) to the majority in everyday interactions such as work or on social media, to avoid exclusion. This is illustrated by Linda (31y) a nurse working in a retirement home who converted to Islam a few years ago. She shared how her close environment reacted badly when she converted, as if she was disloyal. These experiences made her hesitant to share her conversion with others, for instance at work. She declares:

"I am not going to tell [that I am Muslim], because I am scared of hitting the wall and they [my colleagues] will look at me in a different way […] It sometimes bothers me. Maybe I will grow out of it. But for now, I can't handle the confrontation" (Linda, 31y).

This fear of being judged and excluded also shapes Muslims' (in particular womens') religious practices such as wearing the veil, as they are constantly considering the consequences. Previous research has described the formation of Muslim subjectivities as a process of negotiation about interpretations of Islamic performances, practices and experiences (de Koning, 2008), questioning how to manage their conduct in everyday encounters with non-Muslims (van Es, 2019, Tibi, 2020). Some Muslims, such as Louiza (34y), a housewife and mother of two, therefore monitor not only their behavior but also their religious appearances, fearing rejection. She explains how she was aware of her gendered and minoritized status, and tried to fully assimilate when she was young, in the language she used and her appearance:

"I really struggled to identify myself as a Muslim woman, because I have never experienced racism. Never. First, because I was born here, and I speak Dutch like every Belgian, and I used to color my hair blond. So, I really never experienced racism. And I thought, if I identify myself as a Muslim, and yes, my name says something, but it's really the way you look that's important making a statement of being a Muslim. But I struggled as I feared racism. I feared rejections, comments, awkward behavior towards me. Eventually, I took the step [wearing a veil], but very late like in my thirties. But still feeling a bit

uncomfortable about it. People act differently although I am still me, I talk and act the same but from the moment I put on my hijab, there is a clear reticence."

Building up a counterpower

A third strategy observed in the interview is more collective and consists of supporting and strengthening other, mostly younger generations, helping them to engage more strongly and fully with society. Participants with children spoke about how they try to prepare their children (and more broadly young Muslims), emphasizing their position on the margins of society. Through organizing themselves, they also sought to address important issues such as anti-racism, but also education and the labor market, to abolish obstacles for younger generations. Yasmina (41y), a housewife and mother of 6 children, places considerable emphasis on preparing her children for "the real world", arguing that:

'Life is not all about sunshine and rainbows. We have been there for decades. As Belgians with a Moroccan background you have to prove yourself double as hard, you have to put up with a lot of things to achieve something in life. That's general knowledge. You also have to be careful what you say and do, because you know how it will be interpreted [by the majority]. They [my children] have to prepare themselves for the prejudices people have about them. When you stand up for your faith, you will be reprimanded."

While some emphasized education, Karim (47y) talked about the importance of pushing youngsters to act. Through his civic engagement, which involved bringing together the mayor, the police and young Muslims for a meeting, he encourages youngsters to speak about their interests, concerns and needs. By informing and discussing matters with political decision makers, Muslims should – as citizens – force them to listen to their grievances and hold them accountable. Karim understands the frustrations of young people, but throwing in the towel is not an option for him. While speaking about his motivation for political action and volunteering, he described his view of young Muslims as the future, the way to tackle domination. He therefore must get them ready to participate. In the words of Karim (47, city official):

"I always said, we have to get the young Muslims ready for the future. Because most of them are not into it. They are all negative about the future. But to me, it's the contrary: when you understand everything and can position yourself in the debate, make yourself heard and are a bit articulate, you can counter oppression. Don't let yourself be treated badly as we [older generations] did. That's the reason why I participate, to push youngsters [to participate]."

Karim was one of the few who criticized how most young Muslims currently react to being excluded: notably by participating in riots, vandalism or hanging around in public spaces, which could also be perceived as hidden tactics (Scott, 1985). By engaging with young people, he tries to show how they can participate in a lawful and meaningful way. Others complained that the Muslim community is divided by religious interpretations, gender and class; these divisions prevent the formation of a strong and powerful community that can work together to abolish oppression. All in all, the participants were – in their own words – realistic, as they did not believe that change would occur overnight. Indeed, to achieve revolutionary changes, huge struggles are needed, opposing the core of the oppression, as interlocutors aim to shatter the constructed superiority position of the West. These strategies of coming together, organizing around core principles with the goal of achieving revolutionary changes questioning the dominance of racializing society, are described as weapons of the weak, thus emphasizing everyday forms of "genuine" resistance of subjectivities (Scott, 1985). However, the paradox remains: people are attempting to belong to a community that renders them powerless through distorted projections of Muslims. However, as Du Bois (1999) would argue: without striving, the racialized will stay imprisoned.

Conclusion

This article aimed to gain a better understanding of the everyday acts of resistance employed by Muslims to resist domination in racialized societies. Drawing on in-depth interviews with Muslims in Flanders (Belgium), we see that Muslims are aware of a double consciousness influencing their self-formation and political behavior. Moreover, the intersection of religion, race, ethnicity, and gender shapes how Muslims experience racialization in myriad ways, but also how they understand, negotiate and challenge oppressive discourses in their everyday life.

Second, Muslims try to oppose domination by engaging in political participation and everyday acts and gestures that can be perceived as beyond political. In this study I found three hidden resistance practices: a) reversing the Gaze by gaining knowledge about those in power and their strategies b) being a Good Muslim according to Islam, living by the example of the Prophet Mohamed and 3) aiming to build a counterpower involving younger generations dominated by a hegemonic anti-Islamic discourse. Muslims are thus never merely passive objects: they are able to influence power structures, although never enough to dismantle or abolish domination completely. The findings show the need to focus not only on the recognized forms of political participation, but also on more hidden and everyday acts, which are also political. These endeavors show how Muslims wish to belong to the polity as co-members.

Further research should investigate hidden and creative forms of resistance contesting hegemonic anti-Islamic discourses, to extend the myriad ways in which the less powerful navigate society. Some discuss whether hidden resistance practices could be perceived as political participation; Vintagen and Johanssen (2019) make a strong case for doing so.

CHAPTER 08

Conclusions and discussion

Chapter 8

Conclusion and discussion

Aim and set-up

My dissertation aimed to unravel Muslims' political agency in a racialized environment, where Islam is a *"chronic object of discussion and debate"* (Brubaker, 2014:3). This work therefore sought to capture *"both the agency of Muslims in making the world they inhabit and the enabling and constraining forces of the world as it has been produced"* (Choo and Ferree, 2010:34). Political agency is defined as the ability to decide on and act politically (Crossley, 2022; Cole, 2021). To study how and why Muslims participate in politics in racialized environments in a comprehensive way, this dissertation focused on (1) Muslims' electoral choices of party and candidates and explanations of these choices in a flexible proportional list system, (2) Muslims' non-institutionalized participation and its drivers and (3) Muslims' hidden, everyday resistance practices. Moreover, this dissertation paid attention to the intersecting power dynamics (i.e., gender, religiosity, ethnicity) affecting "the marginalized", using a unique combination of quantitative and qualitative data (exit poll data and candidate data from the 2018 local elections, European Social Survey data and in-depth interviews with Muslims) in a socio-political setting conducive to rigorously study Muslims' agency: Belgium.

In this concluding chapter, I will bring together the various findings and insights gathered from the studies conducted to reflect on Muslims' agency in the political realm. The remainder of this chapter is structured as follows. To start with, I give a systematic overview of the key findings of my dissertation studying Muslims' political participation. The following section describes the limitations of my work and presents future research avenues. The final part touches upon the contributions made by and social implications of this dissertation.

Key findings and contributions

In six empirical chapters, this dissertation unraveled Muslims' agency by systematically studying Muslims' party and preference vote, their noninstitutionalized participation and hidden resistance practices in Belgium (with the exception of Chapter 5, which takes a comparative approach). In the following subsections, I will discuss the empirical findings of my dissertation.

Institutionalized participation

First, drawing on unique exit poll data and in-depth interviews with Muslims describing their decision-making process, Chapter 2 studied factors explaining Muslims' preference for leftist parties at the 2018 local elections in Belgium. We tested not only specific considerations related to the traditional factors of the Michigan model (issues, candidates and party evaluation), but also whether religion and political alienation owing to Muslims' marginalized position explains their leftist vote (factors specific to Muslim minorities). Our empirical findings show that Muslims' leftist party choice (compared with non-Muslims) can be explained by their stronger concern with particular issues (e.g., their precarious socio-economic status), and their more limited party evaluation motives (i.e. party identification). Religious issues (i.e., the ban on veils and religious slaughter), political alienation and the candidates themselves do not seem enough to explain Muslims' massive support for left-wing parties. Interestingly, our results still show a significant and robust effect of Muslim identification with voting for left-leaning parties: being Muslim relates to voting leftist despite the presence of the mediators and control variables in the model. This "Muslim effect" seems to be stronger than the "migrant effect", pointing to Muslim identity as a salient identity marker, as previous scholars have suggested (Dancygier, 2017; Peace, 2015). The interviews confirmed the issues (i.e., socio-economic situation and anti-Muslim discrimination) explaining their party vote.

Next, Muslims' tendency to use preferential votes more than non-Muslims was assessed with the same mediators. Neither the Michigan variables nor the Muslim-specific factors explained why Muslims are more likely to cast a preferential vote than non-Muslims. Interestingly, although previous studies refer to preferential voting as a sophisticated vote cast by more highly educated and politically interested voters (see Wauters et al., 2020), André et al (2017) suggest that occupying a marginalized position could also provoke this specific type of voting behavior. The in-depth interviews showed how Muslim participants explained their preference for Muslim candidates, notably: (1) to endorse candidates who

look like them (descriptive representation), (2) to support "one of them" (symbolic representation) and (3) to represent their interests (substantive representation). These qualitative findings are interesting to show the various explanations for a preference vote. However, as they cannot be generalized, it is necessary, in our view, to study Muslims' preferential voting using quantitative data, to explore whether Muslims are more likely to cast a preference vote for Muslim candidates.

To do this, in Chapter 3, we looked at the case of Antwerp, one of the largest majority-minority cities in Belgium, with a sizeable Muslim electorate. We used accurate and representative exit poll data and candidate data, while oversampling Muslims in urban districts. The compulsory voting and oversampling in Belgium ensured sufficient data on Muslims' electoral choices in an ideal-typical setting: a flexible proportional list system with a wide range of parties (from radical left to radical right parties), each presenting a candidate list diverse in terms of gender, age, ethnicity and religion. Voters could cast either a list vote (agreeing with the order of the candidate list as presented) or one or multiple preference votes on a single party list. Our study is novel because we were able to study the decision-making process of Muslims (demand side) while simultaneously considering candidate characteristics (supply side). Other studies generally rely on either demand-side or supply-side data (with the exception of van Erkel, 2019). We not only gauged whether Muslims are more likely to vote for Muslim candidates, but also whether Muslims who frequently attend mosque are more prone to vote for Muslim candidates.

The results of our analyses clearly illustrated Muslims' agency when casting a preferential vote. First, Muslims were more likely to cast preferential votes than list votes, compared with non-Muslims, although this type of voting is perceived as a sophisticated vote notably for the more highly educated and politically interested citizens (Wauters et al., 2020). Second, Muslim voters were more likely to vote for "only other candidates" than for "only list puller" or "list puller and other candidates". We can therefore assume that Muslim voters actively search for Muslim candidates, as Muslims are rarely ranked as list puller. Thirdly, our combined analyses indeed showed that Muslims were more likely to vote for Muslim candidates. However, voters who frequently attended mosque were not more prone to vote for Muslim candidates.

Chapter 4 delved deeper into the question of affinity voting by Muslims, due to gendered racialization portraying Muslim women as submissive and oppressed. As Muslim women are often blamed for a lack of political agency, it is useful to carry out more in-depth analyses on the gendered preferential voting of Muslims. Are Muslim men voters and Muslim women voters more likely to vote for respectively Muslim men candidates and Muslim women candidates? The intersectional approach to affinity voting

among a stigmatized group – *in casu* Muslims – is thus a follow-up to the novel research which combines demand-side data and supply-side data in order to study Muslims' gendered preferential voting, while taking account of important factors such as ballot list position, incumbency and traditional parties.

Our analyses in Chapter 4 showed several interesting findings illustrating the complexity of Muslims' electoral choices through an intersectional lens. First, showing their agency, Muslim women did not differ in their use of preferential voting from Muslim men or non-Muslim women. Second, Muslim votes tended to be gender-based (Muslim men tend to vote for men candidates, while Muslim women tend to vote for women candidates); however, Muslim women voters were not more likely than Muslim men voters to choose someone of their own gender. Third, Muslims voted for Muslim candidates, but Muslim women voters were less likely to vote for Muslim candidates than Muslim men voters. Fourth, and more interestingly, based on an intersectional approach to affinity voting, we find – with caution – that Muslim men voters were more likely to vote for Muslim men candidates, thus an intersectional vote, while we did not find an intersectional vote among Muslim women voters. To put it differently, Muslim women voters were not more likely to vote for Muslim women candidates. Although some would point to the conservative attitude of Muslim women to explain such voting preferences (Dancygier, 2017), additional bivariate analysis comparing the average support for gender parity in politics challenges this stereotype. There was no meaningful difference between Muslim women voters and non-Muslim women voters, while men in general (Muslim and non-Muslim) displayed less support for an equal proportion of women and men in politics. This finding seems to contradict the stereotype of submissive and conservative Muslim women, but relates, instead, to the explanation given by Celis and Erzeel (2013), implying that the selectorate chooses (non-visible) Muslim women candidates so as not to scare off the non-Muslim majority electorate, and to enhance internal gender and ethnic diversity instead of accommodating Muslim women's interests and needs.

The first three empirical chapters focusing on Muslims' electoral choices and explanations of these clearly demonstrated their political agency, as Muslims seem to act to promote their interests. First, this can be seen in their choice of leftist parties, due to issues related to their precarious socio-economic status and exclusion from society. Interestingly, religious issues do not seem to play a significant role, despite the widespread othering of Muslims in society, based on their faith. This does not mean that religion does not play a role in Muslims' political participation; I rather argue that Muslims generally do not find that current political parties represent their religious needs and interests. Indeed, Muslim participants explained during the interviews that they do not feel fully represented by leftist political parties, as they enact policies that go against Muslims' interests (i.e. the headscarf ban). In a similar vein, recent studies have shown how leftist parties take up positions conflicting with the religious

interests of Muslims (Bray, 2011; Gaasendam, 2021), this may be why religious issues do not explain Muslims' leftist party votes. Second, our studies on Muslims' preferential voting showed that Muslims are more prone to vote for Muslim candidates, thus suggesting the existence of a Muslim vote. Furthermore, Muslim men were more likely to vote for Muslim men candidates, while this intersectional vote was absent among Muslim women voters. These results suggest that when party selectorates opt for Muslim candidates, they aim to appeal to Muslim men. This could be because Muslim women voters are not prototypical members of a social group (i.e., Muslims and women), illustrating their double disadvantage, and are thus neglected as a target group.

Nonetheless, as an underrepresented group, Muslims seem to vote strategically in order to pressurize political actors to consider their interests and needs. This is particularly evident in their decision-making process, as captured by the interviews: (particularly Maghrebian) Muslims made their electoral choices by considering the obstacles they experience in everyday life (i.e., Islamophobia, low socio-economic status), and aiming to better their situation. However, this does not mean that Muslims only act based upon their Muslim identity. Applying an intersectional lens, we see that interlocking power dynamics, i.e., gender, class, age, explain the variation in Muslims' electoral behavior. These findings question the alleged homogeneity of Muslim communities, while at the same time also seeming to highlight the importance of Muslim belonging, even transcending the role of ethnicity, as previous studies have claimed (Dancygier, 2014; Zibouh, 2014; Fleichmann et al., 2011). Our findings strengthen the wish voiced in the introduction that Muslim subjectivities should (also) be researched in political science studies, rather than a single focus on ethnicity, thus acknowledging that both identity markers are intertwined. Lastly, I carefully claim that, owing to the comparable social and political positions of Muslims (i.e., Islamophobia, labor migration narratives) in other Western European countries, the electoral findings can be extrapolated to these countries. I will address this point when discussing future research avenues.

Noninstitutionalized participation

Chapters 5 and 6 have further extended our understanding of Muslims' political behavior, through a focus on the various ways in which Muslims engage politically (in addition to voting), and their reasons for doing so. Chapter 5 studied – in a quantitative and comparative way – how mosque attendance, religious salience and religious discrimination shape Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation (i.e., boycotting products, signing petitions, taking part in lawful demonstrations, wearing a badge or sticker, posting or sharing anything political online). We made use of the European Social Survey data, selecting

six Western European countries. The analyses indicated how religious salience enhances noninstitutionalized participation for Muslims in general, whereas religious discrimination shows no significants effect. Contrary to studies conducted in the US, we have not found that mosques operate as mobilization vehicles for Muslims (Jamal, 2005). However, as Muslim men and women experience discrimination, mosque attendance and religious salience differently, we applied an intersectional approach to test whether these religious predictors play out differently when intersecting with gender.

Interestingly, our intersectional analyses showed no significant effects. We can therefore conclude that our three religious predictors do not influence Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation. Interestinngly, differences were also found between countries, suggesting that the socio-political context in which Muslims live provides differing perceived opportunities to participate in noninstitutionalized forms of action.

Chapter 6 addressed how Muslims "talk back" (hooks, 1989), by exploring which forms of noninstitutionalized participation Muslims engage in, and what shapes these noninstitutionalized political activities; to do this, we drew on in-depth interviews conducted with self-identifying Muslims in Flanders. First, this study revealed that Muslims may distrust mainstream politics but believe in democracy as a political system, and therefore, in addition to mandatory voting, took "regular" political action (boycotting, petitions, demonstrating). Second, Muslim participants engaged in activities with local governments (e.g., lobbying and advisory boards) and also everyday practices (e.g., the use of social media for political ends, their daily work), seeking and constructing spaces that they can control in order to produce alternative self-representations. When focusing on what motivates them to participate in such activities, I identified three main reasons given during the interviews. First, Muslim participants talked about their upbringing, where international politics were often discussed (i.e., the Israeli-Palestine conflict, the US invasion of Afghanistan), to explain their political engagement striving for transnational justice. Second, similarly to the scholarly work of Peucker (2018, 2019) I find that Muslims are inspired by their Islamic faith to do good and contribute to society, but democratic and humanistic principles, such as being a good citizen, also informed their engagement through counterpublic spheres. Lastly, Islamophobia seems to engender political participation for some Muslims, while constraining participation for others, e.g., Muslim women refraining from attending protests or avoiding certain neighborhoods because they feel unsafe. All in all, as Muslims are heterogenous, they also differ in the multiple ways they counteract their marginalization.

Hidden everyday resistance practices

The last empirical study, Chapter 7, draws on the double consciousness theory of Du Bois, explaining that Muslims see themselves through the eyes of the dominant group. Therefore, to counter the widespread stereotypes of Islam, Muslims also engage in more covert forms of political participation, also referred to as hidden everyday resistance tactics (see also Scott, 1990; de Certeau, 1985). First, Muslims inform themselves about the dominant group, invoking an inversion of the (Muslim) gaze in order to understand and challenge their marginalization. Second, we found that there are diverse, almost opposing ways, in which "being a Muslim" plays a role in their political participation, depending on, for example, their experiences of discrimination. Whereas the Islamic repertoire is actively mobilized to counter negative stereotypes (i.e. actively referring to how Islam promotes cohesive and constructive values), we also witness a simultaneous concealment of one's Muslimness from non-Muslims, to avoid exclusion. These different resistance tactics are informed by intersecting powers and Muslims' positionalities, for instance hiding their Muslimness (and thus otherness) is a strategy enacted by Muslim converts and Muslims who are not visibly Muslim. Muslims who were visible (e.g., wore a headscarf) had no other option than to engage with hidden resistance tactics to challenge existing prejudices (e.g., bringing cookies to non-Muslims to refute the Muslim-as-the-dangerous-other view). Thirdly, Muslims invest in building a counterpower by engaging with younger generations in order to strengthen resistance in the future. In sum, while we learn much about the acknowledged forms of political participation, more research is needed into the ways in which subjugated minorities enact hidden resistance tactics to better their situation, and how Muslims tackle their marginalization through everyday resistance tactics.

The last three empirical chapters of the dissertation showed how Muslims engage with a variety of political activities in addition to institutionalized participation (e.g., voting). These chapters described not only the creative ways in which Muslims navigate racialized environments, but also Muslims' motivations to challenge discourses that marginalize them. Our findings further show that the noninstitutionalized participation of Muslims is shaped by a complex interplay of family socialization, Islamic faith and Islamophobia, generating subordinate counterpublics. Applying an intersectional lens, this dissertation unraveled how political actions are shaped by, for example, gender, religiosity, age, class and visible Muslimness. All in all, Muslims seem to balance the way they counteract their exclusion depending on the power dynamics at play, finding refuge in hidden and everyday resistance practices. More importantly, Muslims, with their specific demands, needs and interests owing to their social location in a society characterized by Islamophobia, seem to challenge concepts which are taken for granted, such as agency and a secular public sphere providing alternative interpretations (i.e., counterpublic spheres), through overt and covert forms of political participation. So, although public

debates on Islam aim to push religion to the marginal spaces of society, Muslims seemingly talk back while challenging the status quo constructed by a dominant secular group.

Limitations and future research

In this section, I acknowledge and reflect on some of the limitations that constrained this dissertation. A few of these limitations directly concern the data and measurement of the religion-related concepts used in the dissertation. Second, I will elaborate on areas that we have studied which may benefit from further attention, and areas which were not studied, suggesting future research avenues.

First, owing to the collaboration with several Belgian universities, a unique exit poll dataset was made available. However, to guarantee that the survey would be kept a manageable length, all universities could include two extra questions in the exit poll survey (as well as the agreed questions on voting behavior and political attitudes). We chose to use two standard questions, on religious belonging and the worship attendance of respondents, because the survey focused on voters in general, not Muslims alone. Previously, El Menouar (2014) criticized such standard items, as, generally, indicators measuring Christian religiosity were adapted to Islamic terminology. This is partly because election surveys mainly focus on the dominant group, paying less attention to characteristics of minority groups. Indeed, it would have been fruitful to study the varieties of Muslim religiosity and the effects of this on Muslims' political engagement. El-Menouar's (2014) instrument for measuring Muslim religiosity, albeit a more limited version, would benefit quantitative research studying the relationship between religiosity and Muslims' political engagement. Additionally, Fleischmann (2022) reviewed two decades of large-scale survey research on the relationship between immigrants' level of religiosity and their integration into European societies, and suggested a focus on differences in reasoning about religion and religious meaning-making, as additional, potentially more powerful explanations for migrants' social relations. These innovations are particularly important owing to the growing interest in Muslims' religiosity as a subject for empirical social research. All in all, these challenges in measuring religiosity tap into how Muslim-as-a-concept is understood and defined. In this dissertation we opted for self-definition by Muslims, acknowledging that there could be as many definitions as respondents in this study, owing to the racialized environment.

Second, an approach examining more than one aspect sheds light on the complexity of Muslims' agency while taking account of Muslims' multiple identities. With regard to Muslims' engagement,

intersectional theory provides deeper insights into how differences in Muslims' positionality (i.e., gender, class, age, religiosity, Islamophobia) leads to unique experiences and therefore also unique ways of engaging with political acts, even beyond the acknowledged forms of political participation. Interestingly, research is now emerging on how to study intersectionality in social sciences in a quantitative manner (Spierings, 2012; Bauer et al., 2021; Misra et al., 2020). This is a methodological development that can only be applauded, but also calls for more investigation into the wide variety of methodological tools needed to analyze power relations through their intersections. Indeed, power and oppression are key to understanding intersectional inequalities (Misra et al., 2020). Overall, intersectional research is a complex task that requires a strong theoretical and methodological approach, but it can provide valuable insights into the ways in which different processes of marginalization intersect and interact to shape the experiences of individuals and groups.

Third, although I previously argued that the findings in this dissertation related to Muslims' agency can be generalized to other Western European countries, I do not exclude potential country-level differences or other influential factors such as the level of political representation, the level of elections (i.e., national, regional, local) and the political climate (i.e., the success of radical right parties). Moreover, in the Belgian proportional list system, Muslims could opt for one or multiple candidates in the same list; it would be useful to conduct studies in countries where the preferential vote is limited to one vote (i.e, the Netherlands). This country-level variation is found in Chapter 5, our comparative study, which focuses on non-electoral participation of Muslims. We did not scrutinize this country-level variation any further, as our study was focused on the influence of religious predictors, and how they intersect with gender. In a similar vein, most studies on Muslims' political behavior focus on a single country and identify individual-level characteristics, although more comparative research on Muslims' political engagement could provide insights into contextual variations, explaining for instance why political parties founded by ethnic minorities (i.e., Nida, Denk) are more popular in the Netherlands than in Belgium (i.e., DSA, Be.One). All in all, more research is necessary to study the extent to which country-level and other variations play a role in Muslims' political participation.

Fourth, the qualitative dataset aimed to provide a more in-depth understanding of Muslims' electoral and non-electoral choices and acts. To gather respondents, I sent a call out to several organizations with Muslim followers, and asked for respondents to contact me. This potentially explains why the majority of those who participated in the interviews have attended higher education or were more politically interested. One could argue that some groups, e.g., lower educated and first-generation Muslims, are less likely to contact a researcher to be interviewed. Moreover, as most of the participants had a Moroccan background and were second or third generation Muslims, one could ask how this impacted

the findings of the qualitative studies. A more ethnically diversified pool of respondents (e.g., Turkish, Afghan, Iraqi respondents), as well as different generations, would have benefited this dissertation, particularly in order to study potential differences related to ethnicity and generations of Muslims. It was therefore not possible to examine in more depth intra-community differences based on, for example, ethnicity and the different generations. More research is needed, then, to confirm or question the findings presented in the empirical chapters.

Fifth, scholarly knowledge about Islam and Muslims has mainly concentrated on what policymakers and public opinion deem important, neglecting issues other than integration, security and secularism (Sunier, 2009; Sayyid, 2009; Fadil et al., 2015). More political science studies should therefore examine the frames and processes that affect Muslims in the political arena. Moreover, more research is needed on how Muslims aim to challenge discourses that marginalize them, and the impact of this on mainstream narratives. Through their participation, some Muslims seem to challenge the assumed dichotomy between the religious and secular, in order to create more space for Muslim communities, while other Muslims uphold this binary. Scholars have pointed to the need to re-conceptualize the notion of agency and secular public spheres in the understanding of Muslims' lives (Salem 2013; Fadil, 2003, Göle, 2002; Mahmood, 2005); this is currently lacking in Western frameworks. In this respect, further exploration should be encouraged of how Muslims' political agency is shaped and shapes non-Muslim societies, gaining insight into the challenges this poses to more secular/liberal interpretations of Muslims' agency.

Responding to this call, this dissertation focused mostly on institutionalized and noninstitutionalized modes of participation – with the exception of the last chapter exploring everyday resistance practices. As Muslims' agency is found in our studies, more research is needed on what explains Muslims' preferential voting, which variables make Muslims more prone to vote for Muslim candidates and the reasons for the lack of an intersectional vote among Muslim women. Moreover, all these efforts of Muslim affinity voting could result in descriptive representation of Muslims in urban cities with a large Muslim electorate. However, the consequences of this type of electoral participation and representation remain relatively unexplored. For instance, we do not know whether such participation also results in more political trust or substantive representation.

Sixth, more scholarly attention should be paid to a broadening of what we understand as political participation beyond the widely acknowledged forms, as such research can illustrate how subjugated minorities employ hidden and everyday resistance practices to challenge their marginalization, despite the existing power structures. Johansson and Vintagen (2019) emphasize that hidden resistance practices in particular can tell us more about the agency of marginalized and vilified minorities, as overt forms of

participation may harm them. Indeed, in the qualitative interviews, Muslims explained how they refrain from (some) political actions so they are less likely to be excluded by non-Muslims. Chapter 7 engages with these hidden political acts, but more could be unraveled by focusing in particular on covert forms of participation. One could also question whether this type of participation is related to being a member of a minority group. Research focusing on minority groups other than Muslims and migrants (i.e; LGBTQ+), could provide the insights needed.

Seventh, this dissertation did not consider more violent modes of participation (e.g., vandalism, riots) or the non-participation of Muslims, so I did not fully cover Muslims' agency. Non-participation in elections, for example, could also be one way of exercising agency. To put it differently, in oppressive social environments, resisting and rejecting authority figures who supervise oppressive institutions has been described as an important form of self-preservation, and thus, as agency (Cole, 2021). Research aiming for a better understanding of why Muslims do not want to participate in politics, could therefore be a follow-up study on Muslims' agency.

Lastly, Muslims' continuous efforts to belong as co-members of the polity could be applauded. This dissertation has shown that Muslims are not merely passive subjects, but are able to influence power structures, although realizing that this – for now – is not enough to dismantle or abolish domination completely. Thus, we could consider the psychological implications for Muslims who continuously challenge exclusionary and oppressive narratives. Studies on the consequences of racial experiences and challenging these experiences, primarily conducted in the US, highlight consequences for the mental and physical wellbeing of political actors, describing how racist experiences provoke stress and mental health issues (Samari, 2016; Basit, 2010; Khan, 2021). Since little research has been conducted in Western Europe on how Muslims' participation in a racialized society impacts their health and wellbeing, research on this matter could be prioritized. At what cost do Muslims aim to influence the power structures in a society that marginalizes them?

Contributions and social implications

Drawing on a quantitative and qualitative data collection, my contribution to the literature on Muslims' political participation is fourfold. In the following section, I will elaborate on how this dissertation added to the literature on Muslims' agency, intersectionality and resistance studies.

First, the stereotype of the agency-less Muslim is widespread in Western Europe, as Muslims are seen as following religious principles, and thus not as autonomous individuals. However, the results of this dissertation challenge the multiple stereotypical portrayals of Muslims not engaging in the political realm. My dissertation unraveled how Muslims in Belgium do exert agency in a variety of ways, not only to counter their marginalization but also to contribute to society as co-members of the polity. First, the electoral studies in this field demonstrated Muslims' agency through their vote for leftist parties and Muslim candidates, and described factors influencing this electoral behavior (issues and Muslim belonging). Both electoral choices could benefit Muslims, as left-wing parties and Muslim candidates are perceived to be more responsive to Muslims' needs and interests. Furthermore, the wide range of non-electoral political activities in which Muslims engage show their creativity in challenging their marginalization and exclusion, not only as Muslims, but also as women, young people, politically interested citizens. Second, scrutinizing worship attendance, religious salience and Islamophobia, this dissertation does not find that religion hampers Muslims' political participation. Research on Muslims' agency therefore contributes to a deeper overall understanding of the political engagement of Muslim communities, highlighting barriers and challenges that Muslim individuals and groups may face when participating in the political process.

All in all, these findings contribute to contemporary debates which aim to integrate Muslims (perceived as a monolithic group) into secular societies. This dissertation shows how problematizing Muslims' faith affects their sense of belonging. New and crucial insights into Muslims' complex political behavior could have implications for the strategies of political parties, particularly which issues to highlight and/or which candidates to field when aiming to attract the votes of Muslims. This is particularly true in urban areas where the demographical growth of Muslims has turned this faith group into an electoral force which parties cannot ignore.

Second, this dissertation contributes to academic research by providing a more comprehensive understanding of the political behavior of Muslims. I did not focus solely on institutionalized or noninstitutionalized participation, but also studied what are perceived as acknowledged forms of

political participation by considering Muslims' hidden and everyday resistance practices. To do so, the empirical studies rely on innovative data (exit poll data, candidate data, interviews, ESS) and a mixed methods approach providing insights into the ways in which Muslims, a marginalized and contested minority group, organize and mobilize for political action. The dissertation thus provides a more nuanced and complex understanding of the ways in which Muslims engage with politics, challenging misconceptions about them.

Third, the intersectional approach of several chapters adds to the growing – but still limited – literature on how intersecting power dynamics shape Muslims' political participation. Indeed, Muslims are not a homogenous group, but are differentiated in a complex way through age, gender, education, ethnicity but also in what it means to be a Muslim, how Islamophobia affects them, in their political actions, and therefore also in the unique ways they deal with their marginalization. Our intersectional approach has provided a deeper understanding of Muslims' unique experiences and challenges when participating in politics. This dissertation therefore stresses the need for policies adapted to the differences which exist among Muslims owing to, for instance, gender, class, ethnicity and age. General policies aimed at Muslims, perceiving them as a monolithic block, are outdated and focus mainly on a certain group within the Muslim communities, while excluding others. Government boards should therefore investigate the heterogeneity of Muslim communities if they wish their inclusionary policies to succeed. All in all, this research can help to challenge stereotypes and misconceptions about Muslims, and inform policies and decision-making on issues related to Muslim minorities.

Lastly, drawing on Du Bois' theory of the double consciousness, the last chapter has provided evidence of Muslims seeing themselves through the eyes of the dominant group. This double consciousness shapes how Muslims challenge the power structures which oppress them. For instance, by inverting the gaze, Muslims gain information on how the racializing think, and therefore gain insights into how they could avoid being stereotyped or act in a way so as not to be excluded. This existence of a Muslim double consciousness has implications for research on Islam and Muslims enacted by non-Muslim researchers. If Muslim respondents do not feel they can trust the non-Muslim interviewer, perceiving them as a member of the dominant group, they are likely to answer in a socially desirable way, aiming to change the dominant narratives through their participation in research. In addition, one could ask what this double consciousness means in the case of Muslim researchers. To what extent does a Muslim researcher also provoke socially desirable answers when asking Muslims about their religious values and experiences? In general, all researchers – and in particular members of the dominant group – should become involved in processes on, for example, how to engage with Muslim respondents, how to build relationships based on trust, how to identify their biases. Through sincere engagement with reflexivity

processes and an analysis of researchers' positionality, the research field on Muslims and Islam (but also other research fields) could only benefit from such critical thinking, which would eventually result in more valuable, engaged knowledge.

In sum, this dissertation showed how Muslims exert their agency in the political realm through various forms of active engagement, despite facing a range of obstacles. Focusing on Muslims' perspective, this dissertation adds to the literature that does not concentrate on what policymakers deem important. The several empirical studies counter the stereotypes and misconceptions of Muslims that could inform policies, and create awareness of the lack of social justice and equality in our society. These forms of inequality are not only related to Islam, but also to other intersecting oppressive structures such as patriarchy, racism and capitalism. Consequently, research is needed into how factors such as gender, ethnicity, religion and class shape Muslims' political behavior in multifaceted and complex ways. It is therefore important for policymakers and scholars to continue to study and understand the complexities of Muslim political participation in order to promote inclusive and equitable societies. Through critical and ethical research centering on the voices and perspectives of marginalized minorities, we can work towards creating a political landscape that is inclusive and representative of all individuals and communities.

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Appendices

Appendices

Appendix 2.1 Robustness test Model 1A-r and Model 1B-r – Muslims vis-à-vis Catholic/Christian respondents

Both models 1A-r en 1B-r have a good fit, with a chi-square = 29.28(df = 17, p *= 0.03), RMSEA = 0.03 (Model 1A-r) and chi-square = 29.28(df = 17,* p *= 0.03), RMSEA = 0.02 (Model 1B-r). Similarly, to our previous analyses, we reject H1a/H3a/H5a and confirm H2a/H4a, notably stating that issues and party evaluation mediate Muslims' leftists vote vis-à-vis Catholic/Christian voters.*

	Model 1A robustness test – *Muslims on left vote*	**Model 1B robustness test - *Muslims on left vote***
	B (S.E.)	**B (S.E.)**
Total	0.34(0.03)***	0.31(0.03)***
Total indirect	0.03 (0.01)*	0.02 (0.01)*
Specific indirect		
Party evaluation	*Reference category*	0.01 (0.00)*
Religious issues	0.00 (0.01)	-0.00 (0.01)
Issues	0.02 (0.01)**	*Reference category*
Alienation	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Candidate	0.01 (0.00) *	0.02 (0.01)**

*Significance level +p<0.10 / *p<0,05 / **p<0,01 / ***p<0,001*

Appendix 2.2 Robustness test Model 2A-r and Model 2B-r – Muslims vis-à-vis Catholic/Christian respondents

Both models have a good fit, with a chi-square = 65.54 (df =30, p *= 0.00), RMSEA = 0.02 (Model 2A-r) and chi-square = 46.41(df = 29,* p *= 0.02), RMSEA = 0.02 (Model 2B-r). Similar to our previous analyses, neither the Michigan model nor the Muslim-specific variables explain Muslims casting a preferential vote vis-à-vis Catholic/Christian voters.*

	Model 2A robustness test – *Muslims on prefvote*	**Model 2B robustness test - *Muslims on prefvote***
	B (S.E.)	**B (S.E.)**
Total	0.03(0.03)	0.03(0.03)
Total indirect	-0.03(0.01)*	-0.02(0.04)
Specific indirect		
Party evaluation	*Reference category*	-0.00(0.00)
Religious issues	0.00(0.00)	0.00(0.00)
Issues	-0.00(0.00)	*Reference category*

Alienation	0.00(0.00)	0.00(0.00)
Candidate	-0.00(0.00)	-0.00(0.00)
Competence of candidate	-0.00(0.00)	0.00(0.02)
Know a candidate	-0.01(0.01)	-0.01(0.03)

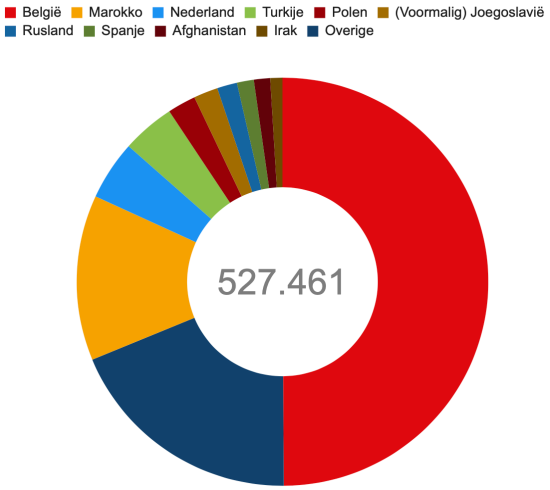
*Significance level +p<0.10 / *p<0,05 / **p<0,01 / ***p<0,001*

Appendix 3.1 Ethnic background of minorities in Antwerp

Ethnic background of minorities in Antwerp	%
Northern Africa	30,6%
Western Asia	18,5%
Eastern Europe	18,2%
Western Europe	15,7%
Southern Europe	6,5%
Western Africa	5,6%
Southern Asia	3 %
Rest category	1,9%
	100%

Source: Data in cijfers, Antwerpen (2018)

Appendix 4.1 Demographic share of citizens with a migration background in Antwerp, Belgium



Source: Stad in cijfers, Antwerpen (2018)

Appendix 4.2 Logistic regression with 'Casted a preferential vote or not' as DV among Muslims (N=233) and Women (N=442)

Muslim sample (N=233)

	B	**S.E.**
Female Muslim	-0.11	0.31
Education(ref High)		
Low	-0.37	0.42
Middle	0.40	0.31
Nagelkerke R square	0.29	

Female sample (N=442)

	B	**S.E.**
Muslim	0.40	0.26
Education(ref High)		
Low	-0.32	0.32
Middle	-0.26	0.24
Nagelkerke R square	0.01	

Appendix 4.3 Number of - (fe)male - Muslim candidates within political parties at the Antwerp local elections of 2018 (N=487)

Party	Number of female Muslim candidates	Number of male Muslim candidates	Number of Muslim candidates/Number of total candidates - % of Muslims on the list
Traditional parties			
Radical left	8	6	14/55 (25%)
Greens	5	8	13/55 (24%)
Socialists	7	4	11/55 (20%)
Christen Democrats	4	6	10/55 (18%)
Liberals	3	3	6/55 (11%)
Nationalist party	3	0	3/55 (5%)
Radical right	0	0	
New migrant parties			
Be.One	5	3	8/10 (80%)
D-SA	14	16	30/37 (81%)
Other (new) local parties			
Burgerlijst	1	1	2/19 (11%)
Paars: Piraten+Volt	1	0	1/16 (6%)
BDW	0	0	0/20 (0%)
Total of Muslim candidates	51 (52%)	47 (48%)	98 (100%)

Appendix 4.4 Percentage of Muslim candidates positioned on party lists per quintile at the Antwerp local elections of 2018 for all parties and only traditional parties (column percentages).

	First quintile (ballot list position 1-11)	Second quintile (ballot list position 12-22)	Third quintile (ballot list position 23-33)	Fourth quintile (ballot list position 34-44)	Fifth quintile (ballot list position 45-55)	Total of candidates
All parties						
Muslim candidates	41 (31%)	29 (26%)	10 (11%)	12 (15%)	6 (8%)	98 (20%)
Non-Muslim candidates	90 (69%)	81 (74%)	78 (89%)	69 (85%)	71 (92%)	389 (80%)
	131(100%)	110(100%)	88(100%)	81(100%)	76(100%)	487 (100%)
Traditional parties						

Muslim candidates	19 (25%)	19 (25%)	5 (7%)	8 (10%)	6 (8%)	57 (15%)
Non-Muslim candidates	58 (75%)	58 (75%)	72 (93%)	69 (93%)	71 (92%)	328 (85%)
	77(100%)	77(100%)	77(100%)	77(100%)	77(100%)	385 (100%)

Appendix 6.1 Information form presented to the participants before the interview

Politieke participatie van moslims: politieke acties en motivaties

U wordt uitgenodigd om vrijwillig deel te nemen aan een onderzoeksproject inzake politieke participatie van moslims in België. Vooraleer u toestemt om aan deze studie deel te nemen, is het belangrijk dat u dit formulier aandachtig leest. In dit informatie- en toestemmingsformulier worden het doel, de onderzoeken, de voordelen, risico's en ongemakken gepaard gaande met de studie beschreven. Ook de voor u beschikbare alternatieven en het recht om op elk ogenblik de studie te verlaten, zijn hieronder beschreven. Er kunnen geen beloften gedaan worden noch waarborgen gegeven worden betreffende de resultaten van het onderzoeksproject. U hebt het recht om op elk ogenblik vragen te stellen over de deze studie.

Doel en beschrijving van de studie
Dit is een wetenschappelijk onderzoek waaraan naar verwachting ongeveer *30* deelnemers zullen deelnemen.

Deze studie is onderdeel van een doctoraatsonderzoek en heeft tot doel om
1. inzichten te verwerven in wat moslims motiveert om voor specifieke kandidaten te kiezen
2. nagaan of en welke vormen van participatie ze aangaan
3. wat hen motiveert om in hun vrije tijd politieke acties te ondernemen

U werd uitgenodigd om deel te nemen aan deze studie omdat
1. je jezelf identificeert als moslim(a)
2. politiek participeert door te stemmen
3. (eventueel) participeert in bijkomende politieke acties (niet-electoraal)

Opdrachtgever van de studie en onderzoek
De opdrachtgever van de studie is Universiteit Antwerpen. Indien u aanvaardt aan de studie deel te nemen en u voldoet aan alle voorwaarden voor deelname aan de studie, dan zal Samira Azabar een diepte-interview van ongeveer een uur of twee afnemen op een rustige locatie naar eigen wensen.

Vrijwillige deelname
U neemt geheel vrijwillig deel aan deze studie en u hebt hiervoor het aangehechte toestemmingsformulier ondertekend.

Belangrijk om te weten is dat u
- steeds het recht hebt te weigeren deel te nemen aan de studie.
- uw deelname aan de studie te stoppen wanneer u wenst (ook na het tekenen van het toestemmingsformulier) zonder reden hiervoor te geven. Het intrekken van uw toestemming zal geen enkel nadeel of verlies van voordelen met zich meebrengen.
- deze informatiefolder meekrijgt om te bewaren

Bescherming van de persoonlijke levenssfeer Uw identiteit en uw deelname aan deze studie worden strikt vertrouwelijk behandeld. U zult niet bij naam of op een andere herkenbare wijze geïdentificeerd worden in resultaten of publicaties in verband met de studie. Het is met name de bedoeling om uw persoonsgegevens te verwerken teneinde het transcriberen en analyseren van de interviews. Na het uitschrijven van de interviews zal het audiobestand , transcripties en het bestand met contactgegevens versleuteld worden bewaard. De naam van de geïnterviewde zal niet voorkomen in de bestandstitels, we hanteren een pseudoniem bij de verwerking en publicatie om uw privacy te bewaren.

Om de doeleinden omschreven in dit formulier te bereiken, zullen de promotoren van mijn doctoraat de nodige controles uitvoeren en dus ook toegang hebben tot uw persoonsgegevens: Prof. Dr. Peter Thijssen. (peter.thijssen@uantwerpen.be) en Prof. Dr. Peter Van Aelst. (peter.vanaelst@uantwerpen.be)

Uw persoonsgegevens zullen steeds verwerkt worden onder de verantwoordelijkheid van Samira Azabar, met telefoonnummer 0485245026 en met e-mailadres samira.azabar@uantwerpen.be . Bij vragen en/of opmerkingen mag u haar ten allen tijde contacteren.

U hebt in het kader van de verwerking van persoonsgegevens bedoeld in dit formulier te allen tijde recht om uw persoonsgegevens kosteloos in te zien en indien nodig te laten verbeteren bij onjuiste en/of onvolledige persoonsgegevens die op uzelf betrekking hebben. U heeft voorts het recht om te vragen dat wij een kopie van uw persoonsgegevens overmaken aan uzelf en/of rechtstreeks aan een andere instelling of persoon van uw keuze in een formaat dat toelaat om deze persoonsgegevens gemakkelijk over te dragen. Indien u meent dat Samira Azabar uw persoonsgegevens niet meer mag verwerken, dan kan u in bepaalde gevallen ook vragen dat uw persoonsgegevens definitief gewist worden. Uw persoonsgegevens zullen in elk geval niet langer bewaard worden dan nodig is voor de doeleinden omschreven in dit formulier namelijk 10 jaar.

Bij klachten Voor bijkomende vragen over uw rechten en alle andere aangelegenheden betreffende de verwerking van uw persoonsgegevens door Samira Azabar kan u ook steeds terecht bij onze functionaris voor gegevensbescherming, via het e-mailadres privacy@uantwerpen.be Deze functionaris ziet op onafhankelijke wijze toe op de naleving van de privacywetgeving binnen het onderzoek van Samira Azabar. Indien u zou menen dat uw persoonsgegevens niet rechtmatig en volgens de wettelijke vereisten worden/werden verwerkt, dan heeft u ook steeds het recht om een klacht in te dienen bij de Privacycommissie (contactgegevens beschikbaar via: www.privacycommission.be). In geval van klachten raden wij evenwel aan om eerst onze functionaris voor gegevensbescherming te contacteren. Vaak zullen eventuele problemen of misverstanden zo eenvoudig opgelost kunnen worden.

Indien u niet wenst dat wij uw persoonsgegevens verwerken voor de doeleinden omschreven in dit formulier, dan mag u uiteraard steeds weigeren om uw toestemming te geven zonder dat u daartoe een reden moet opgeven. Indien u wel uw toestemming heeft gegeven, maar nadien van gedacht verandert, zal u bovendien steeds uw toestemming kunnen intrekken door dit te melden aan Samira Azabar via het e-mailadres: samira.azabar@uantwerpen.be zonder dat u daartoe een reden moet opgeven. Indien u uw toestemming intrekt, zal Samira Azabar uw persoonsgegevens niet verder gebruiken voor de doeleinden omschreven in dit formulier. De intrekking doet echter geen afbreuk aan de rechtmatigheid van de gegevensverwerkingen die reeds plaatsvonden vóór de intrekking van uw toestemming of van gegevensverwerkingen die zonder uw toestemming mogen worden uitgevoerd. Indien u besluit om te weigeren of om uw toestemming in te trekken, dan zal dit voor u geen enkel nadeel met zich meebrengen.

Hergebruik van gegevens Om optimaal gebruik te kunnen maken van alle verzamelde onderzoeksgegevens, zullen de datasets mogelijk in een later stadium hergebruikt worden voor andere onderzoeksdoeleinden. Hierbij garanderen wij dezelfde zorgvuldige omgang met de verstrekte gegevens als bij de initiële verzameling.

Contactpersonen in geval van vragen in verband met de studie Indien u meent studiegebonden schade te hebben opgelopen of indien u vragen heeft over het onderzoek of uw rechten als studiedeelnemer, nu of tijdens of na uw deelname, dan kan u contact opnemen met: Samira Azabar (samira.azabar@uantwerpen.be) en/of Prof. Dr. Peter Thijssen (peter.thijssen@uantwerpen.be).

Alvast bedankt om de tijd te nemen dit informatieformulier te hebben doorgenomen.

Datum:

Handtekening uitvoerende onderzoeker(s):

Contactgegevens:
Samira.azabar@uantwerpen.be

Appendix 6.2 Consent form presented to participants before the start of the interview

Universiteit Antwerpen

TOESTEMMINGSFORMULIER

Politieke participatie van moslims: wat motiveert hun kandidaatkeuze en andere vormen van participatie in de samenleving?

Hierbij bevestig ik, ondergetekende (naam & voornaam) _____ dat ik over de studie ben ingelicht en een kopie van de "Informatie voor deelnemers" en het "Toestemmingsformulier" heb ontvangen. Ik heb de informatie gelezen en begrepen. De uitvoerder van het onderzoek heeft mij voldoende informatie gegeven met betrekking tot de voorwaarden en de duur van de studie, én het effect hiervan. Bovendien werd mij voldoende tijd gegeven om de informatie te overwegen en om vragen te stellen, waarop ik bevredigende antwoorden gekregen heb.

- Ik heb begrepen dat ik mijn deelname aan deze studie op elk ogenblik mag stopzetten nadat ik de uitvoerende onderzoeker hierover heb ingelicht, zonder dat dit mij enig nadeel kan berokkenen.
- Ik ben mij bewust van het doel waarvoor de door mij aangeleverde gegevens verzameld, verwerkt en gebruikt worden in het kader van deze studie en dat zij vertrouwelijk zullen worden behandeld.
- Ik ga akkoord met de verzameling, de verwerking en het gebruik van deze gegevens, zoals beschreven in het informatieblad voor de participant. Ik ga eveneens akkoord met de overdracht en de verwerking van deze gegevens in andere landen dan België.
- Ik ga akkoord met het gebruik van de door mij aangeleverde onderzoeksgegevens voor andere onderzoeks-doeleinden (exclusief persoonsgegevens).
- Ik stem geheel vrijwillig toe om deel te nemen aan deze studie en om mee te werken aan alle gevraagde onderzoeken. Ik ben bereid informatie te verstrekken i.v.m. mijn achtergrond en eventuele deelname aan andere studies.

Ik geef de toestemming aan Azabar Samira om mijn persoonsgegevens te verwerken voor het doctoraatsonderzoek rond de politieke participatie van moslims op de wijze en onder de modaliteiten zoals omschreven in het informatieformulier.

Ik wil verder **wel/niet** op de hoogte gehouden willen worden van het onderzoek door[49]

- Nederlandstalige rapporten met tussentijdse bevindingen te ontvangen **JA / NEEN**
- Engelstalige startpapers voor publicatie te mogen ontvangen **JA / NEEN**
- Engelstalige finale publicaties die uit het onderzoek voortvloeien **JA / NEEN**

Datum: _____

[49] Schrappen wat niet past aub.

Handtekening deelnemer:_____

Deel enkel bestemd voor de onderzoeker die de studie uitvoert:

Hierbij bevestig ik, ondergetekende Samira AZABAR dat ik met _____ de procedures zoals beschreven in het inlichtingenblad heb besproken, waarbij ik specifiek heb gewezen op de mogelijke ongemakken – en de rechten van de deelnemers - verbonden aan het onderzoek. Ik heb expliciet de vraag gesteld of er nog onduidelijkheden of vragen overbleven en heb deze naar mijn beste vermogen beantwoord. Tevens bevestig ik dat _____ toestemming heeft gegeven om aan de studie deel te nemen.

Datum: _____

Handtekening uitvoerende onderzoeker(s):

Contactgegevens: samira.azabar@uantwerpen.be

Appendix 6.3 Semi-structured interview

Topic	Main Questions	Additional questions
Introduction	Could you tell me something about yourself?	How were you informed of the interviews?
Political participation	What does political participation/participation in politics mean to you?	
	What associations do politics evoke? What do you think of when hearing the word politics?	Interest in politics? Faith in politics? To what extent do you have the feeling that your needs and interest are heard/met? When do you feel represented/heard?
Importance of political participation/ political experiences	Do you aim to change things in society, either close in your network or broader in society? If yes, what and how?	What do you do when confronted with obstacles that require an answer? How do you react
	How do you feel about the political system? Could you tell me about a moment when you were happy/not happy with the political system?	Questioning the emotions/feelings. Why? Asking about specific experiences to recall experiences. To what extent do you feel that the system is just? Why (not)?
	How do you evaluate the current political system? Democracy/ government?	Do you believe change is possible? Why (not)?
	How important is it to participate, according to you? Why?	Local level/national level? In a collective or alone? Can you tell me about obstacles making it harder to participate?
	Where do you get information about societal topics discussed? Which and how do you use media?	What do you think about media? How do you evaluate them? Are you satisfied? Enough information? Do you follow news? Which channels do you follow?
Thoughts on politics	What are your thoughts about political parties/ politicians?	What do you expect from political parties/ politicians? Imagine the ideal politician, which qualities should they have? What are the topics they should represent?
Topics	Which topics are important to you?	Which problems need attention? Which problems need to be solved by politicians? What are priorities? Do you discuss political matters? With whom? Which topics?

Voting behavior	Have you voted at the latest elections (local/national)? Do you think voting is important? Have you voted for candidates?	Would you vote if it was not mandatory? For which party have you voted? Why? For which candidate(s) have you voted? Why?
Noninstitutionalized participation	Could you tell me about a moment that you for the first time participated in an activity? What made you react? Which other activities do you engage with to influence policies/change matters that affect you?	Which goal? Which obstacles? How do you feel about your activity? Give examples if needed? (Lobby, blogging, petitions) Why these activities, why not others?
	Challenges	Name three challenges that Muslims are confronted with. Which opportunities (three) are present? If you could give advice to fellow Muslims, what would these be?
Identity and role of ethnicity/religion/local identity/gender intersecting	Retake introduction question on how they introduced themselves. You have stated X, you have introduced yourself as X. Could you explain?	Role of religion? How would you define being Muslim? What does it mean to you? How do you express yourself as Muslim? What about other important markers? What would you want to transfer to your children (in the future)?
Dimensions of group consciousness, ingroup vs outgroup. Identification with Ummah	Do you feel part of society? Sense of belonging? Do you feel connected to groups? Which groups? Why? What do you share with them?	Have you experienced discrimination? Could you tell me more about a case when such happened? Why? How do you cope with forms of exclusions? What does the Ummah mean to you?
End	Is there something you want to share? Do you want to share something that has not been discussed? Or things you consider to be important that are not yet mentioned?	

Appendix 6.4 Information about the participants

Respondents' fictive names	Gender and age	Extra information
Moussa (searching for a job)	Male, 40y	Low educated In-person interview Active in mosque as the key-bearer
Mohammed (security)	Male, 34y	Low educated In-person interview Earlier active in several mosques as an Imam
Nadia (part-time student/food deliverer)	Non-binary / Queer, 24y	Low educated In-person interview Active in a Sufi group
Christine (student)	Female, 23y	Student Convert Interview online Active in a student organization
Marwan (educational coach)	Male, 37y	High educated In-person interview Not active in an organization
Safa (researcher)	Female, 42y	High educated Interview online Active in an advisory board
Karim (city official)	Male, 47y	High educated Interview online Active in youth center and mosque
Maryam (community worker)	Female, 28y	High educated In-person interview Active in several organizations (feminist/youth/antiracist)
Fatima (educational worker)	Female, 40y	High educated Interview online Active in a civil society organization
Kamal (searching for a job)	Male, 35y	High educated In-person interview Active in a movement

Ayse (searching for a job)	Female, 24y	High educated In-person interview Not active in an organization
Yasmina (housewife)	Female, 41y	Low educated Interview online Not active in an organization
Louiza (household)	Female, 34y	Low educated Interview online Not active in an organization
Hakim (ICT)	Male, 29y	High educated Interview online Active in a youth organization linked to a mosque
Linda (nurse)	Female, 31y	Convert High educated Interview online Not active in an organization
Redouan (ICT)	Male, 31y	High educated Interview online Active in a youth organization linked to a mosque
Wissam (teacher)	Female, 38y	High educated Interview online Not active in an organization

English summary

Halal Resistance. Unraveling Muslims' agency

Owing to a racialized environment where Islam is a "chronic object of discussion and debate" (Brubaker, 2014:3), this dissertation studied Muslims' political participation from an agential perspective. The several empirical studies aimed to answer the following question: How and why do Muslims participate in an environment that perceives Muslims as the dangerous Other? Political agency is defined as the ability to decide on and act politically (Crossley, 2022; Cole, 2021). To study how and why Muslims participate in politics in racialized environments in a comprehensive way, this dissertation focused on (1) Muslims' electoral choices on the party and candidate level and explanations of these choices in a flexible proportional list system, (2) Muslims' non-institutionalized participation and its drivers and (3) Muslims' hidden, everyday resistance practices. Moreover, this dissertation paid attention to the intersecting power dynamics (i.e., gender, religiosity, ethnicity) affecting the marginalized, while using a fairly unique combination of quantitative and qualitative data (exit poll data and candidate data from the 2018 local elections, European Social Survey data and in-depth interviews with Muslims) in a socio-political setting conducive to studying Muslims' agency in a rigorous manner: Belgium.

Focusing on Muslims' electoral choices (and explanations for these) clearly demonstrates their political agency, as Muslims seem to communicate that they act to promote their interests. First, this shows in their leftist party choice owing to issues related to their precarious socio-economic status and exclusion from society (Chapter 2). Interestingly, religious issues do not seem to play a significant role, despite the widespread othering in society based on their faith. This does not mean that religion does not play a role in Muslims' political participation, but could rather point to Muslims not feeling that their religious needs and interests are represented. Indeed, Muslim participants explained during the interviews how they do not feel fully represented by leftist political parties, as these enact policies that go against Muslims' interests (i.e., the headscarf ban). Second, the studies on Muslims' preferential voting showed that Muslims are more prone to vote for Muslim candidates, thus suggesting the existence of a Muslim vote (Chapter 3). Third, Muslim men were more likely to vote for Muslim men candidates while this intersectional vote was absent among Muslim women voters (Chapter 4). To put it differently, Muslim women were not more likely to vote for Muslim women candidates. One could ascribe these results to Muslim women lacking agency, or being submissive. However, Muslim women are more likely to vote for women candidates and Muslim candidates, yet not for the intersection of both identities. Additionally, Muslim women are as likely to support gender parity in politics as non-Muslim women, countering the idea of the oppressed Muslim woman, while both men (Muslim and non-Muslim) showed

a lower support. These results suggest that Muslim men voters are better catered for by the party selectorate than Muslim women voters. This could be because Muslim women voters are not prototypical members of a social group (i.e., Muslims and women), showing their double disadvantage, and that they are therefore neglected as voters.

All in all, as an underrepresented group, Muslims seem to vote strategically to pressurize political actors to consider their interests and needs. This particularly showed in their decision-making process as captured by the interviews: Muslims deliberated their electoral choices in the light of the obstacles they experience in everyday life (i.e., Islamophobia, low socio-economic status) and aim to better their situation. However, this does not mean that Muslims only act as Muslims. Through an intersectional lens, interlocking power dynamics – i.e., gender, class, age – explain the variation in Muslims' electoral behavior. Consequently, these findings question the alleged homogeneity of Muslim communities, while at the same time also see to highlight the importance of Muslim belonging, which transcends, even, the role of ethnicity, as previous studies have claimed (Dancygier, 2014; Zibouh, 2014; Fleichmann et al., 2011).

Discussing not only the creative ways in which Muslims navigate racialized environments, but also Muslims' motivations to challenge discourses that marginalize them, Chapter 5 unravels how religious salience heightens noninstitutionalized participation for Muslims in general. Second, contrary to studies conducted in the US, mosque attendance does not operate as a mobilization vehicle for Muslims (Jamal, 2005) but rather seems to decrease nonelectoral participation. Third, religious discrimination does not influence participation. As Muslim men and women experience discrimination, mosque attendance and religious salience differently, we hypothesized that these three religious religious-related indicators, when intersecting with gender, could influence Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation in complex ways. However, no such evidence was found in this chapter concluding that gendered religious indicators do not shape noninstitutionalized participation differently for Muslim men's and women's participation.

Drawing on interviews, Chapter 6 further showed how Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation is shaped by a complex interplay of family socialization, Islamic faith and Islamophobia, generating subaltern counterpublics. First, Muslim parents seem to have introduced their children to international media channels and geopolitics, which explains why Muslim participants engaged in transnational activities and did not limit their political actions to Belgium. Second, I found Muslims to be inspired by their Islamic faith to do good for fellow Muslims but also to contribute to society. Third, Muslims aimed to balance the way they counteract their exclusion, depending on the intersecting power dynamics at

play. For instance, Muslim women stated that they participated less in demonstrations as they feel that the public sphere pushes them to the margins, particularly Muslim women who wear a veil.

As this dissertation aimed to provide a comprehensive overview of possible political actions, it also studied Muslims' hidden and everyday resistance practices. Overt ways of participation could further marginalize Muslims, as they are perceived as the 'Other' and their actions are continuously scrutinized. Muslims take refuge in gaining as much as information possible, thus reversing the gaze. Second, as Muslims are racialized owing to their Muslimness, they make an effort to show that they are good citizens by engaging in small everyday resistance acts to counter the negative portrayal of Muslims. Lastly, younger generations are encouraged and educated about Muslims' marginalization and the consequences hereof, supporting them in their counteracts. More importantly, with their specific demands, needs and interests owing to their social location in a society characterized by Islamophobia, Muslims seem to challenge, through political participation, taken-for-granted notions such as agency and a secular public sphere providing alternative interpretations (i.e., counterpublic spheres). Even though, then, public debates on Islam aim to push religion to the marginal spaces of society, Muslims seemingly talk back while challenging the status quo constructed by a dominant secular group, although Islamophobia also makes Muslims (temporally) refrain from certain modes of political participation and thus from the political sphere.

In sum, this dissertation showed how Muslims exert their agency in the political realm through various forms of active engagement, despite facing various obstacles. Focusing on Muslims' perspective, this dissertation adds to the literature that does not center what policymakers and public opinion deem important. The several empirical studies rebut widespread stereotypes and misconceptions of Muslims that could inform policies, and create awareness of the lack of social justice and equality in our society. These forms of inequality are not only related to Islam, but also to other intersecting oppressive structures, such as patriarchy, racism and capitalism. Consequently, it seems inevitable to investigate how power dynamics such as gender, ethnicity, religion and class shape Muslims' political behavior in multifaceted and complex ways. It is therefore important for policymakers and scholars to continue to study and understand the complexities of Muslim political participation, in order to promote inclusive and equitable societies. Through critical and ethical research centering the voices and perspectives of marginalized minorities, academic research can work towards creating a political landscape that is inclusive and representative of all individuals and communities.

Nederlandstalige samenvatting

Verzet is halal. Een onderzoek naar de politieke agency van moslims in België

Islam wordt in maatschappelijke debatten vaak gepercipieerd als onverenigbaar met het Westen waar vrijheid en emancipatie centraal zouden staan dankzij de secularisering. Moslims die zich onderwerpen aan een geloof worden daarom beschouwd als niet-autonome individuen met een gebrek aan agency. Onderzoekers stellen dat de islam, moslims en hun integratie in de samenleving steeds vaker in een ongunstig daglicht worden geplaatst (Fadil et al., 2015; de Koning, 2016; Zibouh, 2013). De idee dat moslims een bedreiging vormen voor de maatschappelijke veiligheid is enkel gesterkt in een post 9/11 tijdperk met als gevolg dat het groeiend aantal moslims (als De Ander) met argusogen bekeken worden. Dit racialisatieproces, waarin groepen gecategoriseerd worden als de Ander en dus een ongelijke behandeling krijgt ten opzichte van anderen, is volgens onderzoekers wijdverspreid in Europa (Selod, 2018; Garner en Selod, 2015; de Koning, 2016).

Academisch onderzoek naar hoe en waarom moslims politiek participeren in een geracialiseerde samenleving is daarom broodnodig om meer zicht te krijgen op de agency van gemarginaliseerde groepen. Politieke agency wordt gedefinieerd als het vermogen om beslissingen te nemen en politiek te handelen (Crossley, 2022; Cole, 2021). Met dit onderzoek beoogde ik drie bijdragen te leveren aan de bestaande academische literatuur. Ten eerste, ik vertrek van een brede interpretatie van politieke participatie, door niet alleen erkende vormen van participatie te onderzoeken van een geracialiseerde minderheid (*in casu* moslims). Dit doctoraatsonderzoek bestudeert daarom (1) de electorale keuzes van moslims op partij- en kandidaatsniveau en verklaringen hiervoor in een flexibel proportioneel lijstsysteem (België), (2) de niet-electorale participatie van moslims en drijfveren hiervan en (3) de verborgen, alledaagse verzetspraktijken van moslims. Ten tweede, in verschillende empirische hoofdstukken wordt een intersectionele benadering gehanteerd waarbij onderzocht wordt hoe de intersectie met gender, etniciteit, religie, klasse en leeftijd de politieke participatie beïnvloedt. Dit doctoraat gaat bovendien na in welke mate moslimidentificatie, moskeebezoeken, belang van religie en Islamofobie (als vorm van racisme, zie Selod, 2018) de participatie van moslims beïnvloedt. Ten derde, een *mixed methods* benadering wordt gehanteerd in dit doctoraat door een combinatie van kwantitatieve (unieke exitpoll data, European Social Survey data) en kwalitatieve data (diepte-interviews). Door de voordelen van beide methoden te combineren, wordt een vollediger beeld verkregen van de politieke participatie van moslims en drijfveren hiervan, en dus ook een hogere validiteit van de resultaten. In wat volgt bespreek ik kort de resultaten van de empirische hoofdstukken door in te gaan op de electorale

participatie van moslims (hoofdstukken 2, 3 en 4), de niet-electorale participatie (hoofdstuk 5 en 6) en de verborgen, verzetspraktijken van moslims (hoofdstuk 7). Ik sluit af met een kort besluit.

Electorale participatie

Hoofdstuk 2 bestudeert de motivaties van moslims om op een linkse partij te stemmen. Eerder onderzoek verwees reeds naar het links stemgedrag van moslims, maar we weten weinig over de motivaties hiervan (Zibouh, 2013; Cesari, 2013). Tijdens de lokale verkiezingen van 2018 organiseerde een consortium van verschillende universiteiten[50] een unieke exitpoll waar we in 45 gemeenten meer dan 200 jobstudenten hebben ingezet om respondenten te interviewen. Een oversampling werd uitgevoerd in diverse majority-minority steden (o.a. Antwerpen, Brussel) om voldoende respondenten die zich identificeren als moslim te bevragen. Tijdens de interviews werden kiezers bevraagd naar hun stemgedrag, motivaties hiervan en politieke attitudes. Deze zelfverklaarde motivaties werden gecodeerd volgens verschillende verklaringen (partij identificatie, issues, kandidaten). Gezien de gemarginaliseerde positie van moslims opteerden we ook voor bijkomende thema's (religieuze issues, politieke vervreemding). De bevindingen wezen op het belang van issues als verklaring voor het links stemgedrag van moslims. Religieuze issues (vb. hoofddoekenverbod) speelden geen significante rol, net als politieke aliënatie, ondanks de wijdverspreide marginalisering en uitsluiting in de samenleving op basis van religie. Dit betekent niet dat religie geen rol speelt in de politieke participatie van moslims, maar de bevindingen zouden eerder kunnen wijzen op moslims die zich niet vertegenwoordigd voelen met betrekking tot hun religieuze belangen. Opmerkelijk, ondanks de verschillende motivaties in het model, is er nog steeds een significant effect van Moslim-zijn op links stemmen die we niet konden verklaren. Om hun stemgedrag beter te begrijpen werden diepte-interviews uitgevoerd waarbij gepeild werd naar hoe moslims hun electorale keuzes afwegen. Zo bleken thema's en eerder gevoerd beleid van politieke partijen doorslaggevend te zijn. Bovendien werden gelijkaardige thema's besproken namelijk de socio-economische achterstelling van moslims, en het ervaren van uitsluiting. Respondenten associeerden deze thema's eerder met linkse partijen. Verder werd ook het preferentieel stemmen bevraagd: moslims gaven aan te stemmen voor moslimkandidaten om meer diversiteit in lokale besturen te bekomen (descriptieve representativiteit), omdat ze hen vooruit wilden helpen als medemoslims (symbolische representativiteit) en omdat ze verwachten dat moslimkandidaten hun belangen beter zouden vertegenwoordigen (substantieve representativiteit). Omdat kwalitatieve data niet te generaliseren zijn, gaan we aan de hand van kwantitatieve data na of deze bevindingen standhouden.

[50] Het consortium bestond uit UAntwerpen, UGent, UNamur, UHasselt, VUB en ULB

Hoofdstuk 3 en 4 gaan verder in op de voorkeursstemmen van moslims. Eerder onderzoek wees op kiezers die stemmen op kandidaten omdat ze bepaalde kenmerken delen (Cutler, 2002; Erzeel en Caluwaerts, 2015; Teney et al., 2010). Zo zouden vrouwen/mannen meer geneigd zijn te stemmen op respectievelijk vrouwen en mannen (*gender voting*) en etnische minderheden meer geneigd zijn te stemmen op kandidaten met een migratie achtergrond (*ethnic voting*). Hoofdstuk 3 onderzocht of moslimkiezers meer op moslimkandidaten stemmen. Een data matrix werd gecreëerd waarbij kiezersdata (demand side data) en kandidatendata (supply side data) werden gekoppeld. Zo konden belangrijke factoren die mee het voorkeursstemmen bepalen verrekend worden (o.a. politieke ervaring, lijstpositie). Aan de hand van de exitpoll en mock ballot data wezen onze bevindingen op *Muslim voting:* moslimkiezers hebben inderdaad een voorkeur voor moslimkandidaten. Hoofdstuk 4 ging verder op deze bevindingen, en stelde de vraag in welke mate de intersectie van religie en gender de voorkeursstemmen zou verklaren. Anders gesteld: zijn moslimvrouwen (moslimmannen) meer geneigd te stemmen op kandidaten die moslim én vrouw (respectievelijk moslim én man) zijn?

De resultaten in hoofdstuk 4 duidden op moslimmannen die vaker op kandidaten stemden die moslim én man zijn, moslimvrouwen daarentegen vertoonden geen gelijkaardig stemgedrag. Dit betekent dat moslimvrouwen niet vaker op kandidaten stemden die én moslim én vrouw zijn. Men zou deze resultaten kunnen toeschrijven aan het feit dat moslimvrouwen geen agency hebben of onderdanig zijn, maar het onderzoek bewijst het tegendeel. Moslimvrouwen stemmen namelijk wel vaker op vrouwelijke kandidaten en vaker op moslimkandidaten, maar niet volgens de intersectie van beide identiteiten. Bovendien zijn moslimvrouwen even bereid om gendergelijkheid in de politiek te steunen als niet-moslimvrouwen, waarmee het idee van de onderdrukte moslimvrouw wordt tegengesproken.

Niet-electorale participatie

Hoofdstuk 5 gaat dieper in op de niet-electorale participatie van moslims in zes verschillende West-Europese landen[51]. Niet-electorale participatie wordt hier omschreven als het deelnemen aan betogingen, het gebruik van sociale media voor politieke doeleinden, petities ondertekenen, het dragen van campagnebadges en boycotten van producten. Op basis van European Sociale Survey data werd onderzocht in welke mate regelmatig moskeebezoek, belang van religie en religieuze discriminatie de niet-electorale participatie van moslims beïnvloeden. Eerder onderzoek wees reeds op verschillen tussen mannen en vrouwen: mannen gaan vaker naar moskee dan vrouwen, vrouwen zijn algemeen beschouwd geloviger en ervaren meer islamofobie dan mannen. Een intersectionele benadering laat ons toe na te

[51] België, Nederland, Italië, Duitsland, Frankrijk en het Verenigd Koninkrijk

gaan in welke mate de verschillende religieuze indicatoren een effect hebben op de participatie van mannen en vrouwen. Beïnvloeden deze indicatoren de niet-electorale participatie van moslimvrouwen en moslimmannen op een andere manier? Onze resultaten toonden aan hoe regelmatig moskeebezoek een negatief effect en het belang van religie een positief effect heeft op al dan niet nonelectoraal participeren. Wat religieuze discriminatie betreft, is er geen significant effect aanwezig.

Verder wezen de intersectionele analyses op geen significante verschillen in effecten van religieuze indicatoren op participatie tussen moslimmannen en moslimvrouwen. We concluderen hierbij dat moskeebezoek, belang van religie en religieuze discriminatie geen verschillend effect hebben op de nonelectorale participatie voor mannen en vrouwen. Politieke interesse van moslims blijkt een standvastige verklaringsvariabele te zijn: hoe meer politieke interesse, hoe hoger de kans op nonelectorale participatie.

Hoofdstuk 6 vertrekt van de theoretische concepten *talk back* van bell hooks (1989) en *subaltern counterpublics* van Fraser (1990) om de niet-electorale participatie en motivaties diepgaander te bestuderen. De vraag welke politieke acties worden ingezet om terug te spreken (*talk back*) en waarom staan hierbij centraal. De studie stelt ten eerste vast dat moslims tijdens hun opvoeding te maken kregen met ouders die de mediaberichtgeving rond internationale oorlogen op de voet volgden via internationale media, bijvoorbeeld Al Jazeera (o.a. in Irak, Afghanistan en Palestina). Respondenten engageerden zich hierdoor voor politieke activiteiten die de inmenging van westerse landen in islamitische landen aanklaagden. Ten tweede inspireert religie om goed te doen, niet enkel voor medemoslims maar ook om een bijdrage te leveren aan de samenleving. Ten derde, moslims maken keuzes die beïnvloed worden door ervaringen met discriminatie. Zo stellen moslimvrouwen minder deel te nemen aan demonstraties omdat ze zich onveilig voelen. Moslimvrouwen tonen een voorkeur om te zetelen in adviesraden, of een job waar ze zich kunnen inzetten tegen uitsluiting en marginalisering van minderheden (vb. sociaal werk). Anderzijds deelden moslimmannen hun ervaringen met lobbywerk met lokale besturen dankzij de posities die ze bekleedden onder andere in moskeeën. Door de verschillende politieke acties ontwikkelen moslims alternatieve noties van (1) een *agency* waar religie een belangrijke rol speelt (Muslim political agency) en (2) het publieke domein door aandacht te vragen voor hun belangen in publieke debatten, en zo publieke sferen te ontwikkelen waar ze kunnen deelnemen aan het maatschappelijk debat om zich te verzetten tegen de dominante (seculiere) publieke sferen die hen uitsluiten.

Alledaagse, verborgen verzetspraktijken

Hoodstuk 7 verkent de alledaagse, verborgen verzetspraktijken van moslims door de volgende vraag centraal te stellen: Hoe bestrijden moslims de discoursen die hen marginaliseren? De interviews wezen op erkende vormen van participatie (electorale en niet-electorale participatie), maar ook op verborgen alledaagse verzetspraktijken. Uit dit onderzoek bleek dat moslims hun toevlucht nemen tot het verkrijgen van informatie over de dominante groep zodat ze deze kunnen beïnvloeden in hun voordeel. Op deze manier draaien ze de *gaze* (Shaker et al., 2021) om waar zij normaal aan worden onderworpen. Ten tweede, omdat moslims vanwege hun moslim-zijn worden geracialiseerd, doen moslims hun best om te laten zien dat ze goede burgers zijn. Ze verwezen hierbij naar de profeet Mohammed als rolmodel om goed te doen voor anderen. Ten derde, respondenten wezen op het belang van het betrekken van jonge moslims in de strijd tegen uitsluiting door samen de negatieve beeldvorming van moslims aan te klagen. Dus, hoewel publieke debatten over de islam tot doel hebben religie naar de marge van de samenleving te duwen, lijken moslims terug te spreken (talk back) door de status quo uit te dagen met als gevolg het ontstaan van *counterpublic spheres*. In deze counterpublic spheres ontwikkelen ze een tegendiscours om hun uitsluiting aan te kaarten, en versterken ze zo hun positie in de bredere samenleving.

Kortom, dit proefschrift laat zien hoe moslims hun *agency* in het politieke domein uitoefenen door zich op verschillende manieren actief in te zetten, ondanks de verschillende hindernissen die ze ervaren. Zo stemmen moslims op linkse partijen die de belangen van socio-economisch precaire groepen verdedigen en positiever staan ten aanzien van migratie dan rechtse partijen. Moslims stemmen bovendien op moslimkandidaten, omdat ze verwachten dat ze de belangen van moslims beter zullen representeren (substantieve vertegenwoordiging) maar ook om meer representativiteit te verkrijgen in lokale besturen (descriptieve representatie) en symbolisch te ondersteunen (symbolische representatie).

Ten tweede, dit doctoraat benadrukt het belang van intersectioneel onderzoek, met name hoe kruisende machtsdynamieken o.a. geslacht, etniciteit, religie en klasse het politiek gedrag van moslims op veelzijdige en complexe manieren beïnvloeden. Onze bevindingen wijzen op de heterogeniteit van de moslimgemeenschappen, en dus ook verschillende vormen van participatie en motivaties. Zo speelt het belang van religie een rol om participatie te verklaren, maar regelmatig een moskee bezoeken heeft een negatief effect op nonelectorale participatie van moslims. Er zijn geen verschillen tussen mannen en vrouwen merkbaar van religieuze indicatoren op nonelectorale participatie. Uit de interviews blijkt vooral hoe respondenten trachten de negatieve beeldvorming rond moslims te bestrijden door informatie

te vergaren over hoe de dominante groep over hen denkt (Du Bois' *double consciousness*). Omdat moslims vooral als een bedreiging (mannen) en als onderdrukt (vrouwen) worden gepercipieerd, proberen moslims door middel van goed gedrag (Good Muslim) de gendered racialisering tegen te gaan. Zo spreken ze terug (talk back) tegen onderdrukkende structuren, en ontwikkelen ze counterpublieke sferen die vanzelfsprekendheden (o.a. seculiere dominantie) in vraag stellen.

Dit onderzoek toont het belang aan van studies die de complexiteit van de politieke participatie van moslims trachtten te ontrafelen om te begrijpen hoe een inclusieve en rechtvaardige samenleving bevorderd kan worden. Door kritisch en ethisch onderzoek waarin de stemmen en perspectieven van gemarginaliseerde minderheden centraal staan, kunnen we werken aan een politiek landschap dat inclusief en representatief is voor alle individuen en gemeenschappen.

Authors' contributions

Chapter 2 Exploring mediating motivations for Muslims' electoral preferences
Samira Azabar (first author): conception of the study (50%); data collection (70%); data preparation (100%); data analysis and interpretation (30%); writing of research paper (70%).
Peter Thijssen (co-author): conception of the study (50%); data collection (30%); data analysis and interpretation (70%); writing of research paper (30%)

Chapter 3 Is there such a thing as a Muslim vote?
Samira Azabar (first author): conception of the study (30%); data collection (70%); data preparation (100%); data analysis and interpretation (60%); writing the research paper (60%)
Peter Thijssen (co-author): conception of the study (30%); data collection (30%); data analysis and interpretation (30%); writing of research paper (30%)
Patrick van Erkel (co-author): conception of the study (40%); data analysis and interpretation (10%); writing of research paper (10%)

Chapter 4 The electoral agency of Muslimahs. An intersectional perspective on preferential voting behavior of Muslims in Belgium
Samira Azabar (first author): conception of the study (70%); data preparation (100%); data analysis and interpretation (70%); writing of research paper (70%).
Peter Thijssen (co-author): conception of the study (30%); data analysis and interpretation (30%); writing of research paper (30%)

Chapter 5 Religion works in different ways. An intersectional approach to Muslims' noninstitutionalized participation
Samira Azabar (first author): conception of the study (70%); data preparation (100%); data analysis and interpretation (70%); writing of research paper (80%).
Peter Van Aelst (co-author): conception of the study (30%); data analysis and interpretation (30%); writing of research paper (20%)

Chapter 6 Muslims in Belgium 'talk back': Claiming visibility and presence through counterpublics
Samira Azabar (single author): conception of the study (100%); data collection (100%); data analysis and interpretation (100%); writing of the research paper (100%)

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Chapter 7 Good Muslims, good citizens? An intersectional approach to Muslims' hidden tactics
Samira Azabar (single author): conception of the study (100%); data collection (100%); data analysis and interpretation (100%); writing of the research paper (100%)

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