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Muslim Organisations' Response to Stigmatisation in the Media

Protest, Adaptation or Decoupling

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Abstract

In the heated media debate on Muslims and Islam, the role of community representatives is understudied. This article will first use original research to see to what extent Muslims get the chance to speak out in newspapers in Western Europe, and then demonstrate through findings from interviews how representatives of Muslim organisations operate in the media. We build on Kerstin Rosenow-Williams's perspectives in combining two features, namely 1) the internal and external role of representatives of Muslim organisations, and 2) the active-passive dimension of responses to prejudice and stigmatisation as suggested in social psychology, and will distinguish three patterns: protest, adaptation and decoupling. Throughout the article, we zoom in on the remarkable dissimilarity between the UK and Germany. The British case shows a larger Muslim presence in the newspapers and the tendency of Muslim representatives to use a protest strategy, while the German case shows a lack of Muslim actors in the newspapers and a tendency of Muslim representatives to use an adaptation strategy.

Keywords

Muslims – stigmatisation – Muslim organisations – Islamophobia – media debate

1 Introduction¹

Over the past few decades, Muslims and Islam have been the subject of an intense and not always positive debate in West European media. As early as the 1980s and 1990s, scholars observed that media portrayals of Muslims were predominantly negative, while the debate in the decades after that has been characterised as “Islamophobic” (Sheik, Price, and Oshagan, 1996; Hussain, 2000; Poole, 2002; Modood, 2005; Poole and Richardson, 2006; Bleich, 2011; Fadil, 2011; Van der Valk, 2012; Bleich, Nisar, and Abdelhamid, 2015; Sunier, 2016; West and Lloyd, 2017; Bayrakli and Hafez, 2018). In a revival of Orientalist thinking, Muslims were increasingly pictured as backward, potentially violent and, in line with that, the subordinate position of women in Muslim societies was accentuated (Said, 1981; 1997; Bullock and Jafri, 2000; Morsi, 2017). Media attention on extremism among Muslims in Europe increased after terrorist attacks by groupings such as Al Shabab, Al-Qaeda, and Boko Haram and the emergence of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) (Shadid and van Koningsveld, 2002; Saeed, 2007; Coenders et al.; 2008; Kumar, 2010). Analysis shows that the Western European media regularly associates Muslims with oppression, religious fanaticism and terrorism (Poole, 2002; Richardson, 2004; Shahid, 2005; Saeed, 2007). These reports are clearly not nuanced, since the anti-Western views of small extreme groupings are easily attributed to all Muslims and not distinguished from the beliefs of the majority.² There seems to be a tendency to merge all Muslims into one generalised category, and to ignore the differences that exist between the various sub-groupings of Islam as a faith and between Muslims as believers (Hopkins, 2011).

As we and other authors have explained in earlier work, it is highly disturbing for the Muslim communities in Western Europe to become the target of this kind of stereotyping. Their minority position makes them more vulnerable than Muslims in Muslim-majority countries and they may feel angered, since they consider the negative image as annoying and unjust. They can also become frightened, especially after the increasing incidents and various kinds of attacks on mosques and Muslims.³ This fear is not unrealistic, with historic

1 Fieldwork was part of the EURISLAM project. This project was made possible by the Seventh Framework program of the European Commission with grant ID—SSH-2007-3.3.215863.

2 Brown and Saeed (2015) show that distinguishing between “moderate” and “radical” Muslims is actually a problematic continuation of the Orientalist idea that “good (moderate) Muslims” are those in the West and “bad (radical) Muslims” are those in the (Middle) East, which disregards traditional Muslims.

3 There is even a Wikipedia page with a long (but incomplete) list of Islamophobic incidents: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Islamophobic_incidents (accessed 22 January 2020).

examples showing that stereotyping can be the first stage in an escalating conflict between ethnic and religious groups, and can be followed by a more aggressive phase.

Being negatively regarded by the majority and being told that they are not part of a society naturally influences how members of the affected community perceive their sense of belonging to that society (Sharify-Funk, 2009; Güney, 2010; Hopkins, 2011; Yildiz and Verkuyten, 2013; Kassaye et al., 2016), so it is not surprising that their attachment or loyalty might diminish. Margaretha van Es (2019) describes how this is felt as “conditional citizenship”. First generation immigrants to European countries, who optimistically engaged in integration programmes in the new societies, can feel betrayed and abused by the majority. Muslim communities in Europe that came from former colonies (particularly of France and the UK) may be reminded of the inequality during colonial times.

Another reaction that is often seen is the intensification of ties within the ethnic or religious group (Sirin and Fine, 2007; Verkuyten and Yildiz, 2007; Yildiz and Verkuyten, 2013; Karimshah, Chiment, and Skrbiš, 2014). But the opposite reaction is also reported in the literature; some people, for instance, dissociate themselves from their own community, or make clear to their surroundings that there are also less conservative and religious individuals (Allport, 1954; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Van Es (2019) shows that Muslims in the Netherlands were repeatedly asked by the Dutch to speak up against terrorism in the media. Important figures like Rotterdam’s mayor Ahmed Aboutaleb actually did so, but others openly refused because they considered the assumption that they would be in favour of any violence ridiculous in itself and an indication of the unequal power relations. A third reaction is to present statements on peaceful coexistence in everyday dialogues. Martijn de Koning (2016) describes several stronger forms of anti-Islamophobia activism in the Netherlands, such as creating awareness of its discriminatory nature and reporting incidents.

In this piece, we focus on the role of community organisations and their leaders, which become highly relevant when a community is under attack. The organisations provide a safe haven where religious obligations can be observed without criticism from outsiders. Organisations can also engage in a political strategy or try to prevent their members from following a particular political strategy (Canatan, 2001; Klaussen, 2005; Choudhoury et al., 2006; van Heelsun, 2008). They need to be clear about their point of view on, for instance terrorism or radicalisation. Representatives and leaders of organisations have a complicated position, because they need to understand and help the members, who may be angry or afraid, and defend them to a certain extent, but on the other hand they need to function as mediators with, for instance, the

neighbourhood, representatives of municipalities and journalists. In this discussion, the environment requires a certain moderation.

This article is not just a report on what Muslim leaders have said about how they deal with the media, but will also investigate media themselves. Mass media function as gatekeepers and they can control to a certain extent what kind of *actors* and which *issues* are introduced into the public sphere (McCombs, and Shaw, 1972; Koopmans, 2004; Cinalli and Guigni, 2013a; Koomen and van Heelsum, 2013). A lack or misrepresentation of Muslim voices in the European media might lead to negative and unnuanced reporting. The media realm is a competitive field in which not all actors are given an equal voice. Discursive opportunity structures shape how Muslim representatives can enter the media debate. A necessary starting point is that we want to find out whether they actually make an active contribution in the media. The article is therefore divided into two parts: Part I investigates the newspapers to discover the extent to which Muslim voices are present in articles about Muslims, as interviewees or speakers (“actor”). In part II, we investigate, through qualitative interviews in six countries, how Muslim representatives themselves report on their strategies.

2 Part I Presence of Muslims as Interviewees or “Actors” in Newspapers

We shall now present findings from our research on the presence of Muslims in the media as interviewees or speakers (“actor”). We use the data analysis of newspaper articles generated for the EURISLAM project (2009-2011) on Islam and Muslims in six West European countries. The decision to analyse national newspapers was taken because it is relatively easy for interest groups to approach newspapers by phoning a journalist or sending a letter to the editor, so it is possible for Muslims to actively engage in the public debate. Newspapers are in principle operating within the national debate, and less in the kind of “bubble” where we find most social media. However, choosing newspapers has the disadvantage that national papers are probably less influential among the general public than, for instance, TV news or TV discussions. It is probable that the worst cases of Islamophobia do not occur in Newspapers or TV but in social media rather than in newspapers.

The research took place in six West European countries (Belgium, the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland). Five newspapers were chosen from each country, including, if possible, the newspaper with the widest circulation and newspapers covering a variety of political views, ranging

from right-wing to centre-right/left to left-wing. Then native speakers in each country turned to the online Lexis-Nexis Database for the articles and selected a random sample of 750 articles published between 1999 and 2008, containing keywords such as Islam/Muslim, etc. When the set of articles was ready, the coders in each country read the articles carefully to see whether they made political claims in them. To qualify as an instance of “political claim-making”, the text had to include a reference to an ongoing or concluded physical or verbal action in the public sphere, relating to collective social problems and solutions (Cinalli and Giugni, 2013a). An article might make no (political) claims, or one or more claims. After gathering claims, we coded the characteristics of the claims; the characteristics of the actor putting them forward; the form of the claim; the issue; the objective; and the scope. For this article, we shall report on the “actors” found in the articles. More information on the rest of this analysis can be found in the full report by Manlio Cinalli and Marco Giugni (2010).

Table 1 shows the results. We have divided the actors who made claims into three main categories: state actors, political parties, and civil society actors (and an “others” category for unknown actors). As the table shows, it is civil society actors who most commonly make claims in the newspapers in all countries except Germany. State actors come second in all countries except Germany, where state actors come first.

The first and most important conclusion is that Muslims themselves make less than one-third of the claims about Muslims. Generally speaking, two-third of claims about Muslims are made by other people or institutions. This leads to the conclusion that the viewpoints of Muslims themselves are relatively less visible in the newspapers than those of other actors. Second, it is striking that there are considerable differences between the UK and Germany. The percentage of Muslim actors varies from 16 per cent of the total actors in Germany, the lowest, to 32 per cent in the UK, the highest.

These results suggest that we need to take a closer look at the differences between countries and particularly those between Germany and the UK. The countries in our study have different historical and demographic characteristics related to the immigration of Muslims, differences in the way media are organised and differing national and regional policies, which all contribute to shaping specific environments for Muslims (Carol and Koopmans, 2013; Cinalli and Giugni 2013b; Carol, Helbling, and Michalowski, 2015; Bowen et al., 2014; Statham and Tillie, 2016).

A relevant factor might be the difference between countries such as the UK and France that have older relations with Muslim communities that developed during the colonial era, and countries where Muslim immigrants arrived during the guest worker period, such as the Netherlands and Germany. Not only are

TABLE 1 Actors that made the claims in newspaper articles per country (percentages)

	BE	UK	FR	DE	NL	CH
State actors	34.6	37.6	28.8	54.5	42.5	34.2
Governments	15.2	15.6	16.7	24.2	21.1	15.4
Legislatives	3.8	.6	3.2	3.8	11.1	4.2
Judiciary	7.9	7.9	2.9	13.0	2.7	6.5
Police and security agencies	5.4	12.8	3.2	10.7	5.8	4.4
State agencies dealing with migrants	.6	.0	.3	1.3	.3	1.5
Other state executive agencies	1.6	.7	2.5	1.4	1.5	2.2
Political parties	4.4	5.4	3.6	7.1	6.3	6.6
Civil society actors	51.8	55.0	64.3	35.2	46.7	45.4
Unions	.0	.2	.3	.5	.7	.0
Workers and employees	.1	.6	.0	.3	.1	.0
Employers organizations and firms	.2	1.6	.3	1.0	.9	1.0
Churches	1.7	.9	2.3	3.7	.9	2.8
Christians	.5	1.1	1.3	0	.2	1.4
Media and journalists	4.2	5.0	2.0	7.0	6.0	6.5
Professional groups, think tanks/ intellectuals	8.1	8.2	18.3	4.8	15.8	6.6
Muslim organizations and groups	26.0	32.3	29.6	15.9	16.2	18.6
Other minority organisations and groups	.5	.7	2.0	.4	1.8	1.0
Antiracist organisations and groups	1.1	.4	1.3	.1	.4	.4
Pro-minority rights and welfare organisations	.5	.5	.2	.0	.7	.7
Solidarity, human rights and welfare organisations	.7	1.2	1.3	.6	.7	.7
Racist and extreme right organisations groups	4.7	.7	2.1	.4	1.2	1.4
Other civil society organisations and groups	3.4	1.6	2.6	.4	1.0	4.3
Unknown actors	9.1	2.0	3.3	3.2	4.4	13.8
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100
N	810	1171	750	784	890	787

SOURCE: CINALLI & GIUGNI (2013); GREY MEANS MUSLIM ACTORS

Muslim actors from older communities, such as Pakistanis in the UK, more proficient in the national language and more used to communicating with the British and engaging with the news media than newcomers, such as first-generation Turkish migrants in Germany, but there is also an older context of (political) relations. In addition, it is more likely that a newer immigrant community, such as the Turks in Germany, will be more directed to the country of origin. On the other hand, it is possible that the UK somehow provides a more open discursive context for Pakistani Muslims to join than does Germany for its largely Turkish Muslim community. A final possible explanation is that there are differences in the types of media prevalent in the various countries; for instance the impact of tabloid newspapers seems stronger in the UK than in Germany.

Not just access, but also the subjects that are reported in the papers differed between countries. Major events such as terrorist incidents like 9/11, the Madrid attacks and the Paris shootings have been similarly reported in all countries, but each country raises its own specific issues (Cinalli and Giugni 2013a, 2013b; Vanparrys, Jacobs, and Torrekens, 2013). In the UK, for instance, we find more discussion about discrimination and inequality, whereas in Germany cultural issues such as the head scarf ban for teachers were discussed more widely (Cinalli and Giugni, 2010). Khadijah Elshayyal (2018) states that Muslims in the UK, from the 1960s to the 1980s, did not enjoy the same level of equality under British law as other immigrant communities, but fought hard for it. She calls this the “equality gap”. While racial identity policy in the UK became explicit, it long remained questionable whether “the wider political community [should] be required to assist a religious citizen in bearing any consequences of their belief” (Elshayyal, 2018, 49). From the 1980s onwards, Muslim activists tried to decrease this “equality gap”, and this became increasingly urgent after 9/11, the London attacks in 2005 and the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2006. The UK implemented anti-terrorism and anti-radicalisation policies, which changed relations with the Muslim communities, and provoked strong reactions among them (van Heelsum and Vermeulen, 2018).

The question remains of whether the debate becomes more nuanced when more Muslim actors are involved, as seems to be the case in the UK—which in turn could entice others to participate in the debate. With this information from our newspaper analysis, it becomes very interesting to find out what strategies the community leaders have.

3 Part II Combining Insights from the Literature on the Role of Community Leaders and on Coping with Stigmatisation

Before we discuss the second part of our results, we need a solid theoretical starting point. Investigating the literature on Muslim representatives' role leads us to the prominent work of Jytta Klaussen, who suggests that representatives of (civic) organisations have both an internal and an external function, both shaped by a long range of contextual factors (Klaussen, 2005, 2006, 2009). Internally, Muslim organisations are directed towards the members of their organisation: representatives are required to lead and guide the organisation members in a certain direction and to give them an example on how to behave. For instance, leaders can pacify the organisation's members when the debate gets over-heated. The internal direction of Muslim organisations is shaped by factors such as their size, the level of (financial) dependence on their members, the demands of the community that they have to serve, and also the influence of foreign "homeland" governments and religious institutions (Rosenow-Williams, 2014).

The external function may require that representatives work closely together with the government either because of national or local strategies regarding minority communities, and/or because they depend on its support or funding. External political factors such as minority policy, the integration debate and the "political accommodation of religion" all shape the strategic behaviour and directions of Muslim organisations (Maussen, 2006; Amelina and Faist, 2008). For reasons explained above, one important external function representatives hold is arguably to engage in the political debate in the media.

Studies indicate that organisation leaders often experience considerable tension in choosing between their internal and external loyalties. On the one hand, they "... need to position themselves in the discourse and to try to influence the debate"; on the other, they need to do so "... without neglecting the interests and needs of their members" (Kortmann and Rosenow-Williams, 2013: 41). This tension also affects how representatives of Muslim organisations address their relationship with the outer world and how they respond to prejudice and stigmatisation. With regard to Muslim representatives in the Netherlands, Kadir Canatan found that internally-oriented leaders sometimes emphasise their community's own shortcomings and responsibilities in reacting to the immigration debate, whereas externally-oriented leaders were found to express the need for stronger government policy to address the external causes of migrant problems (Canatan, 2001: 149-150). With regard to the UK, Elshayyal (2018) shows how the Muslim Council of Britain (MCB) was navigating a way between their internal and external functions: although most

Muslims disagreed with British foreign policies, for instance on Iraq (internal role), the MCB also tried to maintain links with the government in its external role. Katherine Brown (2006) shows how British Muslim NGOs that support women in claiming basic rights try to bridge this gap by stressing that basic rights are set out in the Qur'an.

The information available till now is not enough to make it possible to fully understand the representatives, since it is not specific with regard to the stigmatisation of the Muslim community that currently exists. Most work on coping with stereotypes and stigmatisation, comes from psychology and focusses on the individual level, but we want to incorporate some of these insights, acknowledging that leaders do not operate as individuals but as representatives of a group. Individuals are less tied to the views of their support group; while an individual can decide to ignore the stigmatisation of his or her community, it does not seem plausible that a leader would be able to do so, at least not in his internal role.

Dovidio et al. (2005) provide a good overview of prejudice research since Gordon Allport's classic *The Nature of Prejudice* was published in 1954. Allport suggested a continuum from trying not to notice the problem to reacting aggressively. Jones (2005) provides a list of additions to the types of victims' reactions. Shana Levin and Colette van Laar (2006) and more recently Lamont and Mizrachi (2012) brought research together from the Brazil, Israel, the USA, Canada, France, South Africa and Sweden, about responses to stigmatization of race, ethnic group and religion. Michèle Lamont and Nissim Mizrachi (2012) speak of pragmatic assimilation, when immigrants try to hide their ethnic markers. Michèle Lamont, Jessica Welburn, and Crystal Fleming (2012) also report on negotiation behaviour by those who feel addressed unfairly, who may, for instance, actively and openly discuss the problem and make others aware that their actions make them uncomfortable, or else undertake political action. Some subjects prefer a conflict-deflecting strategy—believing that it is best to ignore and walk away, even though that might lead to a growing sense of frustration. Again, we see strategies ranging from passive conflict avoidance to active conflict solving.

Searching for the most suitable approach, we decided that we need to distinguish between the internal and external functions of representatives, and to incorporate the passive–active dimension from the research on stigmatisation. The work of Kirstin Rosenow-Williams seems to have promising starting points. She examined the organisational behaviour of three large Muslim organisations in Germany in response to political expectations, particularly taking into account both their internal and external functions, and she distinguishes three “patterns of organisational behaviour”:

1. *Protest*: this occurs "... if the members' interests and organisational goals are in fundamental conflict with external expectations, if the organisation is marginalised, if it has nothing to lose, and if there is little likelihood that it will receive external resources" (Rosenow-Williams, 2014: 763).
2. *Adaptation*: this strategy includes being open to dialogue, in order to close the gap between the internal and external audiences. It is most probable "... when internal and external expectations are not conflicting with each other, or when the organisation deliberately risks a conflict with its members in order to meet external demands" (ibid.).
3. *Decoupling*: this is a strategy that is chosen when organisations try to keep their internal and external audiences separate, or when the organisation's external adaptation does not lead to any internal changes. This happens, for instance, when representatives aim to stay away from the debate and avoid confrontation with the outside audience. While this might come across as an evasive strategy, Rosenow-Williams treats decoupling not as a negative strategy, but as a possible "functional alternative" for reconciling conflicting expectations between internal and external demands (ibid.).

Importantly, she shows how organisational responses are dynamic and not situated along a continuum between assimilation and segregation. The patterns she describes highlight the interplay between internal and external factors, and so shall use these three patterns to categorise any differences in the way our Muslim representatives cope with the negative tone in the media. Like Rosenow-Williams, we contend that their internal and external responsibilities and interests determine any differences in response strategies.

The theoretical approach outlined here offers a framework for understanding Muslim representatives' relationship with the media.

4 Interviews with Representatives of Muslim Organisations

We shall now set out the results from our interviews to find an answer to the question of how representatives of Muslim organisations react to the (Islamophobia) debate, in their role between their angry and frightened members, and the general public that asks for moderation and the urge of journalist to find issues that are "newsworthy" to their readership. Our (second) dataset, was also compiled for the EURISLAM project and consists of 91 in-depth interviews with representatives of Muslim organisations in 2011 (Tillie, van Heelsum, and Damstra, 2013). To have a solid ground for comparison, the

EURISLAM project was limited to Turkish, Moroccan, Pakistani and former Yugoslav Muslim communities in each of the six countries where the research took place. The objective was to obtain six interviews with representatives from the largest ethnic (Muslim) communities, and four interviews within the smaller ethnic (Muslim) groups. So, if in Germany the Turkish populations is larger than the Moroccan and Pakistani, six interviews would have to be obtained from the first group and four from the other two. Table 2 shows the sample (number of interviewed organisations per ethnic group per country). An attempt was also made to find interviewees from organisations with diverse views in every community, ranging from conservative to liberal, from national to local, and from religious- to community-oriented, to maximise the variation among the interviewees.⁴ Altogether, we held 23 interviews with Turks, 17 with Moroccans, 13 with Pakistanis and 9 with former-Yugoslavians. Also 29 Muslim representatives from other ethnic backgrounds were interviewed in cases where these were prominent. It should be noted that organisational leaders are not (always) the same figures that often appear in the media. Besides the leaders of organisations, there are also other Muslim speakers, who do or do not claim to represent (certain groups of) Muslims, such as the Moroccan mayor of Rotterdam Ahmed Aboutaleb mentioned above.

Table 2 shows that the sampling objective was not met in every country. While there are substantial gaps across various countries and communities, France presented us with the most serious lack of generated material, so it was necessary to remove France from the qualitative analysis. The organisations targeted for the interviews differed in size, orientation and type of constituents. This variety provided us with a broad insight into the various ways Muslim representatives of all backgrounds participate in the debate. The interviewers used the same questionnaire in all the countries; it contained open and closed questions about the organisations in general; what the representatives considered important for their community; what they thought of the debate in the media; and whether or not they had a strategy for dealing with the media and journalists.⁵ After the interviews were transcribed, they were

4 Depending on the country and ethnic group, the researchers tried to find moderate, relatively liberal and relatively orthodox Muslim organisations. For instance, in the Turkish community, Dyanet mosques were usually found to be moderate, Alevi organisations were relatively liberal and Milli Görüş organisations relatively conservative. Among Pakistanis, the Ahmadis and Deobandis were approached, and so on. In the UK, the researcher decided to approach more multi-denominational councils than in the other five countries.

5 Interested readers can ask for the complete questionnaire by sending an email to the corresponding author.

TABLE 2 Number of interviews per ethnic group and country (2011)

	Tu	Mor	Pak	f-Yugosl	otherer	Total
Netherlands	5	5	1	2	1	14
Germany	4	3	4	2	5	18
Switzerland	5	3	3	4	5	20
Belgium	6	6	1	1	0	14
UK	1	0	3	0	15	19
France	2	0	1	0	3	6
total	23	17	13	9	29	91

fed into qualitative software MaxQDA, after which the (coping) strategies of the interviewees were classified.

For the sake of our research question it is important to first get an impression of their opinions on the debate in the media. After that we proceed to consider their strategies, with reference to the three patterns of behaviour as proposed by Rosenow-Williams.

5 General Reactions and Contemplations about the Debate

Not unexpectedly, a major point arising from the interviews is that the representatives of Muslim organisations found the negative side of the debate very striking and/or irritating. Across countries, very few interviewees (2 out of 91) found that there was also positive information on Muslims or Islam in the media. They mentioned that they were always aware and most of the time also influenced by what they saw as a negative debate on Muslims and Islam in the media. After 9/11, "Islam and terrorism were equated and no distinction was made between Islamism and Islam in general" (Bosnian representative, Germany). The following spokesperson from Belgium also connected the hardening of the debate to the changing discourse in the political field:

Now with this right-wing trend, there is a normalisation of a discourse based on hatred against Islam and Muslims. Before 9/11 there had [been] a kind of left approach regarding Muslims, saying they are sweet, they do not know "how", we are going to help them. It was a gentle approach. Now for the young girls for example wearing a veil, the discourse is "It is not her choice, she is dominated."

The “right-wing trend” was at the time of the interviews (in 2011) related to the increasing electoral support for Vlaams Blok in Belgium although not yet to the neo-Nazi and online extremist and white supremacy groups that gained publicity with attacks later. According to many of the representatives, it is extremely problematic that Muslim views are hardly represented in the media and that subjects are hardly ever based on issues Muslims themselves experience. Issues such as the oppression of women in their communities, several interviewees believed, were based on misinformation and had little to do with what actually happens in the community. In their opinion, the community’s social position and employment were much more pressing issues. They disapproved of this perceived biased reporting; many of the Muslim representatives interviewed felt that these stories increased distrust and fear of Muslims. As one representative puts it, “If I knew Islam only through newspapers and TV, I would be scared of Islam myself” (Moroccan representative, Germany).

Another point of criticism concerned the type of voices present in the media. Representatives felt that the debate on Muslims was set by the government, politicians or sensationalist journalists. As a result, many representatives had developed a strong sense of distrust of journalists. A (Moroccan) representative in Belgium tried to explain the complex relationship with journalists:

Listen, the relation with journalists is very, very complicated. We have honest journalists, who interview us on several subjects and reproduce honestly what we say. They can agree or disagree with us, no problem. But sometimes we have journalists ... who do exactly the opposite. For example: some years ago, one came for an interview concerning the role of the mosque. But when he came, [out of the] ten questions, only two were on the mosque and the Muslim community; the rest were about 9/11, Bin Laden, etc. And when I read the paper, I had the impression he had interviewed somebody else. So there is a kind of populism.

In addition to concerns about the subjects that journalists put forward, Muslim representatives generally also did not feel satisfied about the lack of diversity of Muslim voices in the debate:

The media and politics talk a lot about Muslims, but not so much with Muslims, or if they do, it is always the same people/ organisations they talk to. The debate needs new faces, different associations to be involved, as single persons cannot speak for the majority of Muslims. (Moroccan representative, Germany)

It is apparent that the representatives in this study generally hold a negative view on media portrayals of Muslims. Their statements illustrate that they generally experience a negative discursive structure in which they feel they have little say or power. Across countries, representatives were found to characterise the media as conflict-oriented, influenced by government, politicians or journalists and lacking nuance or diversity. This again suggests that certain negative articles have more power or influence than positive items. Seeing that most representatives find the debate antagonising, we can now examine more specifically how they respond to the debate.

6 Strategies: Protest, Adaptation and Decoupling

As explained above, we shall now employ Rosenow-Williams's three categories—protest behaviour, adaptation behaviour, and decoupling—to categorise representatives' behaviour towards the media. Figure 1 summarises the percentage of representatives that chose each strategy. As the figure displays, the most common pattern is protest (38%) while 25% chose a decoupling strategy and 27% an adaptation model. In 5% of the interviews, another or unclear strategy was adopted.

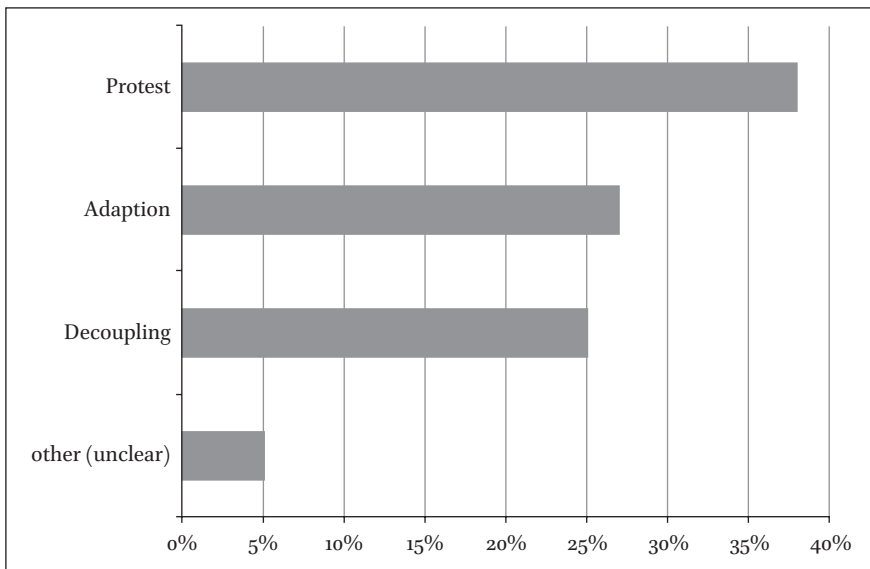


FIGURE 1 Percentage of interviewees who show the Protest, Adaptation or Decoupling strategy.

Some statements of representatives that are typical of the three types of reaction will illustrate the categories. The *protest* category was used when representatives were clearly found to react defensively. In these cases, they actively protested against the negative image by trying to formulate a more positive identity, both internally and externally. Externally, some representatives may have openly protested on TV to defend their faith or community. Internally, they aimed to show members how wrong the general picture is. An example might make clear the reasoning of some representatives in the UK. One of them stated:

[The media] ... is relentless; it picks odd practices here and there. When your practices are looked down upon, you do not feel at home ... I see this with my children. It makes them defend themselves all the time: "I am not barbaric, I am a human being, and I have similar aspirations as yours." This war on terror has created big fault lines. [...] The media is playing a big role and you can speak with others, but you cannot say to the media: "Let's sit down and talk", because that does not sell to the papers.

The protest strategy has the advantage internally that the community feels defended, but as this representative explains, it is difficult to play an active role, because you cannot invite a journalist to sit down and talk.

Those who display the pattern of *adaptation* focus on finding similarities between Muslims and non-Muslims in order to minimise the gap between internal and external demands. Examples include the organisation of multi-faith meetings and joining multicultural events. People whom we classified as adaptation-oriented often argued that they wanted to pursue constructive activities and to believe in initiating dialogue. A representative who was placed in the adaptation category made the following statement:

People always talk about the Muslims but never with the Muslims. To make sure people are not scared we organise open days; for example, when we break the fast at the end of Ramadan we invite our neighbours to come and have a look and see our food and drinks. These goals are set to show the true face of Islam to the outside world instead of the negative image that currently exists. The best way is to start a civilised discussion.

In a similar vein, a representative from Belgium argued: "... if you want to be respected, [if] you want to be part of this society then you have to show your good will. To stay out of the game and claim rights, is not reasonable." This

strategy is a more active strategy, since the initiative to organise common meetings is in the hands of the Muslim organisation. The strategy is positive externally but might need more explanation internally for the members. There is a risk that members of the organisation who are less optimistic about the relations between Muslims and their surroundings may be unhappy about this strategy and eventually even drop out.

Representatives were placed in the *decoupling* category in cases when they explained that the organisational strategy was to focus on internal goals. In some cases, representatives explained that they told the members that the debate was nonsensical. In other cases, representatives had become disillusioned after negative experiences with the media. Since journalists “do not listen”, they feel it is better to simply mind their own business. According to one representative in the Netherlands:

No, we cannot go on with always sending out press communiqués, it is not a strategy, since it doesn't help. It's better to ignore it than to keep on defending yourself all the time. They will tell their own story whatever you do ... You invite [right-wing politician] Wilders to a meeting to discuss the issues, [but] he doesn't take up any invitation. So there is no discussion. If he shouts something in the media, we ignore it.

This representative clearly aimed to keep his internal and external audiences separate as a result of negative experiences in previous attempts at arranging a discussion. This strategy is passive and has the advantage that the representative does not have to worry about journalists, but it has the disadvantage that the community does not feel protected.

We want to explain the differences between the five countries in our dataset, and particularly the difference between Germany and the UK that was noted above. Table 3 shows how the representatives of Muslim organisations in the five countries that remained in this study differed in their public debate strategies.

As Table 3 shows, the protest strategy was relatively often used in the UK (10 times) and in Switzerland (9 times), and hardly at all in the Netherlands (2 times). The adaptation strategy was used most in Germany (10 times), much less in all the other countries, and least in the Netherlands. The decoupling strategy was most used in Switzerland (8 times). Though this is interesting, we shall not elaborate on the Swiss case here because of the complications related to cantonal differences. For the Dutch case, most of the strategies did not emerge clearly in the interviews, while in Belgium the numbers in the various categories were similar. The most striking outcome is that Germany and the UK again stand out, this time because the representatives adopt opposite strategies.

TABLE 3 Public debate strategies (absolute number)

Main category	BE	DE	NL	CH	UK
Protest	5	6	2	9	10
Adaption	4	10	1	3	5
Decoupling	4	1	3	8	1
Unclear or missing	.	1	6	.	3
Total number of organisations	14	18	14	20	18

By looking at our newspaper data (Part I) combined with the data on the strategy of representatives (Part II), we now observe a few interesting trends that might lead to a better understanding of the particularities and differences between the two contrasting cases, Germany and the UK. First, it is remarkable that most representatives in Germany chose an adaptation model, although the debate was actually more negative in Germany than in the UK (Cinalli and Giugni, 2010). In the UK, on the other hand, more Muslims are present as actors in the newspapers and the debate tends to raise both positive and negative points, possibly helped by their input. Even so, we found that Muslim representatives in the UK predominantly reacted to the media debate with a protest pattern.

To comprehend better why Germany and the UK present such different cases, we may consider some additional contextual factors. The first one, and already mentioned, is that Muslim communities in the UK are older, and their community representatives are well versed in English and know how the media work. In addition, the main Muslim organisations are more firmly consolidated in terms of infrastructure and power because of their longer history in the UK. Marta Bolognani and Paul Statham (2013) state that Muslims have participated in the British debate since 1945. As a result, representatives may feel that there is more room for protest-focused coping strategies. The (Turkish) Muslim community in Germany developed more recently and it may have taken some time after establishing themselves before they could actively join the national debate. Matthias Kortmann and Kerstin Rosenow-Williams (2013: 53) have argued that, as “Islam in Germany has finally arrived on the political agenda ... The umbrella organizations are generally anxious to emphasize their willingness to cooperate and to participate in political dialogue.” Another aspect of the discursive context in Germany might be the earlier presence of rather violent extreme right-wing groups that had been involved in racist attacks and murders in Germany for some years before the period of the interviews. Opting for a

careful interaction model targeted at de-escalation of conflict may have been a conscious and necessary strategy to avoid a negative spiral.

Second, the media landscape has caused some of the differences. We saw that more Muslim voices are active in the British newspapers, which suggests that Muslims in the UK are able to attract more visibility, resonance and legitimacy in their country's newspapers. On the other hand, we observed over and over again that representatives in the UK strongly complained about the difference in quality between the news reports in the tabloids and other local and national media. While representatives in Germany also criticised sensationalist journalism, they did not make complaints of this nature. A possible explanation for the highly defensive response by Muslim representatives in the UK could thus also be a stronger polarising tone in the British media, particularly in the tabloids.

7 Conclusion and Future

Having studied West European Muslim representatives' role in the debate on Islam, we now want to ask what our observations could mean for the position of the organisations' leaders and for Muslims in West European countries in the future. As we have argued, the fact that the UK has a Muslim community with more established relations, better anti-discrimination policies and a stronger position in the media than in the other countries, could mean that the countries with less established Muslim populations might develop in a similar direction, unless the context changes significantly.

The main conclusion from our newspaper analysis was that, overall, more is said about Muslims by non-Muslims than by Muslims themselves. The percentage of claims made by Muslims ranges from 16% in Germany to 32% in the UK. Though Muslim speakers do not have the same opportunity to set the agenda as the more dominant "state-actors" and are forced to follow what others instigate, their active role probably improves to a certain extent when the community is longer established.

Likewise, the strategies that the representatives report in the interviews, from careful pacifying in Germany to a protest strategy in the UK, could be interpreted as phases and as an increase in what the psychological literature has called an "active" coping strategy. However, we may see this as an increase not only in the number of voices heard, but possibly also in frustration about things not changing. In the long run, the active protest strategy is probably easier, since the internal and external message becomes the same. So combined with the assumed historical effect, one may expect that representatives

in all the countries in this study will become more protest-oriented in the near future. De Koning (2016), reporting on the Netherlands and on the period after our fieldwork, seems to point in the direction of increased and conscious anti-Islamophobia activism. However, as Katherine Brown and Tania Saeed (2015) say, it is mainly well-educated Muslims, who manage to get their voice heard, while the rest of the community remains stuck in unequal power relations.

The observation that a community with better established relations has been forced to become more defensive, relates to several developments. First, the institutionalisation and integration of the community might have had a positive effect at the local level, but relations between Muslims and non-Muslims in the media have not improved. Second, the general context of anti-immigrant sentiment and political parties that voice these sentiments is only becoming tougher, with hate speech and violence towards migrants and Muslims increasing. One can only hope that a reasonable debate remains possible. Representatives of Muslim organisations alone are not capable of moving the debate in a less prejudiced direction. An important conclusion from the above fieldwork is that the “actors” who emerged as the most influential in the debate are state and government actors. They are in a position to impose and enforce guidelines and norms for a debate that is not discriminatory.

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