Between a Rock and a Hard Place

The Islamic Council of Norway and the Challenge of Representing Islam in Europe

Olav Elgvin

Thesis for the degree of Philosophiae Doctor (PhD)
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Summary

In several European countries the authorities have sought to institutionalize and regulate the Islamic or Muslim presence in their countries through Islamic Representative Councils (IRCs) that can function as interlocutors between Muslim communities and the state. Many of these organizations have been marked by instability, defection, conflict, or splits. This thesis asks why, through a detailed case study of the trajectory of one such IRC – the Islamic Council of Norway (IRN).

Existing research on IRCs has not delved deeply into the question of why so many IRCs have been unstable, but three broad perspectives can be found. One perspective is that there are *internal* reasons for the conflicts: it is argued that Muslims and Muslim organizations are simply too different from one another, and this may make cooperation difficult. Another perspective is that these conflicts have been caused by *external* reasons: external conditions or the policies of the authorities made it difficult for these organizations to function well. A third perspective is that the conflicts were caused by a combination of internal and external factors – it is about the *competing expectations* they face, and the difficulties of dealing with these competing expectations.

The thesis employs a process-tracing approach to explore the trajectory of the Islamic Council of Norway. The organization was created in 1992/1993 and grew stronger for the next couple of decades. The IRN's performance during the cartoon crisis in 2006 led the government to provide public funding to the organization from 2007 onwards. In the 2010s a conflict began to emerge. One faction advocated a *dialogue path,* with an emphasis on soft rhetoric and external outreach. Another faction advocated a *community path*, which aimed at strengthening the internal solidarity in the Muslim communities. Those who were in favour of the community path won the internal power struggle and were able to secure an independent source of funding through a successful system for certification of halal meat. After a prolonged conflict the advocates of the dialogue path decided to break out and create a competing organization. The government took away the IRN's funding, and the system for halal

certification broke down. Following the split, the IRN continued to exist, but now without funding and with a close competitor.

The thesis relies on analysis of different sources of data – primary archival records, secondary literature, oral interviews, and media items – in order to ascertain why these events occurred. Perspectives from earlier scholarly literature indeed point to relevant factors, but the concepts are clarified and the actual mechanisms are unpacked in detail. What earlier researchers have referred to as *diversity* on the Islamic field is in this thesis conceptualized as *multipolarity*. Multipolarity played a role since different member organizations in the IRN had different goals. During its phase of consolidation the organization was able to work through these differences. But when the conflict erupted in the 2010s, the multipolarity among the members made it more difficult to find solutions.

Throughout the organization's history *external actors* also had an impact. Whereas existing literature mostly talks about the relationship between IRCs and the state, the case of the IRN indicates that intermediary third-party organizations can also be important. In the first couple of decades these organizations acted as stabilizing forces. These organizations helped actors in the IRN to find ways of dealing with the demands from different sectors of Norwegian society. When the organization was beset by stormy weather these organizations were there to help the IRN. In the final phase, however, these organizations did not publicly support the IRN, giving the authorities carte blanche to remove funding from the organization.

It was a consistent challenge for the IRN to deal with the *competing demands* placed on the organization. The thesis details how such competing demands can create challenges and conflicts. The organization mostly tried to deal with such competing demands through balancing solutions which to a certain degree could satisfy all stakeholders. The major difficulties for the organization arose when different factions in the organization wanted to pursue different and conflicting strategies for dealing with these competing demands.

In addition to these existing perspectives from the literature, this thesis also shows that *organization matters*. The challenges IRN experienced are not unique to IRCs as Islamic or migrant-dominated organizations. In the thesis the IRN is conceptualized as a *meta-organization*: an organization whose members are organizations themselves. Meta-organizations often have weak central hierarchies and are therefore ill-suited to deal with conflicts and deep disagreements.

Crucially, the thesis shows that all of these factors interacted with one another. When a meta-organization is placed in a politicized environment that frequently requires it to take a stand on controversial issues, when it has a multipolar membership base and faces external actors that place difficult demands on the organization, conflicts and difficulties easily arise.

This thesis is the first study to explore in depth why IRCs seem prone to conflicts and splits. The main factors identified – the multipolarity of the Islamic field, the influence and meddling of external actors, the multiple demands the organizations are facing and disagreements about how to relate to these demands, the difficulties of solving conflicts due to the weak hierarchy of meta-organizations, and the interplay between these factors – have probably played a role in the conflicts in other IRCs as well. For the research fields of political science and Islamic studies on the one hand, and authorities and Muslim organizations in Europe on the other, this dissertation brings new conceptual and empirical knowledge. It elucidates why it remains a challenge to ensure that relations between authorities and IRCs can be beneficial both to society at large and to the Muslim communities themselves.

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PART I.

INTRODUCTION,
STATE OF KNOWLEDGE,
and
THEORY & METHODS

1. Introduction: The challenge of representing Islam and Muslims in a Muslim-minority country

1.1 The puzzle: Why is it so difficult to be an Islamic Representative Council?

 "We need the Muslims to be organized. That is the only way we can hold them responsible for what happens in their communities".

A Norwegian government official told me this several years ago. I had interviewed him about Norwegian faith communities and asked about Norwegian government policies towards these communities. This official found it especially important that Muslims should become more organized. He perceived several challenges facing Muslims in Norway: discrimination and Islamophobia, radicalization, social pressure to conform to conservative norms. The answer to all this, he thought, was stronger institutionalization and representation of Muslims in Norwegian society. They needed representative institutions. When these institutions were in place, the Norwegian authorities could hold these institutions responsible, and they would function as interlocutors between the government and ordinary Muslims on the ground.

Whether he knew it or not, this official expressed a way of thinking that has become common in European policy circles during the past 20 years. As has been documented in several studies, European governments have sought to institutionalize and regulate the Islamic or Muslim presence in their countries through particular Islamic institutions so that these institutions can function as interlocutors between Muslim citizens and organizations and the state (Bayrakli, Hafez, and Faytre 2018; Braginskaia 2015; Bruce 2018; Ciciora 2018; Godard 2015; Haddad and Golson 2007; Laurence 2012, 2015, 2019; Mattes and Rosenberger 2015; Rosenow-Williams 2012, 2014; Silvestri 2009, 2010a, 2010b). In Eastern Europe, these councils have often been created on the basis on long-standing Muslim organizations with roots

back to the Ottoman empire. In Western Europe, the councils have usually been created on the basis of organizations founded after post-war immigration to Europe.

One of the assumptions behind the empowerment of such institutions has been that Muslim citizens are not sufficiently represented through ordinary political institutions or interest organizations, such as political parties, labour unions or civil society organizations (Dancygier et al. 2015). To remedy this, organizations I will refer to as *Islamic Representative Councils* (IRCs) have been created or empowered according to a *neo-corporatist* political logic. These councils purport to represent Muslims, mosques or other Muslim organizations vis-à-vis the state and other actors in society. Therefore, they have a double aim. They are expected to voice the concerns of their members to the authorities or to society at large and thereby ensure that the interests of their members are considered when policy is formulated. But they are also expected to voice the concerns of the authorities and society at large to their members and constituencies and ensure that central issues for the authorities – such as violent radicalization– are addressed. In many ways, it is an *exchange relationship*: You give some, you get some. IRCs get formal recognition and policy concessions in some areas, and in return they give the authorities concessions in other areas.

So much for the theory. But how has this actually worked? On this question, there is a surprising dearth of research. To the degree that research on IRCs can be said to be a defined field of research, this field emerged to a considerable degree through a string of books and articles by the American political scientist Jonathan Laurence (Laurence 2005, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015, 2019; Laurence and Vaisse 2007). The work of Laurence has been highly influential, and the present work is deeply indebted to the studies Laurence performed. Laurence showed that the leaders of state-sanctioned IRCs in the major European countries he looked at in depth did display a pattern which could be explained by neo-corporatist theory. After having been invited into the policy process, they moderated their demands. They engaged less in overt protest and attempted to frame their demands in a way that was more acceptable to society at large. Laurence nevertheless claimed that the process of

institutionalization of Islam through IRCs so far was imperfect and only partially complete (Laurence 2012, 198–244).

Following the work of Laurence, only a few researchers have investigated empirically how the project of IRC incorporation has worked. Have these councils had an impact on their members or Muslim constituencies? Have they had an impact on society at large or the policy-making process? The political scientist Alice Ciciora published an article in which she looked into whether IRCs were incorporated into the policy process or not, arguably a key aspect of neo-corporatist political practice. Using headscarf debates as a case, she showed that the Austrian IRC became involved in the policymaking process, whereas the IRCs in France and the Netherlands did not (Ciciora 2018, 340–47). Political scientist Benjamin Bruce, meanwhile, wrote a detailed historical monography on how Turkey and Morocco attempted to govern their diasporas in Europe (Bruce 2018). While it was not the primary focus of his work, he nevertheless touched upon the IRCs in France and Germany. According to Bruce, the IRCs in France and Germany could only be deemed to be partially successful. They faced several internal and external obstacles that made their work difficult (Bruce 2018, 127–41). Political scientist Ekaterina Braginskaia wrote her PhD thesis on IRCs in Great Britain and Russia and detailed their development from 1997 to 2013 (Braginskaia 2015). Whereas the British IRC she looked at – the Muslim Council of Britain – relied more on support from the grassroots and civil society, the Russian IRC – the Russian Council of Muftis – relied more on support from the state.

None of these studies, however, have explored explicitly and in depth what is arguably one of the most salient features of many of these organizations, namely that they have often been marked by instability, defections, conflicts or splits. The experience in many European countries is simply that it is difficult to be an Islamic Representative Council. These conflicts have been mentioned in many of the studies, and in media reports, but they have not been looked at systematically by researchers. The most thorough treatment of these conflicts is very likely found in a book by Bernard Godard, a former official at the French Ministry of the Interior (2015,

chapter 1). As will be detailed in the next and the final chapter, many of these councils have experienced substantial difficulties. Such conflicts, for example, have been documented in IRCs in France (Bruce 2018, 128–35; Godard 2015, chapter 1), in Germany (Bruce 2018, 135–42; Rosenow-Williams 2012, chapter 6), in the UK (Shah 2016, 12–19), in Austria (Kurier 2018), in Russia (Braginskaia 2015, 15–16), in the Netherlands (Atkinson 2016; Houten 2019), in Sweden (Sorgenfrei 2018, 105–31), in Spain (Laurence 2012, 196), and in Belgium (Loobuyck, Debeer, and Meier 2013, 69–70). Some of these IRCs have been split, and others have been paralyzed by internal conflicts. Some IRCs have seen one of the sides prevail in the conflict, while others were able work out their internal differences.

Why did conflicts occur in all these IRCs, in so many different countries? Even though the studies which have been done on IRCs have not attempted to answer this question in depth, some broad perspectives can be found in the literature – I refer to these as *perspectives* because they have not been fleshed out as complete theories. One perspective is that there are *internal* reasons for the conflicts: Muslims and Muslim organizations are simply too different from one other, it is argued, and this may make cooperation difficult. This, for example, is the argument of Bernard Godard, who was partly responsible for setting up CFCM, as an explanation for why cooperation in CFCM became so difficult (Godard 2015, chapter 1). It has also been proposed as an explanation for why Muslims seem to have difficulties engaging in collective action in Europe (Pfaff and Gill 2006; Warner and Wenner 2006).

Another perspective is that these conflicts were caused by *external* reasons: The policies of various European governments made it difficult for IRCs to function well. Some of the researchers who have written on IRCs have seen the empowerment of these organizations as an attempt to control and *securitize* Muslims, i.e. present Muslims as a threat (Aguilar 2018; Amir-Moazami 2011; Bayrakli, Hafez, and Faytre 2018; Haddad and Golson 2007). The institutional setup of IRCs may therefore have come about according to securitized and politicized logics that were not optimal for the functioning of the IRCs themselves. In his treatment of IRCs in Germany and France, for example, Benjamin Bruce places much of the responsibility for the

malfunctioning of the IRCs in these countries on French and German authorities, and Muslim home states, whose interference made it difficult for the organizations to function well (Bruce 2018, 128–42).

A third perspective is that the difficulties of the European IRCs have been due to a combination of internal and external factors – it is a matter of the *competing expectations* they face. IRCs face one set of expectations from the authorities or governments they interact with, and they often face very different expectations from their Muslim constituencies. This situation – of facing competing expectations from different stakeholders – has been highlighted by sociologist Kerstin Rosenow-Williams in her work on Islamic federations and IRCs in Germany (Rosenow-Williams 2012), by political scientist Ekaterina Braginskaia in her work on IRCs in Russia and Britain (Braginskaia 2015), and by anthropologist of Islam John Bowen in his work on Islam in the UK (Bowen 2016, 44). Such competing expectations may also lead to internal conflicts.

However, given that none of these studies have explored this question in depth and in a longitudinal manner, it is difficult to know which of these perspectives is more correct than the others.

1.2 Learning form the Norwegian case

In this thesis, I will add to the nascent literature by looking explicitly at why cooperation became difficult in one such IRC – the Islamic Council of Norway (IRN). IRN was established in 1992/1993, as one of the first councils of its kind in Western Europe. Despite some rough tumbles, IRN seemed to grow stronger during its first 15-20 years. Starting out as an organization run on a voluntary basis, it began to receive funding from the Norwegian state in 2007. It also became an increasingly important interlocutor for the authorities. Seen from the outside, IRN appeared to be a stable and secure organization. Nevertheless, an internal conflict emerged in the 2010s. This conflict ended with a split and a public fall from grace in 2017. The

government took away their funding, and an important faction within IRN broke out and started a new organization of their own. IRN had also built up a large and successful franchise for the certification of halal food, which broke down.

Even though Norway is a small country with a relatively small Muslim population, the case of Norway can nevertheless be interesting for casting light on the larger phenomenon of IRCs in Europe. As Jonathan Laurence pointed out, the incorporation of IRCs has usually been done within a corporatist logic. Norway is generally regarded as one of the most corporatist countries in OECD. Religious communities in general benefit from relatively generous funding from the state. In the 2000s, a dense network of religious leaders emerged, in which the IRN participated, that was involved in the policy-making process (Døving 2016). A priori one could expect an IRC in Norway to be relatively stable and well-functioning. Any challenges that are revealed in the Norwegian case are thererfore likely to be challenges that are basic and fundamental to the project of IRC incorporation. A theoretical account which explains the development in the Norwegian case may be useful for understanding other cases as well.

The most important empirical research question in the thesis is this:

What led the IRN organization to break up?

To answer this question, the thesis employs a longitudinal and historical process-tracing approach which looks into all the phases of the history of the organization, from the very beginning to the split and the post-split period. It asks these questions:

How and why was the IRN created?

How and why was it stabilized and consolidated as an organization?

How and why did it break up?

The broader analytic question is why it is seemingly so challenging for IRCs to function well as organizations, all across Europe.

1.3 The structure of the thesis and the argument in brief

The argument in the thesis proceeds in three steps corresponding to different periods in the IRN's development as an organization – creation, consolidation and break-up.

First part: Existing research, theory and methods

To understand the challenges IRN faced, the thesis draws on theories from organizational research, and in particular theories about *meta-organizations* and how organizations deal with *multiple pressures* and competing expectations. The second chapter explore the existing research on IRCs, and outline the theoretical framework I use. The third chapter lays out the methodology used, the data I have had access to and how I have worked with this data.

Second part: The creation of a meta-organization

The second part of the thesis asks how IRN was created and asks what kind of organization IRN was and is. Drawing on the work of the organizational theorists Göran Ahrne and Nils Brunsson, I argue that the IRN should be conceptualized as a *meta-organization* – an organization in which its members are organizations as well (Ahrne and Brunsson 2005, 2008). This has important implications for an organization, according to Ahrne and Brunsson. Organizations in which members are human beings are often able to convince its key members to do certain things. This is more difficult to achieve in a meta-organization, given that organizations usually have fairly defined goals, which can be difficult to change.

The central challenge for the initiators who set up IRN was to overcome the *multipolarity* on the Islamic field in Norway, which they overcame by creating an organization that would not meddle too much in the internal affairs of its members. There was no strong demand for an organization like the IRN among the majority of

the Norwegian mosques. What led to the creation of the organization was an external impetus in the form of an invitation from the Church of Norway, coupled with a pan-Islamic ideology among key organizational entrepreneurs.

Third part: Navigating expectations

The third part of the thesis framework asks how IRN developed in the consolidation phase, which lasted roughly from 1993 to 2010. The fundamental predicament of IRN as a meta-organization is that it found itself *between a rock and a hard place* – it needed simultaneously to relate to conflicting demands or expectations from various actors. Another way to put this is by relating it to *multiple institutional logics*. Its members may want one thing, whereas the authorities or its external partners may want another. What does an organization or meta-organization do when facing such situations? Drawing on an influential account by the organizational theorists Matthew Kraatz and Emily Block (2008), I propose that IRN attempted to deal with conflicting pressures in four fundamental ways throughout its history: *balancing; decoupling; withdrawal;* and *independence.* Throughout most of the consolidation phase, IRN attempted to *balance* the different demands it faced. It adjusted to the demands from society at large, but nevertheless tried to find solutions that could be acceptable to their members as well. At several critical junctures, it was aided in this balancing act by intermediary organizations that had good relations with both the IRN and the authorities. But there were also tendencies towards *decoupling* and *withdrawal*, and there were voices who wanted IRN to pursue *independence.*

Fourth part: Breaking up and starting over

The third historical part of the thesis framework asks why conflicts began developing in IRN around 2011, and why an influential faction in the organization broke out and created a competing meta-organization of its own. This is explained by building on the theoretical work from the previous sections, as well as by adding some additional theoretical building-blocks.

For both internal and external reasons, IRN had pursued different strategies for dealing with the multiple demands and expectations it faced. All alternatives – balancing, withdrawal, decoupling and independence – had been favoured by key actors from time to time. In the 2010s, the demands on the organization grew stronger and more intense, from actors on the Islamic field as well as from society at large. This made the act of navigating expectations more difficult. Whereas some actors favoured a continuation of the balancing strategy, with a focus on soft rhetoric and external dialogue, new actors who had become active in the organization wanted to achieve more independence from their external stakeholders. A deep conflict ensued. The organization had difficulties solving this conflict, partly because of the institutional features that were inherent to its status as a meta-organization: weak central authorities which may be ill-equipped to deal with conflicts.

Moreover, external opportunity structures also mattered. Key actors in IRN found themselves in an environment that emphasized *reputation over representation*. To be heard by policymakers, they did not necessarily need to be *representative* of larger groups of Muslims, but they did need to have a good *reputation*. This could be achieved outside the IRN, even though a competing organization would be less representative than the organization they left. The intermediary organizations that had previously sheltered the IRN from external criticism chose not to lend IRN their support. Key actors in the IRN therefore chose to set up a competing organization, which could acquire a better reputation.

In the last chapter I also discuss whether these factors also mattered in other IRC cases, with a particular look on four shadow cases – Germany, Austria, France and the UK. The answer is that yes, it mattered. The multipolarity of the Islamic field, the meddling and influence of external actors, the multiple demands the organizations were facing and disagreements about how to relate to these demands, the difficulties of solving conflicts due to the weak hierarchy of a meta-organization, and the interplay between these factors – it all mattered and led to conflicts or splits in other IRCs as well.

1.4 Research contribution

The last chapter summarizes the findings in the thesis, and what the study contributes to the literature. The most important contribution of the thesis is fairly straightforward: it is the first study to explore in depth why IRCs seem prone to conflicts and splits. The overall finding of the thesis is that the perspectives found in the previous research all contained some truth. These perspectives point to factors which played a role; but the concepts are here clarified, and the actual mechanisms are unpacked in detail. In addition, the thesis shows that *organization matters* and that the challenges IRN experienced are not unique to IRCs as Islamic or migrant-dominated organizations. For both authorities and IRCs, it remains a challenge in the years to come to find ways of interacting which ensure that IRC incorporation can be of benefit to both the Muslim communities and society at large.

2. Previous research, key concepts and research questions

Why have IRCs come into being in so many European countries? How have they functioned? The research on this is still limited in scope. This chapter surveys the existing literature and identifies a research gap. It also outlines the research questions I will pursue in the thesis, discusses briefly the theoretical framework and defines some of the most important key concepts.

To the extent that research on IRCs can be said to be a defined field of research, this field emerged to a considerable degree through an influential series of publications by the American political scientist Jonathan Laurence (Laurence 2005, 2006, 2009, 2012, 2015, 2019; Laurence and Vaisse 2007). There were other researchers who also published valuable early studies on the emergence of IRCs (Haddad and Golson 2007; Silvestri 2007), partly in dialogue with Laurence's early work, but these did not attain the same influence as Laurence's studies. Later on, the findings of Laurence have been expanded upon – and partly challenged – by other researchers who positioned their work within the framework created by Laurence (Bayrakli, Hafez, and Faytre 2018; Bech 2010; Bruce 2018; Ciciora 2018; Haddad and Golson 2007). Other researchers have also written on IRCs, directly or indirectly, but pursuing different questions, using other perspectives, or not relating their research primarily to Laurence's framework (Aguilar 2018; Amir-Moazami 2011; Braginskaia 2015; Elshayyal 2018; Rosenow-Williams 2012; Seddon 2014). In addition, a large body of literature has emerged that does not limit itself to IRCs in particular, but looks more generally at the legal and political institutionalization of Islam in Europe (Bader 2010; Fetzer and Soper 2005; Joppke 2013; Loobuyck, Debeer, and Meier 2013; Maussen 2006, 2009).

2.1 Laurence's foundational work

Because the work of Laurence has become so important for the emergence of the field, and because it serves as a central backdrop for this thesis, I will briefly outline the main themes and claims in his work. Following that, I will detail how his work has been expanded upon and critiqued by others, and how IRCs have been studied by researchers working in other traditions or fields. Laurence spent many years doing fieldwork in several European countries, interviewing key actors from both governments and IRCs. His first focus was France, resulting in the book *Integrating Islam: Political and religious challenges in contemporary France*, which he co-authored with the French historian Justin Vaisse (2007). For his subsequent publications he also did extended fieldwork in Germany, Italy, and the UK and the Netherlands, as well as less extensive fieldworks in the Netherlands, Belgium and Spain. His most influential and expansive work on the subject to date is the book *The Emancipation of Europe's Muslims. The State's Role in Minority Integration* (2012), which I will mainly refer to here. The following paragraphs contain the bulk of Laurence's argument, interspersed with references to other studies which provides further details on the processes Laurence describe.

2.1.1 From outsourcing to domestic policy

The starting point for Laurence is the demographic fact that the Muslim population in Western Europe became much larger in the post-WWII era, largely as a result of immigration. Muslims have been present in Europe for centuries, particularly in areas of Eastern Europe that had been part of the Ottoman empire or adjacent to it – such as the Balkans, Hungary, Georgia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Russia, and Turkey itself. But Muslims made their presence felt in Western Europe more strongly from the 1960s and 70s and onwards, following labour and refugee migration into Europe from Muslim countries. In the beginning of this period, the "Muslims" were usually not referred to primarily as Muslims, but rather as foreign workers, or by their nationality ("Pakistanis", "Turks", etc.). They organized through different kinds of

organizations: Non-religious associations based on nationality, labour unions, and, to a lesser degree, mosques. But the fact that these migrants self-identified as Muslims, still made it pertinent how Islam should be organized and governed.

Laurence documents that from 1960 to around 1990, the preferred interlocutors for many European governments in matters that had to do with guest workers and Muslim migrants were their home countries (Laurence 2012, 31–69). The assumption, from both governments and frequently the migrants themselves, was that they were temporary workers, and that they would return to their home country at some point. Their religious needs and concerns were therefore seen as the responsibility of the home country. For sending countries like Turkey and Morocco, this was seen as a domestic problem as well: They wanted to avoid that the diasporas became hotbeds of leftist or Islamist activism. Laurence introduces an apt term for the engagement of Muslim countries with their diasporas in Europe: *Embassy Islam*. Some sending countries – particularly Morocco and Turkey, and to a lesser degree Algeria – became directly involved in the religious life of their diasporas by funding mosques or employing religious personnel. In the case of Turkey, this was done very explicitly. *Diyanet*, the national religious establishment that partly resembles a state church in its hierarchical structure, sends imams to countries all over Europe. Morocco has not employed imams directly to the same degree, but nevertheless engages intimately with the religious life of Moroccans in Europe through the funding of associations and mosques. Algeria has been less involved in providing religious services to Algerians in Europe than Turkey or Morocco, but has funded some large mosques, and has been trying to become the official voice of Islam in France through the *Grande mosquée de Paris*.

Even though Laurence does not focus much on Shia Islam and/or Iran, it is probably the case that Iran has promoted a similar kind of embassy Islam among Shia Muslims in Europe. I am not aware of any published research on the influence of Iran among Muslim organizations in European countries, but it has been documented that Iran engages in embassy Islam outreach in other parts of the world (Haynes 2014) . In addition to the countries that engage directly with their diasporas in Europe, there are

countries that have supported a more diffuse and pan-Islamic kind of embassy Islam, particularly Pakistan and Saudi-Arabia. Whereas Morocco and Turkey have primarily catered to their own diasporas, Saudi-Arabia – and to a lesser degree Pakistan – have sponsored associations and initiatives that in principle target all Muslims, in Europe and elsewhere. By doing this, they are trying to don the mantle as modern successors to the Caliphate, in order to be seen as the spiritual leaders for all Muslims worldwide (Laurence 2012, 33).

In addition to these embassy Islam organizations, most European countries had a strong presence in what Laurence calls *political Islam organizations* – organizations which to a large degree hailed from what I will refer to as the *Brotherhood lineage*. The Islamic landscape in most European countries, as Laurence depicts it, was thus divided between embassy Islam and political Islam, dispersed by local organizations that were connected to neither.

2.1.2 The two phases of IRC incorporation

Towards the ends of the 1980s and in the beginning the 1990s, the outsourcing policy gradually began to change in several countries. European governments realized that the temporary workers were not temporary, and wanted to deal with problems such as unemployment, social unrest and the nascent wave of religiously framed political violence. They therefore began to seek interlocutors who were locally grounded. At the same time, religion became a more important identity marker in Muslim populations. In the words of Laurence (italics in original),

> Religion had previously been but one characteristic of this population of immigrant origin. Religion became *the* relevant characteristic for policymakers, and as such, the door through which social integration of this minority population would come to pass.

(Laurence 2012, 148)

To incorporate IRCs into the political system became one important way of achieving such integration through religion. The thinking was that drawing representative Islamic organizations to a greater extent into the policy-making process would co-opt them and make them more moderate in their demands.

Laurence distinguishes between two phases in the incorporation of IRCs. The first phase lasted from around 1990 to 1999. In this phase, governments and authorities began to engage seriously with more or less representative Islamic organizations or councils. Laurence mentions examples from several countries. In France, the short-lived "Council for Reflection on Islam in France" was set up in 1990 to advise the government on issues that had to do with Islam (Laurence 2012, 159). In the UK, the Muslim Council of Britain was set up in 1997, following informal prodding from the authorities in the preceding years (Laurence 2012, 161). In Italy and the Netherlands, there were also some short-lived attempts at creating IRCs. But neither of these first attempts at incorporating IRCs proved durable, either in terms of institutional longevity or interaction with the state: "The lack of structure and commitment [from governments] meant that these early Islam Councils would play a mostly symbolic role" (Laurence 2012, 157).

The second phase Laurence identifies lasted from 2000 to 2010 and has arguably continued since the publication of his book. In this phase, the governments in various European countries intensified their efforts to institutionalize and regulate the practice of Islam in their countries, to a large degree prodded by the rise of Islamist political violence (Laurence 2012, 163). In this second phase, the authorities engaged with IRCs in a more direct manner, with a heavier hand. According to Laurence, the authorities took three important steps in this second round of engaging with the IRCs (Laurence 2012, 165). They explicitly wanted these councils to consist of rival or competing organizations, and thus become more inclusive than the previous councils had been. Some IRCs also consisted of independent government appointees who did not belong to the main member organizations. Second, they often made the participation in such councils conditional on the acceptance of the national constitution or of certain political principles. Third, the IRCs were granted some

symbolic rewards for their participation. They were given the responsibility for making suggestions on some important issues to Muslims, such as halal food or Muslim burial sites. In that way, the leaders who got involved and were able to increase their symbolic standing in the communities. Summing it up, we may say that European governments invested these new IRCs with more power and responsibility but also took a more heavy-handed approach in deciding how these IRCs should function and be constituted.

2.1.3 The corporatist antecedent

Why – and how – did this process of IRC incorporation occur? Laurence provides several arguments. A major historical argument in his book is that the incorporation of the IRCs was based on what he had called in a previous publication "the corporatist antecedent" (Laurence 2009). When European governments sought to incorporate Muslims and Muslim organizations closer into the societal apparatus, the process was similar to previous attempts at corporatist incorporation of groups which had been more or less marginal in European countries: The Jewish communities in the 19th century, and labour/worker movements in the 20th century. When the labour movement was co-opted into corporatist institutions in the 20th century, a key aim is said to have been "to depoliticize conflicts and lead to the moderation of demands through the establishment of a set of moderate elites/leaders" (Laurence 2012, 127).

Laurence also claims that this policy towards Muslim organizations and interest groups was inspired by policies regarding the Jewish communities in Europe in the 19th century. The title of the book – the Emancipation of Europe's Muslims – is a deliberate allusion to what has been called the *Jewish emancipation* in the 19th century, when Jewish communities received rights as citizens in several European countries (Brenner et al. 2003). Laurence takes particular note of the Jewish emancipation in France under Napoleon and under Kaiser Wilhem II in Prussia. In both of these cases, Jewish emancipation consisted of a double process. Jewish communities and individuals were granted more rights as citizens. In return, the

Jewish communities had to acknowledge the authority of the state and foreswear some theological ideas, such as the ban on intermarriage between Jews and non-Jews. Laurence's description of how this process unfolded under Napoleon bears a striking resemblance to how IRCs would be set up in several European countries in the 00s:

> In France, the most significant accomplishment following formal emancipation was the creation of the Jewish Consistoire in 1806–1807. Napoleon invited eighty-two delegates (a mixture of merchants, rabbis, and community leaders) from all regions to constitute an assembly of notables asked to answer twelve questions regarding the compatibility of Jewish law (halacha) and the French civil code. This assembly was eventually converted into a Grand Sanhedrin (a rabbinical high court) of seventy members, two-thirds of whom were rabbis, which in turn led to the creation of national and local consistoires formed around synagogues, later a system of community representation as interlocutors for the French state.

> (Laurence 2012, 124).

This resemblance was actually noted by Michel Rocard, a previous prime minister of France, in an interview he had with Laurence (Laurence 2012, 130). But while the Jewish emancipation may have served as a model, it is the corporatist inclusion of Labour groups that Laurence sees as the direct precursor or antecedent of the empowerment of IRC.

2.1.4 The expected outcome: Moderation through cooptation

How can we expect these arrangements to work? Laurence's expectation, based on the theory of neo-corporatism, is that the IRCs will lead to moderation of the demands of the IRCs, and ultimately contribute to Muslim *emancipation*.

> A central claim of the neo-corporatist literature is that interest groups 'exercise restraint in pursuing their goals in return for their official recognition and privileges'. The advantages and privileges of institutional access for organized

interest groups, as one scholar describes it, are balanced by a set of restrictions and obligations: interest organizations will "behave responsibly, predictably and will refrain from non-negotiable demands or unacceptable tactics.

(Laurence 2012, 202)

But he acknowledges throughout his book that these processes are ongoing and imperfect. The chapters which trace the actual track record of the IRCs are befittingly called *Imperfect institutionalization* and *The partial emancipation* (Laurence 2012, 198–244). The implementation of IRCs has not been perfect in any European country, Laurence suggests, but they have nevertheless led to substantial results: "The state's recognition, however imperfect, has reduced the stridency of organized Muslims' religious demands and taken federation leaders out of a defensive posture". (Laurence 2012, 198).

Laurence provides several examples from different countries illustrating this tendency: After having been invited to the table in the IRCs, several Muslim leaders moderated their demands and became less antagonistic towards the authorities. He mentions, for example, how the leaders of the *French Council of the Muslim Faith* (CFCM) called for "calm and serenity" when President Chirac called for a headscarf ban in 2003. By contrast, the UOIF – the Islamist-affiliated organization – had called for street demonstrations in 1989 when three school girls were expelled for wearing headscarves (Laurence 2012, 208; 214).

2.2 Refinements, critiques and competing perspectives

When Laurence began working on this topic in the early 2000s, the topic was novel and relatively unexplored. Following his work, several researchers have positioned themselves more or less directly within the context of his pioneering work, expanding upon it or challenging parts of his analysis. Other researchers have written case studies of individual IRCs, but without using Laurence's framework.

2.2.1 IRC creation: Top-down vs bottom-up

One of the first criticisms came in 2010, before Laurence had published his major book on IRCs in Europe but following his early articles and his co-authored book on France in 2007. Emily Cochran Bech, then a PhD student in political science at Columbia University, wrote a conference paper in 2010 on IRCs in Europe (Bech 2010). It was a comparative case study on the emergence of IRCs in France, the United Kingdom, Denmark and Sweden. Bech's question was how IRCs emerged. This paper was never published in a journal, and the empirical analysis remained rudimentary. But some of the topics Bech focused on in her analysis would later resurface in other studies. Bech challenged what she saw as an overly state-centric tendency in the work of Laurence, in which the heavy hand of the state was seen as essential for the emergence of successful IRCs. Based on the examples of the UK and Sweden, she claimed that IRCs could also evolve from the ground up. Even though the initial impetus for the *Muslim Council of Britain* (MCB) had been gentle prodding from the Conservative Home secretary Michael Howard in 1995, it was nevertheless the Muslim organizations themselves that took charge of the process of creating the organization (Bech 2010, 16–17). The same applied to Sweden, according to Bech. An IRC emerged in Sweden in 1990, which continued to function well until 2000s and 2010s – the *Swedish Muslim Council* (SMR). Even though it was not formally acknowledged as an official partner for the government, it did function as "the government's main consultative partner" [on Muslim matters], and it "represents a majority of Sweden's Muslims through its constituent organizations" (Bech 2010, 10–11). And crucially for Bech's argument, the SMR emerged largely from the bottom-up, it was not created top-down by the state.

Political scientist Alice Ciciora (Ciciora 2018) later expanded upon Bech's claims. Ciciora created an overview of all the IRCs in Europe – or *Muslim Councils* in her terms – defined as organizations or groups that "the state has in some manner designated to be the organization with which it will consult" (Ciciora 2018, 336). She claimed that far from all IRCs were created by the state, including IRCs operating in

Laurence's second phase from 2000s and onward. Ciciora's claim was that the IRCs in Europe vary in two crucial dimensions. The first is whether the IRCs are generated top-down (state-created), or evolved, bottom-up. The second dimension is whether the IRC is *exclusionary* or *umbrella* – i.e. whether it includes all Muslim sects and denominations, or only some of these. In Ciciora's classification, one may find examples of all the varieties of IRCs in Europe. Some councils are generated and exclusive, some are generated and umbrella. Others are evolved and exclusive, while others are evolved and umbrella.

Ciciora provided a useful table showing the IRCs in different European countries (Ciciora 2018, 339). Based on Ciciora's definition of a *Muslim Council* – that it must be formally recognized by the state – there are several cases of what I define as IRCs in this thesis which she did not include. The most obvious omission was the UK, where no IRCs were included. I therefore reproduce her table with some revisions and additions. The UK and Sweden are added, as these countries have long-standing IRCs that have assumed representative roles vis-à-vis the authorities or mainstream society, even though they have not been formally recognized as such. I do not include Denmark, as the attempts at creating IRCs in Denmark have proved to be short-lived so far. In France and Germany, new IRCs have evolved from within the Muslim communities although they emerged as a reaction to perceived problems with the state-centric and state-created IRCs. I also provide the years the IRCs were founded, and list them chronologically by founding year.

Figure 2-1 IRCs in Europe according to formation history and inclusiveness

Type	Generated	Evolved
Umbrella	Spain (ICS – 1992)	Bosnia and Hercegovina (ICBH – 1882)
	Belgium (EMB –1996)	Serbia (ICiS – 1868/2007)
	France (CFCM – 2003)	Poland (MZR – 1947)
	Italy (CII – 2005)	Austria (IGGiÖ – 1979)
	Germany (DIK – 2006)	Malta (WICS – 1984)
	UK (MINAB – 2006)	Finland (SINE – 2006)
		Hungary (HIC – 2012)
		France (AMIF – 2019)
		France (L.E.S. Musulmans – 2019)
Exclusionary	The Netherlands (CMO – 2004)	Slovenia (IC – 1992)
		Albania (KMSH – 1923)
		Macedonia (IRCM – 1992)
		Norway (IRN – 1993)
		UK (MCB – 1997)
		Lithuania (LMSDC-M – 1998)
		The Netherlands (CGI – 2005)
		Germany (KRM – 2007)
		Norway (MDN – 2018)

Sources: Ciciora (2018, 339), Laurence (2012, 13), Scharbrodt et al. (2017), websites of the different IRCs

As with most binary classifications, the actual empirical reality is probably more complicated. It may be debated whether all of these IRCs have been placed in the right quadrant. Most of the IRCs classified as *umbrella* nevertheless exclude certain Muslim groups, either formally or informally. Several of those IRCs which are labelled as *evolved* were also in fact created due to informal signals from the government or were created as a reaction against another IRC which were state generated. It is probably more correct to think of these dimensions as continuums, where a group can be more or less evolved, and more or less inclusive. We can conceive of the IRCs labelled as generated as *less* evolved from below and *more* generated by the state, and the IRCs labelled as umbrella as *more* inclusive than the others.

The table is nevertheless instructive, as it does bear witness to the variation of IRCs in European countries. It also shows that IRCs are not a marginal phenomenon. By now they can be found in virtually all European countries. As the table shows, there is a clear tendency for many of the IRCs in Western Europe to have been generated by the state, particularly the ones created in the 2000s. In Eastern Europe, on the other hand, most of the IRCs have evolved. This is probably due to the much longer history of Muslim communities in these countries, given that many of these areas were historically a part of the Ottoman empire.

The central outcome of interest for Ciciora is whether the IRC present in a country became involved in the policy process or not. Backed by a comparative case study of Austria, The Netherlands and France, Ciciora claims that councils which are evolved and umbrella (i.e. inclusive) like in Austria are more likely to be incorporated into the policy-making process. Ciciora lists several reasons why we may expect this pattern to hold. If a state has created a generated council, instead of empowering an already existing council, it is an indication that the state wants to control the Muslim population more strictly and does not want much actual input from them. It is also likely that a generated council will be seen as less legitimate by its Muslim constituencies. There will then be less reason for the authorities to discuss with them since they hold less actual power. When it comes to exclusivity and

inclusivity, it may be that the state will be more sceptical towards engaging with an exclusionary council, since the state will want to avoid being seen as favouring some Muslim groups over others.

Whether this claim holds true for most IRCs would require case studies across other countries as well. But the main descriptive claim of Ciciora – that there are many current IRCs which were not in fact completely generated by the state but evolved more or less from below – does seem well-founded.

2.2.2 Emancipation vs. securitization

Whereas Bech and Ciciora criticized Laurence's state-centric account of how IRCs were actually created, other researchers have approached the creation of the IRCs with a more fundamentally critical perspective. For Laurence, the state-centric IRCs are ultimately seen as a way of *emancipating* Muslims – it is a positive step towards their integration in European societies. For Laurence, these councils have been responses to real challenges. In his work, it is seen as an actual challenge that several Muslim groups espouse values and opinions that are in conflict with dominant values in Western Europe, and that many Muslim immigrants have had difficulties integrating into European societies. Moreover, Laurence highlights that Muslims are often discriminated against, and that many European governments have been unwilling to acknowledge Muslims and the Islamic faith on a par with other religions. State-centric IRCs thus serve as an answer to this dual challenge: They ensure that Muslims make their demands within the confines of liberal society, and they also ensure that governments take steps to acknowledge Islam and work against the discrimination of Muslims.

Other researchers who have written on IRCs have seen IRCs as attempts by the government to control and securitize Muslims, in the context of Islamophobia, racism and securitization in European societies (Aguilar 2018; Amir-Moazami 2011; Bayrakli, Hafez, and Faytre 2018; Haddad and Golson 2007). It is not uncommon, after all, for states or governments to discriminate against minorities. The

anthropologist Arjun Appadurai labelled this a *fear of small numbers* (Appadurai 2006). Appadurai's term indicates that the people constituting these small numbers are not actually a threat, but they are perceived in that way. Another term which has become influential is *securitization* (Appollonia 2015; Buzan et al. 1998; Stritzel 2007). Securitization theories emphasize how securitized subjects such as migrant groups are construed as a threat, without necessarily being one. The *securitizing agent* – often a politician – frequently engages in securitization because they try to find favour with an intended *audience*. When it comes to securitization of Muslims in particular, this has been conceptualized through the lens of *Islamophobia* –a hostility towards Muslims simply because they are Muslims, often based on negative stereotypes about Islam as a religion (Bangstad 2014).

One of the first comparative and systematic treatments of IRCs in different European countries was published by Yvonne Haddad and Tyler Golson in 2007, in part reacting to Laurence's early articles, but predating his major book from 2012. This study was informed by such a perspective; it tied the development of state-centric IRCs to a long history of Islamophobia and fear of Muslims in European societies, a tendency which had grown stronger after 9/11 (Haddad and Golson 2007). According to them, "state policy [including IRCs] currently seeks to manipulate even Muslims' private religious identity in the interests of national security" (Haddad and Golson 2007, 498). The authors did not repudiate these efforts by the state completely, and like Laurence they acknowledged that European states had previously had similar policies towards other religious communities. They argued, however, that

> …whereas "religion-change" for Christianity and Judaism was the rational outgrowth of centuries of European liberal progression, the overhauling of Islam is a visceral, reactionary response to unprecedented security concerns.
>
> (Haddad and Golson 2007, 512)

As a result, they were also less optimistic than Laurence as to the positive effects these IRCs could actually bring about.

This topic was also brought to the fore in one of the latest comparisons of European policies on IRCs and institutionalization of Islam (Bayrakli, Hafez, and Faytre 2018). The authors studied the political rhetoric surrounding the IRCs in Austria, Germany and France. Their conclusion was that

> …many of the measures taken to regulate Islam-state relations reveal an approach that on one side attempts to give Islam a place in their society, while on the other side clearly refers to a stereotypical imagination of the Muslim, where the notion of Europe stands for enlightenment, modernity and progressiveness, while Islam and Muslims represent the opposite.
>
> (Bayrakli, Hafez, and Faytre 2018, 150).

Which perspective is more correct – Laurence's optimistic *emancipation* perspective, or the more critical *securitization* perspective? To a certain degree, both of these perspectives represent different ways of looking at the same phenomenon. Laurence and the critical scholars agree that European governments have attempted to *reengineer* Islam, as Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre phrased it. The disagreement is partly about whether this is necessary. Do social practices associated with Islam represent a genuine challenge that a state can deem reasonable grounds to meddle in and attempt to reengineer? Or is this only a perceived threat, nothing but a *fear of small numbers*?

Yet another part of the disagreement is about governments' intentions. When creating or engaging with IRCs, do governments do this in an honest effort to integrate Muslims into their societies? Or is it instead done as a political strategy whereby Muslims are securitized in order to please a targeted political audience? To a certain degree, this is a question that can be answered empirically on a case by case basis. In Germany and France, the cases which have been studied most extensively, demonstrate that the answer is probably *both*. The creation or empowerment of IRCs has partly been about an honest attempt at integrating and emancipating Muslims, but it has also been marked by a securitizing logic where Muslims are securitized. Laurence's work, based on extensive interviews with policymakers in these countries,

does indicate that there have been many policymakers – politicians and bureaucrats alike – who thought that they were facing real and substantial problems relating to Islamist terrorism and the general integration of Muslim migrants. They also conceived of the IRCs and associated policies as real and honest efforts to integrate Muslims. When Laurence interviewed a former advisor to the French interior minister in 2003, the advisor framed the issue in this way:

> With the effort to integrate the Muslim religion by way of the consultation, and by treating its representatives with consideration, the public authorities symbolically demonstrated their desire to integrate the entirety of the population of Muslim origin or culture.

> (Laurence 2012, 148–49)

But there is also ample evidence from Germany and France that the process of creating and empowering the IRCs has happened within a securitized political framework, where the targeted audience has been important for the politicians involved, as evidenced by Bayrakli, Hafez and Faytre. When setting up the *German Islam Conference* (DIK) in Germany in 2006, the interior minister Wolfgang Schäuble said publicly that "we want enlightened Muslims in our enlightened country" (Bayrakli, Hafez, and Faytre 2018, 141). This statement implies that Germany is already enlightened, while Muslims are not, and it also creates a subtle distinction between the German *we* and the Muslims in question. Leaving aside the topic of whether this statement is factually correct or not, it is difficult to imagine that Schäuble would have used these words if his primary audience had been the Muslims he was in fact interacting with.

The statement makes more sense if it we understand it as directed towards Schäuble's larger audience in the German public, which may have responded positively to this kind of rhetoric. Following the creation of DIK, the organization went on to produce a large body of knowledge – reports, articles, anthologies, etc. These works were studied by the anthropologist Luis Manuel Hernandez Aguilar in a thorough PhD dissertation, later published in revised form as a book (Aguilar 2018).

According to Aguilar, much of the material that was published under the aegis of DIK displayed a clear *othering* tendency, where Muslims were construed as foreigners who ultimately did not belong to the German nation.

Questions about the intent of the authorities when engaging with IRCs are not only of descriptive interest. The intent behind the creation or empowerment of the IRCs probably also has a bearing on how IRCs function once they are in place. If Muslims credibly perceive IRC policies as an attempt to illegitimately control them or discriminate against them, and not as an honest effort to help them find their place in society, the result of these policies might be that the IRCs do not function as well as they could have, because key actors in the IRCs do not think that adjustment on their behalf will lead to real recognition.

2.2.3 Organizational strategies in IRCs

What do these IRCs do? How do they act once they have been created or empowered? The outcome Laurence was interested in was the *moderation* of the IRCs, which he claimed indeed occurred, as outlined previously. But early on, Haddad and Golson dialogued with Laurence and proposed a different hypothesis. Because IRCs may be perceived by Muslims as illegitimate efforts by the state to interfere in the lives of Muslims, they claimed that the state interference through IRCs may lead to anti-reactions, thereby leading Muslims to turn away from state institutions:

> This [...] has led to widespread feelings of alienation and frustration. Underlying the very public Muslim condemnations of state policy lies a perception that the state is trying to manipulate Muslims and destroy their Islamic identity by means of sowing dissent in the guise of "integration," 'moderation," and "cooperation." Nearly every poll conducted on the subject by the European press has indicated that Muslims' already ingrained sense of marginalization is only deepened by state demands that Muslims "police

themselves" by informing on the radicals within their midst and effectively "cozy up" to authorities.

(Haddad and Golson 2007, 513)

These processes might be termed *backlash effects,* meaning a counter-reaction towards a particular policy or societal development (Norris and Inglehart 2019). Haddad and Golson did not provide any systematic evidence for their claim, but mainly raised the notion as a possibility. Their hypothesis was not necessarily in disharmony with Laurence's theory; one might imagine that the leaders of the IRCs moderate their demands in response to state policies, whereas other Muslim actors or groups – outside of the IRC leadership – turn away from the authorities in a backlash effect. Nevertheless, Haddad and Golson's hypothesis on how IRCs would affect dynamics among European Muslims is fairly different from the more optimistic moderation theory Laurence proposed.

To date there are only two studies that have looked systematically at how representative Islamic organizations respond to government initiatives over time. The first was a study by German sociologist Kerstin Rosenow-Williams, based on her PhD thesis (Rosenow-Williams 2012, 2014). Rosenow-Williams did not relate her work directly to Laurence's theory, but her study nevertheless confirms many of the overall predictions in his work about how Muslim leaders would react to government incentives. However, the analytical framework she proposes for how Islamic organizations respond to government policy is arguably more fine-tuned. Rosenow-Williams distinguishes between *umbrella organizations* and *peak organizations* (Rosenow-Williams 2012, 88). Umbrella organizations are federations of mosques and smaller Islamic associations, which is a common way to organize Islamic organizations in countries such as Germany, France and Sweden. Peak organizations, on the other hand, are essentially umbrellas of umbrellas, consolidating bodies that bring together different umbrella organizations – and come closer to what I refer to as IRCs in this thesis. Rosenow's study is mainly about German umbrella organizations – the state-connected Turkish DITIB, the Turkish-Islamist Milli Görus (IGMG), and

the multinational but Arab-dominated ZMD. Drawing on neo-institutionalist organizational theory in sociology, she claimed that an important factor influencing how Islamic organizations behave is the *expectation structures* they operate within (Rosenow-Williams 2012, 89). These organizations are often met with different expectations from different stakeholders. The members these organizations are supposed to represent, member mosques and individual Muslims, may, for example, wish for these organizations to take clear stances and voice their grievances. But the cooperating partners – the state, the municipalities, or other life stance communities – may expect these organizations to show themselves as responsible and cooperative players who refrain from making too many claims and demands.

This double bind can give rise to different organizational strategies. Inspired by Oliver (1991) she distinguishes between strategies she labels as *adaptation*, *decoupling* and *protest* (Rosenow-Williams 2014, 762–64). Adaptation means that the organization truly adapts to the external environment and the authorities, externally and internally. This strategy probably comes close to what Laurence calls moderation. Decoupling, on the other hand, is a strategy that entails external adaptation but without accompanying internal changes: "One example is the professionalisation of the external affairs department, which buffers external expectations while enabling the often undisturbed continuation of day-to-day services" (Rosenow-Williams 2012, 763). Protest means direct confrontation with the external environment – clear resistance to the expectations of the external institutions. Rosenow-Williams suggests that several factors influence the strategy an organization may choose. The strategy can be influenced by the level of compatibility between the expectations of the members and the expectations of the external environment. The more incompatible those demands are, the more likely it may be that an organization engages in decoupling rather than adaptation. The strategy may also be affected by the external rewards the organization or the organization's leaders expect. If the leaders of an organization assume that they have nothing to lose, for example, they may be more likely to engage in direct protest than if they have a reasonable belief that they may gain certain goods by adapting or compromising. It

also matters whether the organization mostly depends on resources from the external environment, from the members, or from both.

Rosenow-Williams' study does indicate that these factors mattered in the German context. Based on a quantitative analysis of the topics which were featured in the press releases of the three organizations between 2005 and 2009, as well as on qualitative interviews with the organizational leaders, she claimed that one may indeed identify different strategies in these organizations. She also argues that these strategies were linked with both the expectations of the members, and whether the organizational leadership has a real possibility of being accepted by the authorities.

Another study which examined organizational strategies in a broad sense is the PhD thesis of Ekaterina Braginskaia (Braginskaia 2015). Braginskaia compared IRCs in two very different contexts, Russia and the UK. In the UK she looked at the *Muslim Council of Britain* (MCB), and in Russia she looked at the *Russia Council of Muftis* (SMR). These councils have very different histories and make-ups, and the environments they operate within are also very different. Braginskaia nevertheless claims that important aspects of their organizational strategies can be explained by the political opportunity structures they operate within. She describes the UK's approach to religious organizations and religious governance as a *pluralist* approach, where interest groups do not get formal seats at the table: "multiplicity of interest groups, autonomy from the state and horizontal approaches to resolving internal conflicts"; and Russia's approach as *corporatist*: "co-optation of leaders and state patronage, fewer interest groups and vertical policy of compartmentalisation of religious interests" (Braginskaia 2015, 50). Whereas Laurence included the UK in his corporatist framework, Braginskaia claims that the UK incorporation was more pluralist. Crucially, Braginskaia claims that these differences in the external environment mattered for the organizations themselves. The MCB in the UK primarily sought support horizontally and from below. The SMR in Russia, meanwhile, primarily sought support from above, from the state and the authorities. This had to do with the opportunity structures the organizations faced. The SMR could rely on the state, but not so much on civil society and other organizations. The

MCB could not rely on the state, which did not want to cooperate intimately with the organization, and therefore turned to other organizations for support.

2.2.4 A knowledge gap: Conflicts, splits and collective action problems

What has not been covered much in the existing research is the conflicts and splits these organizations have often experienced. The experience in many European countries is simply that it is difficult to be an Islamic Representative Council. These conflicts have been mentioned in many of the studies, and in media reports, but they have not been looked at systematically by researchers. The most thorough treatment of such conflicts to date can be found in a book by Bernard Godard, a former official at the French Ministry of the Interior who was instrumental in setting up the CFCM, does (2015, chapter 1). In most of the research on IRCs – and in much of the research on Islamic organizations in general – such conflicts have not been covered in much depth. As was mentioned in the introduction, such conflicts have been documented in IRCs in France (Bruce 2018, 128–35; Godard 2015, chapter 1), in Germany (Bruce 2018, 135–42; Rosenow-Williams 2012, chapter 6), in the UK (Shah 2016, 12–19), in Austria (Kurier 2018), in Russia (Braginskaia 2015, 15–16), in the Netherlands (Atkinson 2016; Houten 2019), in Sweden (Sorgenfrei 2018, 105–31), in Spain (Laurence 2012, 196), in Belgium (Loobuyck, Debeer, and Meier 2013, 69–70), and possibly in other countries. Some of these IRCs have been split, and others have been paralyzed by internal conflicts. Some IRCs have seen one of the sides prevail in the conflict, while others were able work out their internal differences.

Why did conflicts occur in all these IRCs, in so many different countries? Although the studies done on IRCs have not attempted to answer this question in depth, some broad perspectives or tendencies can nevertheless be found in the literature. I am calling them *perspectives*, as they have not been fleshed out as developed theories.

The internal perspective: Diversity, multipolarity and generational conflicts among Muslims

One perspective is that it is about *internal* reasons: Muslims and Muslim organizations are simply too different from each other, it is argued, and this may make cooperation difficult. This is the argument made by former French ministry official Bernard Godard, who was partly responsible for setting up the CFCM, to explain why cooperation in CFCM became so difficult (Godard 2015, chapter 1). It has also been proposed as an explanation for why Muslims in several countries seem to have difficulties engaging in collective action.

An example can be found in an influential article from 2006 by the sociologists Steven Pfaff and Anthony J. Gill, who explored the seeming lack of collective action among Muslims in Germany and Europe (Pfaff and Gill 2006). Their theoretical assumption was that Muslims «should» be likely to organize collectively, given that they have obvious collective interests in doing so. Nevertheless, this seldom happened, they claimed. They used Germany and the relations between mosques and authorities in Berlin as an example and showed that Muslims articulated their demands through narrow and small groups, and not through broad organizations or coalitions. Pfaff and Gill provided several possible explanations. Their most important explanation highlighted what they called the «decentralized character of Islam». According to them, this aspect makes it difficult for any actor to speak in the name of Islam and therefore makes it more difficult to organize Muslims across their differences.

A similar claim could be found in another influential article from the same year by the political scientists Carolyn Warner and Manfred Wenner. They too explored the political organization of Muslims in Europe and noted a striking lack of organized collective action. Their explanation for this also had to do with the nature of Sunni Islam as a "decentralized" religion:

> Islam is not conducive to large-scale, sustained collective action in the European context. Islam is a decentralized, non-hierarchical religion with multiple and often competing schools of law and social requirements.

(Warner and Wenner 2006, 461)

They did note that Shi'a Islam was centralized and hierarchical but claimed that this was not the case for Sunni Islam. Hence, this decentralized diversity of Sunni Islam made it difficult to come together to achieve common goals. Although Pfaff and Gill and Warner and Wenner's theory had to do with coming together, it may be extended to account for the stability/instability and functioning of IRCs once they are created.

Is this theory reasonable? There is little doubt that the diversity among Muslims in Europe may make collective action obstacles more difficult to overcome[1]. At the same time, I will not be using the term *non-hierarchical* or *decentralized* in this thesis, as these terms are arguably not correct descriptors of Sunni Islam. A closer look at much of the historical research on Islam from the past couple of decades indicates that claims about the "decentralized" character of Islam have been too sweeping. In historically Muslim societies, there have always been hierarchies and a state-governed way of organizing religion. This is seen most clearly in the case of Shi'a Islam, which comprises approximately 10 to 13 percent of the global Muslim population, according to an estimate PEW made in 2009 (Miller 2009). Shia Islam

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[1] An illustrative example can be found in an article by the Islamologue Uriya Shavit, who explores the issue of fasting during Ramadan and how the two mosques in Iceland relate to each other (Shavit 2016). This article is particularly interesting given how small the Muslim community in Iceland is. Still, the one existing mosque split into two mosques in 2006. According to the interviews Shavit did, this split was not about doctrinal issues, but rather about personal conflicts. After the split, doctrinal issues seem to have reinforced the conflict. Muslims who live in the north of Europe face a dilemma during Ramadan: Should they follow the traditional ruling on fasting as it applies to Muslim lands? This rule states that one must refrain from food, water and sexual intercourse from dusk till dawn. But what happens if the sun never sets, as is the case in the Arctic during early summer? Or what happens if this leads to a fast of 18, 20 or 22 hours, like in recent years in Iceland? This has led to two different interpretations. One interpretation, which has been championed by the Al-Azhar university in Egypt, traditionally regarded as the most important theological institution for Sunni Muslims (Zeghal 1996), is that fasting should then be done in accordance with the times of Mecca when the day surpasses 18 hours. When the sun rises and falls in Mecca, Muslims in Iceland should start and stop their fast. The stricter interpretation is that as long as there is a difference between night and day – and two hours is sufficient for that, according to the adherents of this view – one should strive for fasting according to local times, as long as it does not endanger one's health. In Iceland, Shavit shows that this issue deepened the split in the small Muslim community. For some reason, the two mosques decided to opt for different approaches to fasting. This was a choice they had to make on their own, since there was no absolute authority in place to tell them what to do. One mosque follows the local hours, while the other follows Mecca. Because of this, the iftar – the breaking of the fast – occurs at different times in the two mosques. In Muslim countries and communities, the Ramadan and the breaking of the fast are social traditions of profound importance, that have large effects on social life (Campante and Yanagizawa-Drott 2015). In Iceland, however, the month of Ramadan has become a source of division and not a source of shared community. The doctrinal and institutional diversity of current Western Islam, where the believers have a certain freedom in deciding which opinion to follow, seems to play a role here – even though the split between the two mosques did not start out as a theological dispute.

has a clear hierarchical structure, which goes back at least to the 18th century (Babayan 1996). The clergy has a structure bearing similarities to the hierarchical structure of the Catholic church. It is often said that Sunni Islam does not have a church, with less formal hierarchies than the Catholics or the Shia Muslims have. Despite islamologues' presentation of this as factual information, recent research indicates that this perception is a simplification as well. The Ottoman empire, which was the largest and most recent Muslim empire before the advent of modernity and European colonialism, had Islamic «curricula» beginning in the 16th century and onwards, which made clear what was and what was not deemed Islamic (Ahmed and Filipovic 2004).[2]

For the organization of Islam in Muslim lands, modernity brought with it two large ruptures. First came European and Russian colonialism. In the 19th century, the British empire was the largest "Muslim country" in the world. Over half of the world's Muslims were governed by the British (Aydin 2017, 82). In the areas that became colonized by non-Muslim states – by the French, the Dutch, the Germans, the British or the Russians – Islam became organized in new ways (Gottschalk 2017; Low 2008; Tuna 2015). Most of the colonial powers had elaborate policies for governing Islam and Muslims, even though these policies differed from each other (Gottschalk 2017).

Furthermore, the colonial powers created new ways of representing and organizing Islam. Some Islamic leaders were promoted, others were repressed.[3] The

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[2] The most important Islamic scholars and muftis were often appointed by the sultan himself. Partly as a result of this, Islamic law in the Ottoman empire was probably to a large degree oriented towards the wishes of the state and the temporal rulers (Ayoub 2016). Research on the Mughal empire and earlier Arab empires shows a similar pattern: The state and the rulers assumed important roles in setting down rules and limits for the practice of Islam (Alam 2004; Rapoport 2012). The very fact that Sunni Islam has consisted of four major schools of law, all of which mutually accept each other – one of the most foundational aspects of Sunni Islam – might have been set in stone politically because of an intervention by the Mamaluk sultan Baybar in 1265. He wanted to be able consult different judges with different opinions, in case the first judge didn't make a ruling to his liking (Rapoport 2003).

[3] In French Algeria, for example, the organization of Islam was fundamentally restructured by the French authorities. One of the most foundational institutions in the pre-colonial organization of Islam in most Muslim countries was the *waqf* or *habous*. This was – and still is, in many places – a largely autonomous charitable trust financed by endowments from deceased individuals. The waqf in Algeria was in charge of maintaining mosques, instructing children, caring of the needy, and more. In the 1830s, the French started to confiscate the resources of the waqfes in Algeria. They also centralized the waqf system. Many of the smaller waqfes were subsumed under a few larger waqfes, which were then run by French appointees (Saaïdia 2016). The French also created a system which resembled the Catholic Church, which was completely

second large rift in the organization of Islam in modern times was the fall of the large empires, decolonization and the rise of the nation state. Up until the beginning of the 20th century, most of the Muslim populations were ruled by large transnational empires. Some of these were Muslim, such as the Ottoman empire, the Safavid empire in grand-Persia, and the Mughal empire in India. With the onset of colonization, Muslim populations also came to be ruled by non-Muslim empires such as the British, French and the Russians. The 20th century saw an end to this. Most Muslim populations became part of new nation states in which Islam was once again re-organized. In Kemalist Turkey, the caliphate was abolished in 1924, and wide-ranging reforms were instituted. Turkey created a state-governed religious directorate, the Diyanet. Imams were formed and educated in state-led religious schools, and subsequently were employed in a system of state-run mosques. While not as strict, similar tendencies could be found in a number of other Muslim countries. The state controlled with a heavy hand the way Islam should be lived and expressed. In Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world after the Second World War, the ruler, Sukarno, created a state-led religious ideology that emphasized national cohesion just as much as traditional Islamic teachings. In Egypt, the most powerful and influential state in the Middle East, the state controlled how Islam was taught at the university of al-Azhar, the most important seat of learning in the Islamic world (Zeghal 1996). Saudi Arabia led a state-led revival of Wahhabism, the puritanical version of Islam that went back to the 18th century scholar Ibn al-Wahhab, and for which Saudi Arabia supported global outreach through their oil-funded networks.

At the same time, networks and organizations emerged and organized expressions of Islam at a distance from – or in opposition to – the new Muslim states.

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novel in Algeria and in Muslim countries in general. Mosques were assigned "members", and clergy was appointed by the French authorities. A similar change occurred in Bosnia-Herzegovina in the late 19th century, which was then ruled by the Christian Austro-Hungarian empire. The Austro-Hungarian rulers wanted to make sure the Bosnian Muslims would turn away from the Ottoman empire. They therefore created something akin to a Church in 1882: The Islamic Community of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The imperial authorities were in charge of appointing the main clergy, a system to which the Bosnian Muslims increasingly raised objections (Ramet 1998, 160). Nevertheless, this system remained in place when Bosnia became part of the kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1918. The British had a way of governing Islam which was less direct in most of their colonies. Nevertheless, the British as well had a policy of centralizing religious governance, in which some actors were privileged over others (Robinson 1999).

Sufi brotherhoods had always been a fundamental feature of the organization of Islam. In some states, such as Senegal, the Sufi brotherhoods became co-opted by the state and took part in governing (Diouf 2013). In other states, they operated at a distance from the state. In addition to the Sufis, Islamist networks dominated by lay Muslims also emerged, frequently challenging the authority of the state. Some of these networks, in particular networks connected to the Muslim Brotherhood, have become very influential in organized Islam in Europe.

We may therefore conclude that claims about the "decentralized" or "non-hierarchical" nature of Sunni Islam should not be exaggerated. During the past centuries, Islam has been organized in a centralized manner in most Muslim states, both before and after colonization, and continuing after the rise of the nation state. Still, the oft repeated claim about the decentralization of (Sunni) Islam does indeed capture *something*. Sunni Islam does not have one big church. Regulation of religious affairs in Malaysia has not been managed by a "pope" in Mecca, but rather by local authorities. This is quite similar to Protestant Europe after the Reformation, where national kings wrested control of the Church from the hands of the Vatican. Because Muslims in the West come from all over the world, lines of authority may appear mixed and confusing. The institutional structure that provided clear lines of authority in their country of origin may no longer function in the same way in the new country. Transnational non-state networks may also prove important. The religious backdrop against which we may understand Muslims and Islamic organizations in Western Europe is not non-hierarchical or decentralized. We might instead think of it as multipolar –an environment with several structures and organizations interacting with each other and with the society of which they are part, and where several actors wield nearly equal amounts of influence. This may nevertheless create obstacles to achieving collective action through IRCs.

Another possible explanation for the conflicts and splits in European IRCs that has to do with internal relations between Muslims or Muslim groups is related to the *migration background* of many of the central actors – and conflicts between the first and the second *generations*. This has not been highlighted in the research on IRCs so

far but has been a prominent explanatory model in some research on Islamic organizations in Europe more generally. It must be emphasized that not all activists in the IRCs come from a migration background. In IRN as well as in other IRCs, native converts to Islam have played an important role. Many activists and employees have hailed from the second generation, and in some countries even from the third generation. Still, it remains a fact that a majority of those who have been active in IRCs across Europe have either been migrants themselves or have had parents who were migrants.

The migration background may matter through generational dynamics, where first- and second-generation migrants will bring different perspectives to the table. Such dynamics have been described in several studies on Islam in Europe. Some of the richest longitudinal studies of Islamic movements in Europe have been done by German ethnologist Werner Schiffauer. The first study was of the Kaplan movement, a radical Islamist movement headed by the Turkish-German imam Muhammed Metin Kaplan (Schiffauer 2000). Schiffauer documents how the movement gradually fell apart, due to differences of opinion between generations in the movement. The second study was of Milli Görus in Germany, a Turkish Islamist movement that has a strong presence in Germany as well (Schiffauer 2010). In that study, Schiffauer documents the conflict between the German leadership, consisting of people who had lived most of their lives in Germany, and the leadership in Turkey. In both of his studies, Schiffauer emphasizes how these movements were shaped by generational conflicts linked with the immigrant origin of the majority of the members.. On this account, first generation and second-generation immigrants will have different expectations and interests, due to their different structural positions in society.

A similar perspective can be found in several of the works of the famed French Islamologue Gilles Kepel (Kepel 1991, 2013). According to Kepel, Islam in France has gone through three generational stages – although these stages cannot be easily separated from one other – which have accounted for many of the conflicts that have been seen among French Muslims. The first stage was *Islam de bled* – "Islam of the home country" - an Islam which was almost exclusively oriented towards the country

the Muslim migrants had left. The second stage was *Islam de soumission*, "the Islam of submission", which was the first stage in accepting that Islam was in France for good. This stage was marked by a wholesale «submission» to French authorities, and an acceptance of the supremacy of the French state. The third stage was *Islam de rupture* - the "Islam of rupture". This type of Islam was championed by second generation Muslims, who saw France as their natural home-country, and did not accept treatment as second class citizens, but still attempted to find a kind of Islamic religiosity that would set them apart from both their parent's generation and mainstream French society. While this classification arguably overlooks many aspects of contemporary Muslim life in France (Arslan 2010; Arslan and Adraoui 2013), it could nevertheless be used for shedding light on the conflicts between and within the different IRCs in France: embassy Islam pitting itself against French Muslims who want closer contacts with the French state, pitting itself against younger French Muslims who demand a stronger resistance against Islamophobia and discrimination of Muslims.

The external perspective: The politization of Islam and a difficult environment

Another perspective is that these conflicts were caused by *external* reasons: The policies of European governments – and various Muslim states – may have made it difficult for IRCs to function well. Some of the researchers who have written on IRCs have seen the empowerment of these organizations as an attempt to control and *securitize* Muslims (Aguilar 2018; Amir-Moazami 2011; Bayrakli, Hafez, and Faytre 2018; Y. Y. Haddad and Golson 2007). Most of these scholars have made the explicit or implicit claim that the authorities have created a difficult external environment for the IRCs to operate within. The institutional setup of IRCs may therefore have been implemented according to securitized and politicized logics, which was not optimal for the functioning of the IRCs themselves. While he does not employ the securitization perspective, Benjamin Bruce places much of the responsibility for the malfunction of the IRCs in France and Germany on the French and German

authorities and the Muslim home states, whose changing policies and interferences made it difficult for the organizations to function well (Bruce 2018, 128–42).

The literature and media reports on IRCs in various European countries provide several indications that government policies in Europe, and interference from Muslim states, may at times have led to destabilization and conflicts. In the UK, for example, the independent IRC the Muslim Council of Britain was marked by stability, whereas the state-created IRC MINAB was marked by instability. Laurence's study shows that MINAB was facing an unstable external environment, even though he does not go into details. MINAB was set up the British Labour government in 2006, but the successive conservative government "abruptly changed tack", and did not uphold its commitment to MINAB (Laurence 2012, 194). The main authority which had set up MINAB therefore disappeared from the organization.

There are also indications from other countries that interference from the authorities may have led to destabilization and conflicts. In Austria, conflicts in the national IRC *IGGiÖ* seems to have emerged after the organization changed its decision-making rules in 2011 as a result of political pressure. Furthermore, one particular source of conflict concerned how the organization should respond to the discriminatory laws the state had instituted against Islamic communities (Kocina 2018; Simsek 2018). In Belgium, the first elections for the national IRC – the EMB – took place in 1998. The authorities screened the candidates, and those who were deemed to be "dangerous fundamentalists" were not allowed to stand for election (Loobuyck, Debeer, and Meier 2013, 69–70). Some of these rejected candidates then began to organize *against* the EMB, thereby making it difficult to cooperate smoothly in the new organization.

The combined perspective: Competing expectations

A third perspective is that the difficulties of the European IRCs have been due to a combination of internal and external factors – it is about the *competing expectations* they face. IRCs face one set of expectations from the authorities or governments they

interact with, and they often face very different expectations from their Muslim constituencies. This situation – of facing competing expectations from different stakeholders – may lead to conflicts and instability.

John Bowen, an American anthropologist who has written a string of thoroughly researched and highly influential books on Islam in Europe, briefly mentions the trajectory of IRCs in Europe in the introduction to a book on sharia councils and Islam in the U.K.:

> The MCB has fallen in and out of favor with successive British governments, caught as they are between a desire to keep close to their base and the government's expectation that they "manage" Muslim reactions to British foreign and domestic policies. The result is instability, as it is not possible to satisfy both constituencies at once. This instability has plagued corresponding efforts elsewhere in Europe.
>
> (Bowen 2016, 44)

Bowen does not pursue his theory further and merely states that this has been the case. His claim, though, is very similar to the theory of Kerstin Rosenow-Williams that was discussed in a previous section. She used the concept of *expectation structures*, and claimed that the different expectations that IRCs meet give rise to different kinds of organizational strategies (Rosenow-Williams 2012, 89). Ekaterina Braginskaia also used similar concepts in her PhD thesis, where she claimed that an IRC may choose to rely on either the authorities or their constituents (Braginskaia 2015).

Although Rosenow-Williams did not write in depth about internal conflicts in IRCs, her theory can easily be extended to account for such conflicts. The expectation structure the IRC operates within – or other factors in the institutional environment – may give rise to different organizational strategies within the same IRC. Some actors in an IRC may favour what Rosenow-Williams labels an adaptation strategy. Others may favour decoupling, whereas others again may favour protest as a strategy. If key

actors in an IRC disagree about what the best strategy is, this may lead to conflicts and defections.

2.3 Building theory from the Norwegian case

In this thesis, I will add to this nascent literature by looking explicitly at why cooperation became difficult in one such IRC – the Islamic Council of Norway (IRN). IRN was established in 1992/1993, as one of the first councils of its kind in Western Europe. In spite of some rough tumbles, the IRN seemed to grow stronger during its first 15–20 years. Starting out as an organization that was run on a voluntary basis, it began to receive funding from the state in 2007. It also became an increasingly important interlocutor for the authorities. Seen from the outside, IRN appeared to be a stable and secure organization. Nevertheless, an internal conflict emerged in the 2010s. This conflict ended with a split and a public fall from grace in 2017. The government took away their funding, and an important faction within the IRN broke out and started a new organization of their own. IRN had also built up a large and successful franchise for the certification of halal food, which broke down. This makes Norway a suitable case for building theory on conflicts and splits in IRCs.

Norway is a small country with a relatively small Muslim population. The case of Norway can nevertheless be interesting for casting light on the larger phenomenon of IRCs in Europe, and why the project of IRC incorporation has often proved challenging. Even though I do not regard IRN as a *crucial case* or a *most-likely case* in the strict sense (Gerring 2007, 237–38; Rohlfing 2012, 84–85), it can still be helpful to think about the contribution of the Norwegian case using such a logic. The logic of the most likely or crucial case approach is that *not* finding a pattern where it is most likely to occur may have implications for other cases as well. A priori one could expect an IRC in Norway to be relatively stable and well-functioning, more so than in several other European countries. Any challenges that are revealed in the

Norwegian case are likely to be challenges that are basic and fundamental to the project of IRC incorporation.

Why could one expect an IRC in Norway to be relatively stable and well-functioning? First of all, Norway has a well-developed tradition for societal corporatism. As Jonathan Laurence pointed out, the incorporation of IRCs has usually been done within a corporatist or neo-corporatist logic (the addition of *neo* is usually done in order to distinguish this newer type of corporatism of the post-war period from the authoritarian state-directed corporatism of the 19th century). Laurence defines it as follows:

> The state offers incentives for participation by granting the parties a role within intermediary bodies that are established under the state's patronage. The control mechanisms allow an exchange to take place: the state accords a representative monopoly and the chance to have input on public policy decisions concerning the group. In return, groups submit to state influence over 'leadership selection as well as limits on the articulation of their demands'.
>
> (Laurence 2012, 127)

These kinds of arrangements have been common throughout the last decades of Norwegian history. Norway is generally regarded as one of the most corporatist countries in OECD. In an influential ranking of corporatism in 24 industrial democracies, the political scientist Alan Siaroff ranked Norway at the very top, together with Austria and Sweden (Siaroff 1999, 198). Siaroff's ranking system was to a large degree based on the cooperation and partnership between labour, capital and the state. But the societal corporatism in Norway has also included what we may refer to as non-economic interest groups. Even though Norway has become less corporatist in the last couple of decades (Christensen and Hesstvedt 2019; Christensen and Holst 2017; Rommetvedt 2017), it still retains a relatively corporatist political culture, including in the realm of religion. One could therefore expect the state and the authorities to handle the project of IRC incorporation in a better way in

Norway, given the extensive experience the authorities have with corporatist arrangements.

There are also other reasons why one might expect the Islamic field in Norway – and IRN – to experience fewer conflicts than similar undertakings in other European countries. Norway has not been marked by heavy involvement of foreign Muslim states. Embassy Islam, as Laurence defined it, has not been an important feature of the Norwegian Islamic landscape (this will be explored in further detail in the fourth chapter). One apparent source of tension and conflicts in other IRCs has therefore not been present to the same degree in Norway. Furthermore, religious communities in general benefit from relatively generous funding from the state and have until recently been granted a fair amount of autonomy in dealing with their own matters. In the 2000s, a dense network of religious leaders developed, in which the IRN participated. These leaders were intimately involved in the policy-making process through *STL* – the Council for Religious and Life Stance Communities in Norway (Døving 2016). The external conditions in Norway which govern the mosques and the relations between the mosques and the authorities, have therefore been comparatively well regulated in Norway.

In spite of these seemingly favourable conditions, the IRN split up. The story of IRN can thus function as a prism for developing theory about conflicts in IRCs in general. Understanding why these conflicts occur, may reveal something fundamental about the challenges of incorporating IRCs. This leads us to the following overarching empirical research question:

- What led the IRN organization to break up?

Narrowing down the fundamental question underlying this thesis, I pursue some questions that are more specifically defined. To understand why the organization broke up, I employ a longitudinal and historical process-tracing approach. Historically, the thesis looks at the development of the IRN through three historical phases.

- Firstly, *creation*: How and why was it founded?

- Secondly, the years of *consolidation*: How did the organization function and develop after it was created?
- Thirdly, the era of *conflicts* which led to a split: Why did the organization experience conflicts which ended with a split in two?

The goal is not narrowly to *test* the different perspectives from the literature. The goal is instead to build theory –to develop a reasonably complete account of why events occurred as they did in the IRN. In the final chapter, I will discuss whether insights derived from the Norwegian case are applicable to IRCs in other countries, and why IRCs seemingly have been so unstable as organizations all across Europe.

2.4 Looking at IRN as an *organization*

The subsequent empirical chapters in the thesis go into depth on these developments and attempt to understand why the trajectory of the organization unfolded as it did. Such an historical timeline can in some ways be compared with a quantitative dataset. It contains much information that can be approached with different theoretical and analytical questions, which will yield different answers. Likewise, one may employ several lenses or theoretical perspectives for understanding how the story of IRN can be understood. One perspective is to look at it from a *migration perspective*: How were the actors shaped by the fact that most of them were first generation immigrants? How did conflicts between generations shape what happened? Alternatively, one could use a *theology/religion perspective*: To what degree – and how – were the actions of IRN influenced by faith-based normative frameworks? One could also look at the trajectory of the organization through a Marxist or materialist framework: to what degree was the development of the organization influenced by the economic (class) interests of those involved?

All of these perspectives may be valid and fruitful. The fundamental framework I will use in this thesis, however, is rather an organizational perspective: *organization matters.* This means that I will attempt to look at the IRN and the larger project of corporatist incorporation of the organization through lenses that have been

developed in organizational theory. My use of this perspective owes to Kerstin Rosenow-Williams, who employed such a perspective in her study of Islamic umbrella organizations in Germany (Rosenow-Williams 2012, 2014), even though I will not use the same concepts as she.

The main reason for approaching the trajectory of IRN through the framework of organizational theory is first and foremost that the IRN is, in fact, an organization. Organizational theorists have studied organizational conflict for several decades (see for example Kraatz and Block 2008; Lewicki, Weiss, and Lewin 1992; Pache and Santos 2010; Selznick 1953). It would be peculiar if the patterns of conflict in an organization like IRN bore no similarities to conflicts that have been seen in other non-Islamic organizations.

Furthermore, using such a framework for understanding Islamic organizations in Europe is a fairly novel undertaking. In much contemporary research, Islamic organizations are often conceived of either through a *religious lens* or a *migration lens* – even though there are some notable exceptions, such as Fareen Parvez' class-based analysis of Islamic revivalism in France and India (2017). But an additional reason is simply that my work with the data convinced me that such an approach makes sense. Most of the processes that can be seen in the history of the IRN are processes that have been rather precisely described in several key works in organizational theory. The overall framework to which the thesis relates remains the neo-corporatist framework Laurence developed in his work. But in order to understand how such corporatist inclusion and adaptation function in practice, tools and explanatory mechanisms from the toolbox of organizational theory proved to be highly useful.

As this thesis is fairly long and touches on different theories and explanatory mechanisms, I will not introduce all the theory in this chapter, and then relate to it throughout the chapters. Instead, I will introduce key theoretical concepts and notions during the course of the thesis. I will nevertheless provide a short overview here of the most important concepts I will use. In the literature on interest groups and social

movements, some frameworks have been dominant in the past couple of decades. Theories focusing on resources or opportunities, in one way or another, have been particularly prominent. The opportunity structure approach, for example, claims that the trajectory of social movements is dependent on the kind of structural opportunities they are faced with (Jenkins 1995). This approach has its cousin in the neo-institutionalist approach in the organizational literature, which emphasizes that organizations usually adapt to their environments (DiMaggio and Powell 1991). Resource-based theories, on the other hand, claim that the trajectory of social movements or organizations largely depends on the resources they are able to mobilize – or the degree to which they are dependent on resources from an external party (Arnesen 2019; McCarthy and Zald 1977a; Pfeffer and Salancik 2003). The framing perspective, meanwhile, argues that the trajectory of social movements or organizations depends on how they construct meaning and mobilize around certain frames (Benford and Snow 2000).

On a general level, all of these approaches can indeed shed light on the trajectory of IRN. But even though these larger theories are useful, they are not context- or field-specific, meaning that they have not been developed particularly for the kind of entity that the IRN is, namely, an Islamic representative council in Europe. In John Gerring's seminal article on "What makes a concept good?", one of the criteria he proposed was *field-utility* (Gerring 1999, 382–84): the degree to which concepts are helpful for making sense of the field one is studying. For IRN and other organizations of the same type, more precise concepts and theories can arguably be even more useful for shedding light on its trajectory. I briefly survey the concepts and theories I will employ below:

A key question is what kind of organization IRN was and is. Drawing on the work of the organizational theorists Göran Ahrne and Nils Brunsson, I conceptualize it as a *meta-organization* – an organization in which the members are organizations as well (Ahrne and Brunsson 2005, 2008). This concept refers to the type of organization that is more commonly referred to as *umbrella organizations* (Young 2001). Even though the concept of *meta-organization* is less easy on the tongue than

umbrella organization, it directs our attention to one of the most important facets of such organizations: Its members are not individual human beings, but other organizations. This arguably has profound implications for how such organizations work. Drawing on the organizational theorists Detlef Sack and Christoph Strünck, I analyse the trajectory of meta-organizations at three different levels of analysis – macro, meso and micro. This corresponds to the members (micro), leadership and key personnel (meso), and external environment (macro) (Sack and Strünck 2017).

Furthermore, I draw on the work that has been done in organizational theory on what organizations do when they meet difficult kinds of demands from different actors and stakeholders. In organizational theory, this is sometimes referred to as *multiple institutional logics*. When organizations face such pressures or expectations, they usually adopt some kind of strategy. Adapting somewhat an influential account by the organizational theorists Matthew Kraatz and Emily Block (2008), I propose that the IRN attempted to deal with conflicting pressures by employing four fundamental strategies throughout its history: *balancing – decoupling – withdrawal – independence*. For understanding why conflicts ensued in the 2010s, I draw on theories on how and why different factions in organization can disagree on such organizational strategies (Pache and Santos 2010).

Finally, I draw on theory of corporatism and pluralism in order to explain the institutional environment IRN was facing during the years when it broke up. Drawing on studies of corporatism and the voluntary sector in Scandinavia and Western Europe (Arnesen 2019; Christensen and Holst 2017; Laurent et al. 2020; Rommetvedt et al. 2013a; Sivesind et al. 2018), I argue that key actors in IRN found themselves in an environment which emphasized *reputation over representation* – their macro environment contained elements of both corporatism and pluralism. In order to be heard by policymakers, actors in IRN did not necessarily need to be *representative* of larger groups of Muslims. They did need to have a good *reputation*, though. This could be achieved outside IRN, even though a competing organization would be less representative than the organization they left.

2.5 Other key concepts

Before continuing I will explain how I define some further key concepts that do important work in the the thesis.

Islam/Islamic/Muslims: The first important distinction has to do with how I define the key terms of Islam, Islamic and Muslims. This remains a contentious issue among scholars of Islam. What *is* Islam*?* Shahab Ahmed wrote a 600 page tome devoted to this sole question in 2015, which has become highly influential among scholars in the field (Ahmed 2015). According to Ahmed, many scholars of Islam have defined Islam in narrow ways and excluded social and cultural phenomena among Muslims which should be regarded as Islamic. It is for example common to read claims – from Muslim and non-Muslims alike – that drinking alcohol is against Islam. But in Sufi poetry there is a long tradition of writing eulogies to wine drinking, where wine drinking is infused with religious imagery and meaning. Drinking wine can become almost a spiritual act. When drinking wine is done in a spiritual sense by a Muslim, is not it then in some sense Islamic, Ahmed asks? On a similar note: If Muslims demonstrate against blasphemy outside parliament and use "secular" arguments, is it a religious or non-religious activity? If a mosque organizes a scouting group which never prays, is it a religious or non-religious activity? If an amateur cricket team opens each weekly practice with communal prayers and recitation of the Quran, is their weekly practice religious or non-religious?

These are questions without definite answers. For the purposes of this thesis I will simply refer to a *Muslim* as someone who self-identifies as being an adherent of Islam. When I say Islamic, I have in mind activities which are understood by Muslims themselves to be done in the name of Islam; under the headline of Islam, so to speak. Activities in the mosque will typically be conducted in the name of Islam, whereas the organization of a cricket team or a labour union which has only Muslim members typically will not be organized in the name of Islam. A political

demonstration, if carried out in the name of Muslims or Islam, will therefore also be labelled *Islamic*.

    Islamic representative councils (IRCs): For these reasons, I will refer to the council(s) I write about here as *Islamic* representative councils, not *Muslim councils,* as Ciciora does, for example (Ciciora 2018). The reason is that these councils are explicitly organized *in the name of Islam*. There can be other types of councils or organizations that are also essentially "Muslim councils". A federation of Moroccan organizations in Europe, for example, will also be a *Muslim council,* as most of those who organize through such a council will be Muslims. But if the main referent of the organization is Moroccan – rather than Islamic – it would be incorrect to refer to it as an *Islamic* council.

    There is also considerable debate in political science (Mansbridge 2003; Pitkin 1967; Rehfeld 2006) on the second part of the definition, *representation*. Here I will rely on the Rehfeld's simple and nominal definition: Someone can be said to be representative when the group he/she represents deems him/her to be a representative, and this is accepted by the external *audience* – in this case the authorities, the media or other organizations. IRCs function as representatives when those they claim to represent actually think that they indeed represent them – in IRN's case the mosques and their members – and this is acknowledged by at least some important external organizations or bodies.

    Islamic field: Throughout the thesis I will occasionally refer to *fields*, or the *Islamic field*. The reason for using this concept is that a field is different from a *sector*, which is often understood in administrative terms. The mosques, for example, belong to a particular sector, the mosque sector. The IRN as an organization also belongs to the *voluntary sector* or the *non-profit sector.* But IRN and the mosques also belong to a broader Islamic *field.* I have in mind a field as defined by the sociologist Emily Barman:

    A field typically is defined as composed of all those actors who are cognizant that they are co-members of a recognized arena of social life. This definition of

a field departs from other meso-level conceptual frameworks in sociology in that it does not focus solely on those organizations engaged in a similar industry and it is not limited to the dyadic relationship of a focal actor and its exchange partners.

(Barman 2016, 446)

What this entails is that people in IRN – and in their member organizations – would typically have a perception of being a part of a loose group of *Muslims in Norway,* alternatively *practising Muslims in Norway.* This field is broader than the world of the mosques – it also includes Islamic NGOs, Muslim intellectuals who write about Islam in different publications, etc. People in this field are usually cognizant of how they define themselves with regards to other groups and people in the field, and they are also cognizant of having a *Muslimness* in common. Actors in IRN were often affected by happenings and currents in the broader Islamic field, beyond the expectations of the members.

3. Theory, methodological approach and data collection

The methods and approach chosen for a given study should be based on what one wants to find out. In this study, the aim is to understand a specific historical process and assess whether the mechanisms that are uncovered in this case can be applicable to other cases as well. This makes it natural to use a process-tracing approach, which aims at understanding historical processes and ideally to gain insights that can be used to develop broader theory. The interplay between theory and data throughout the thesis is marked by an approach which is *analytically eclectic* and *abductive*. This means that I draw on a variety on theories, research traditions and explanatory mechanisms in order to find the ones that do the best job of explaining the case at hand.

This chapter outlines the methods that are used in the thesis, and how I have been working with the data. It also discusses the ethical challenges a project such as this entails.

3.1.1 Describing and explaining a particular outcome: The case of the IRN

This thesis has two main aims – to describe and understand a particular case, and to use the insights from that case to shed light on a broader family of cases. The first aim is to provide a good account of one specific case –the history of the Islamic Council of Norway. In addition to drawing causal inferences, an important part of the work done in the thesis will also concern *descriptive inference*. Description is not "mere", as John Gerring put it (Gerring 2012). When describing a particular case, an essential job is to determine what the important features of the case are. Is it important for the understanding of IRN that most of the key actors have been men,

for example? Probably, even though I regrettably do not devote much space to the gender dimension in this study. But was it an important feature of the early history of IRN what shoe size the founders wore? No, that was probably a peripheral feature that had no impact on anything else. These kinds of considerations are about descriptive inference – choosing what to highlight, and what to leave out.

In this thesis, I do different types of descriptive inference. One type of inference is to subsume IRN into a broader category of cases; to understand it as a case of something larger. As was mentioned in the previous chapter, I claim that IRN is an IRC – an Islamic Representative Council – and that it is a meta-organization. Both these descriptive concepts have a bearing on how I understand the organization. Furthermore, I create a descriptive typology which is *internal* to the case I study: what strategies the organization used to respond to the external environment throughout the years. This typology is inspired by typologies from other cases and more general organizational theory but is nevertheless adapted to fit the case at hand as closely as possible.

In addition to this type of descriptive inference, I also pose some why-questions – which means that I engage in *causal inference* concerning a specific case. In their influential book on process-tracing methods, Beach and Pedersen call this the *explaining-outcome* approach to process tracing (Beach and Pedersen 2013, 18–21), which they differentiate from *theory-testing* and *theory-building* version of process tracing. The reason why political scientists may choose this approach is that there are sometimes cases or historical processes that are interesting in themselves, and we may want to understand why they occurred. Most would agree that the Cuban missile crisis or the revolution in Iran were important events, and that there is value in getting a good grip on why they occurred. Even though the history of the Islamic Council of Norway is less important than either of these events, it is nevertheless important in itself. The Islamic Council of Norway has played an important role for Norwegian Muslims and for Norwegian society at large. For Norwegians who care about relations between Islamic organizations and society, it is important to understand why these events transpired as they did.

When doing such an explaining-outcome oriented version of process tracing, Beach and Pedersen prescribe that the goal is to reach a "minimally sufficient explanation of a particular outcome, with sufficiency defined as an explanation that accounts for all of the important aspects of an outcome with no redundant parts being present" (Beach and Pedersen 2013, 18). This is a technical way of saying that the goal is to understand why a certain event occurred, and to point at the most important and defining factors that made it happen. The difference from theory-oriented versions of process tracing is that theory-oriented process tracing does not have to aim at *sufficiency* or *completeness*. It is enough to explore some of the mechanisms involved. By contrast, explaining-outcome studies aim at including all of the mechanisms that were necessary for an event to occur – even though such explanatory completeness is very difficult to attain. In addition, the explaining-outcome approach allows for including more case-specific material that may not be present in other cases – unique factors which may not be generalizable. Still, what distinguishes explaining-outcome process tracing from studies done in the history discipline is that explaining-outcome studies usually involve "more generalized theoretical claims than historians feel comfortable making. In addition, explaining-outcome studies often have theoretical ambitions that reach beyond the single case" (Beach and Pedersen 2013, 19).

In my explaining-outcome approach, I aim at explaining three parts of the story about the IRN which I see as historically important for this particular case. The first part is why and how it was created at that particular point in time. The second part is why it seemed to function well for a good number of years. The last part is how and why it ultimately broke apart and led a splinter group to form a competing umbrella organization. We may conceptualize this as three phases in the story of an organization: *Foundation*, *consolidation*, and *break-up*. Much of the work I do in this part is descriptive, i.e. to determine the facts concerning what happened. In some process-tracing studies, many of the basic facts about the process are known. We know the outcome Y – and we know that there were some possible causes – X1, X2, and X3. The challenge in these kinds of process-tracing studies is to establish the

actual connections between outcome Y and causes X1, X2 or X3. One wants to unpack the actual causal mechanisms, and understand which mechanisms were most important.

Possible causes which are known   *Mechanism we want to uncover*   *Outcome which is known*

X1, X2, X3   ⟶   Y
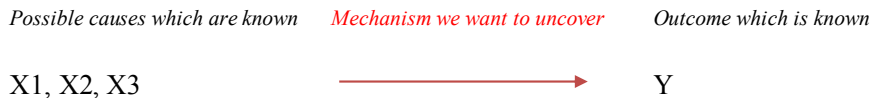
In this study, however, I only know about outcome Y from the outset. Or rather, I know the outcomes – that the IRN was created at a particular point in time, that it functioned relatively well for a good number of years, and that it ultimately split into two. I know the end result. But I know very little in advance about the possible causes X1, X2 or X3 which led to these outcomes. Before I can attempt to unpack the causal mechanism between the causes and the outcome, I first need to uncover what the causes may have been. This leads to the following kind of alternative research:

Possible causes which are unknown   *Mechanism we want to uncover*   *Outcome which is known*

X1, X2, X3   ⟶   Y
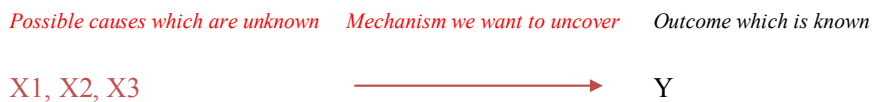
This kind of study becomes more encompassing and time-consuming than a process-tracing study in which the possible causes are known in advance. There are also some limitations in the data I have been able to access. Because of this, some of the mechanisms I describe will be of what Beach calls a *minimalist* account of causal mechanisms, where the causal arrow between a cause and outcome is not unpacked in detail (Beach 2017, 4). For other processes where more data was available, I unpack the mechanisms in greater detail.

3.1.2 Theory-building: Analytic generalization

This thesis also aims to go beyond the case of and the IRN and uses this case to build a mid-level or mid-range theory, which can be applied to the population of IRCs in European countries. In their book on process tracing, Beach and Pedersen make a distinction between *outcome-oriented* and *theory-building* approaches to process

tracing. Whereas an explaining-outcome approach primarily looks to one case, and its unique characteristics, theory-building process tracing explicitly tries to use one case to build a theory that can be applied to other cases as well. But they do acknowledge in the conclusion that the distinction between these two types of process tracing is not clear-cut:

> The difference between them is more a matter of degree than a difference in kind, and explaining-outcome process-tracing case studies often point to specific systematic mechanisms that in principle can be tested in a wider population of cases or that can act as building blocks for future attempts to create generalizable causal mechanisms that can explain outcomes across the population of relevant cases (Beach and Pedersen 2013, 157).

Because there is no clear-cut line between these types of process tracing, I aim to achieve both of these objectives in this thesis, i.e. to explain a particular outcome, and to build a more general mid-level theory. The ambition in this thesis is not to build a general theory which handily is able to explain all the different outcomes in IRCs in Europe. The ambition is instead to identify some theoretical and analytical concepts that can be useful in other cases as well. My claim is that the concepts and factors I identify through the study of the Norwegian case can also be useful for understanding other cases. How these factors play out and interact with each other, however, probably differs between cases.

3.1.3 Arriving at a fit between theory and data: Analytic eclecticism and abduction

The explanation of the case at hand, and the larger development of mid-level theory will be done according to a pragmatic theoretical approach which is inspired by the recent writings on *analytic eclecticism* in political science (Sil and Katzenstein 2010a, 2010b), and *abduction* in sociology (Tavory and Timmermans 2014; Timmermans and Tavory 2012). These two approaches, though developed in different traditions, share important similarities. Sil and Katzenstein's analytic eclecticism is an approach

which is problem- or case-oriented. The primary goal of the analytic eclecticist is to understand particular cases or families of cases. Theoretical traditions, and various causal mechanisms, then function as handmaidens that help the researcher to understand what is going on in the case/s she studies. What theories or established causal mechanisms do the best job of explaining the case that one is studying? Much research within theoretical research traditions, on the other hand, often begins with a particular theory and uses a case or a family of cases to develop, refine or falsify this theory. As Sil and Katzenstein point out, such research is important and vital. But not all research in political science needs to be done according to this logic.

Whereas analytic eclecticism developed within political science in dialogue with theory-oriented research in the positivist vein, *abduction* was developed as an approach within sociology as a reaction against the largely qualitative *grounded theory* approach. Grounded theory, originating in sociology in the 1960s, emphasized the interplay between analysis and data collection. Analysis and theory must arise from the data: theories should not be imposed on the data from pre-existing notions. Existing concepts and theories, under this approach, are seen as *sensitizing*. In the words of Herbert Blumer, sensitizing concepts "give the user a general sense of reference and guidance in approaching empirical instances. Whereas definitive concepts provide prescriptions of what to see, sensitizing concepts merely suggest directions along which to look" (Blumer 1954, 7). Authors who later advocated for grounded theory went even further, and advised researchers to "ignore the literature of theory and fact of the area under study, in order to assure that the emergence of categories will not be contaminated by concepts more suited to different areas" (Strauss and Glaser 1967, 37, cited in Timmermans and Tavory 2012). But as critics of grounded theory have pointed out, it is difficult to assess data without any preconceived notions at all. It is also difficult – and often unnecessary – to build theory from scratch, without taking stock in existing theories and research traditions. The theoretical and methodological ideal of *abduction* – etymologically "leading away", in Latin – calls for the researcher to explicitly start with a theoretical point of departure, or knowledge of the relevant theories pertaining to the case at hand. But the ideal is to arrive at a "situational fit between observed facts and rules"

(Timmermans and Tavory 2012, 171), and this may call for adjusting or updating the theoretical starting point.

Even though they were developed within different social science disciplines, abduction and analytic eclecticism are both approaches that call for extensive use of existing theory, but in a pragmatic and open-ended manner. Relating these approaches to process tracing, Beach and Pedersen emphasize that the interplay between theory and data is an ongoing and iterative process:

> In reality, theory-building process-tracing is usually an iterative and creative process. Hunches about what to look for that are inspired by existing theoretical and empirical work are investigated systematically, with the results of this search forming the background for further searches.

> (Beach and Pedersen 2013, 18)

When working with the empirical material in the study, I therefore went back and forth between theory and the empirical material, until I arrived at a good explanatory fit between theoretical models and empirical findings. Some theoretical hunches or working hypotheses I had early on had to be discarded (more on this in the next sections). The patterns in the empirical material simply did not confirm these expectations. Other patterns were not easily explained by the theories I was working with. I therefore needed to go back to the theoretical *drawing board*, and search for other theories which could account for what I could see in the empirical material.

3.2 Sources and data

The data to be used in this thesis come from several kinds of sources. These sources are of varied types – written sources, oral interviews and field work observations. Furthermore, some of them are primary, which means here that they contain information from a person who personally witnessed the events he or she describes. Some of them are secondary, which means here that they contain information

obtained from some other source. I also distinguish between *contemporaneous* and *non-contemporaneous* sources. Contemporaneous sources tell about events which happened recently, while non-contemporaneous sources tell about events which transpired a while ago. This conceptual usage means that one and the same interview can function as a source which is both primary and secondary, and both contemporaneous and non-contemporaneous – such as when the interviewee talks about events that he or she witnessed personally, but also about events they had only heard about, or the interviewee talks about both recent events and events further back.

As a general rule in methodology, primary and/or contemporaneous sources are usually seen as more reliable than secondary and/or non-contemporaneous sources. But secondary and non-contemporaneous sources can also be valuable and reliable, particularly if multiple sources confirm the same version of events.

3.2.1 Written sources

I began my search by a search in the central Norwegian media archive, *Atekst/retriever*. Atekst contains all of the written media articles in Norway back to 1945. By searching for articles that contained the words "Islamsk råd", "Islamsk råd Norge" and "IRN", I was able to track the major developments that were reported in the media.

In addition to the media articles, I read what exists of secondary literature on the IRN and associated Islamic movements. For the first period, the most important of these studies is a book by Kari Vogt, the preeminent historian of Islam in Norway (Vogt 2008). Between 1997 and 2000 she did thorough fieldwork in Norwegian mosques. She interviewed imams and activists, collected data about the history and organization of the mosques, accessed some internal documents, and attempted to understand the internal dynamics. This was published in 2000 in a book which was a general introduction to Islam in Norway. In 2008 it was reprinted as a second edition with a new and updated introduction. In my interaction with activists in the Norwegian mosques, I have generally heard people speaking approvingly about

Vogt's book. This does not mean that her work was without bias or omissions. But what it indicates, at the very minimum, is that she did not write anything which seemed completely foreign to the people who were active in the mosques at the time. This means that reading her work can give a glimpse into the self-understanding of the people who were active in the Norwegian mosques in the 1990s.

As an introduction to the very beginning of the IRN, which can be traced back to the Rushdie affair and the nascent organization of mosques in Norway, Kari Austenå's book on the Rushdie affair and its aftermath has been helpful (Austena 2011), as well as a master's degree thesis by Marianne Engelstad on the affair (Engelstad 2013). The dialogue activities between the IRN and the Church of Norway were described in a detailed hovedoppgave/master's thesis by Johanne Håvarstein (Håvarstein 2002). For the dialogue activities, I have also read the work that has been published by the participant's themselves, notably Mohamed Bouras, the second leader of the IRN (Bouras 1998) and Oddbjørn Leirvik (Leirvik 1996, 2014), one of the main initiators of the dialogue between the Church and the IRN, as well as works by Anne Hege Grung and Lena Larsen (Grung and Larsen 2000), and Jan Opsal (Opsal 2013), also participants in the dialogue.

I have also consulted other written sources. The most important written sources for the first couple of decades of the IRN can be found in the personal archive of Professor Oddbjørn Leirvik. Leirvik, who was instrumental in bringing about the dialogue between the Church of Norway and the IRN, maintained a personal archive from the very beginning, which is an invaluable source of information. In his archive, Leirvik recorded all the letters that were sent to and from the Church of Norway concerning the IRN, minutes from meetings, as well as personal handwritten notes and scribblings from different occasions. There are, of course, many events and developments that were not recorded in this archive. What it does contain, however, is all the official documents from the church during this period, plus the personal impressions and thoughts of one of the main actors involved. He generously allowed me to consult those records. The MKR – the *Council* on *Ecumenical and International Relations* in the Church of Norway – generously gave me permission to

look through their archive as well, which contains many of the same items as Leirvik's archive – and possibly some others. But after having worked through the items in Leirvik's archive, my assessment was that I did not need any more information from the side of the church.

Another written archive I was able to consult from the 1990s was the personal archive of Bente Sandvig from the Norwegian Humanist Association (HEF). In the 90s there was much cooperation between the IRN and HEF. Sandvig's archive contained newspaper clippings, minutes from meetings and seminars, letters and personal notes. She also generously allowed me to consult her archives. Anne Sender, a dialogue veteran from the Jewish community in Norway and currently the secretary general of the (STL), also maintained some written records in which the contact between STL and the IRN from recent years was documented. She also generously allowed me to consult those records.

I contacted the Islamic Council of Norway and asked for access to any archives they might have had. I was told by several actors that the complete historical archives of the IRN apparently vanished in 2010, because of the burglary of the laptop of the secretary general at the time. For the developments in recent years, I was not granted access to the internal archives of IRN. Some actors in IRN – both past and present – agreed to share some of their written records with me, such as emails, personal notes, minutes from meetings, and some key documents from the organization that they still had in their possession. This was often done on the condition of anonymity. I approach these written sources with some caution, as some of them have been shared with me in an effort to "set the record straight", from the perspective of the actors, and may therefore omit information which does not fit the narrative they wanted to share with me. Nevertheless, many of these documents do contain information that has proved vital for piecing the picture together. As many of these documents were shared with me on the condition of anonymity, I will refer to them in an anonymized form. In addition, I read through all the postings on IRN's current website, and also accessed past postings on the website through the internet

archive/wayback machine. For recent years, I also read the postings that IRN – and subsequently the break-out group *MDN* – made on their Facebook pages.

I was also granted access to some official documents about the contact between IRN and Norwegian authorities, as Norwegian law mandates that communication with the authorities should generally be made available to the public upon request. I also accessed the administrative documents about IRN in the administrative Brønnøysund registries of Norway, to which organizations such as IRN are required to send reports about statutes, board members, etc. Some of the documents from Brønnøysund proved to be very useful. For example, it was only through Brønnøysund that I was able to access different iterations of IRN's statutes. To make comparisons with IRCs in other European countries, I have relied only on written secondary sources – mostly published scholarly works, and to a certain degree newspaper articles written in English, German or French. Appendix A reproduces some important written primary sources.

3.2.2 Interviews

I also conducted several interviews with current and previous key actors. A full list of the interviewees is provided in appendix B, with the exception of two bureaucrats who asked that their names should not be published. When conducting these interviews, I promised all of the interviewees that it was done on the condition of anonymity; but that I could ask them to grant permission to be quoted by name on specific issues if they consented. Roughly half of these interviews were recorded, if the interviewees consented to that, and partly or fully transcribed later. I took extensive notes during the interviews which were not recorded, and filled in these notes immediately after the interview. Some of the recorded interviews did not contain much important information. These interviews were partly transcribed by me, where I transcribed the most important parts and summarized what was more peripheral. The interviews which I deemed to contain essential information were fully transcribed by research assistant Malena Kyvik Martens.

To ensure anonymity when required, I will refer to the interviews in two ways. When I refer to interviewees by name, I also provide the date of the interview. When I refer to the interviewees anonymously, I assign each a letter – such as "B", or "Z". I do not provide the precise date or year for the interview for these anonymized referrals, as that could make it possible to identify some of them in conjunction with the interview list in appendix B. The date for the interview is then provided as "2017-2019".

The actors I interviewed belong roughly to three groups:

- current and previous key actors in IRN

- current and previous key actors in organizations or institutions the IRN had much contact with, either public officials or persons in civil society

- expert interviews, with external actors who had followed closely the development in the IRN, but who were not involved with IRN in a personal or professional manner

All of these interviews were done in a semi-structured manner. I prepared questions in advance for every single interview, as the information I wanted from the different interviewees usually differed. Many of the interviews revolved around topics that were sensitive or controversial. My main goal was therefore to get the interviewees to open up and speak their mind, without thinking too much about what they thought I wanted to hear. It became clear in several interviews that the interviewees had placed me in a certain social category. Sometimes they would say things like:

- People on the outside were not happy with the IRN.

- Which people?

- Well, you know. People like you.

(Interview with D)

It is almost certain that this will lead many interviewees to speak in a different way with me than they would have done with someone they placed in a different social category. I used several strategies to get around this challenge. I generally started out with some general and open-ended questions, such as: "tell me a little bit about yourself"; or "how did you get involved with the IRN". In the beginning of each interview I avoided getting into topics I thought could be controversial, as the interviewees would typically then offer vague answers, or just say what they thought I wanted to hear. As the interview progressed, and when we had established some trust, I would become more direct in my questions and broach subjects that were more difficult and challenging. If there were specific questions I wanted to have answered – such as "did you do X to person Y at time Z" – I would usually save those questions for the end of the interview. All of this was done in order to create an interview atmosphere that would allow my interviewees to speak as freely as possible and to avoid putting my own words in their mouth.

It is of course difficult to know the extent to which I succeeded in this endeavour, i.e. whether the interviewees spoke freely with me or not. What I do know is that several interviews lasted for a long time, sometimes up to three hours, even though it was unplanned and simply because those I interviewed had much they wanted to say. This was sometimes commented upon by the interviewees. One interviewee told me: "You are good at making me talk, you know that?" (interview with F). My own sense is that many of those I interviewed actually did open up, and at least after a while stopped tailoring their responses to what they thought I wanted to hear. But during a few of the interviews I did have a sense that the interviewees did not disclose everything they had on their mind.

I did interviews in several phases, in an iterative process where I spent some time analysing the information I had received before reaching out to new people to talk to. The first phase involved conducting expert interviews to get feedback on what patterns to look for. The next phase involved interviewing people in the IRN and people from other organizations and institutions who had been in contact with IRN. The method used for choosing interviewees in the IRN was a kind of snowball

method. I started by interviewing most of those who held formal leadership positions in the IRN since the beginning and who consented to talk to me. Some persons declined, citing various reasons, and some did not respond. Most people I asked to interview did consent. In these interviews, I asked them which persons they thought had been important in the IRN. I was attentive to the names they mentioned – either as friends of opponents. Subsequently, I would then contact these persons as well. This method is a kind of *snowballing by reputation.* It is reasonable to assume that the leaders of the IRN have been involved in the most important processes in the organization. By interviewing the persons who appear to have been important to them, be it as friend or foe, it is fairly likely that I will be able to talk to most of the persons who have been central in the development of the organization. Some of them were interviewed several times.

In conjunction with interviewing current and previous key actors in the IRN, I also interviewed several key actors in organizations or institutions the IRN had much contact with, either in civil society or with the authorities. Some of these interviewees were interviewed two times, some even three. In the end of the interview phase, I did have a sense of reaching *saturation,* which means that I stopped hearing things I had not heard before. This ended the interview phase and made it pertinent to make sense of the interview data.

The thesis also draws on some interviews I have done earlier, particularly interviews I did in various mosques for my master's thesis in the years 2009 to 2011 (Elgvin 2011). That thesis was about religio-political thinking among imams and mosque leaders in Norway. It was based on interviews, but also involved prolonged participant observation in many mosques and Islamic organizations. Some of these interviews were with people who had either been active in the IRN in the 1990s or 2000s, or who had been active in Muslim activist circles which were close to IRN. I had kept the interview transcripts and field notes and looked over them again when writing this thesis. Even though I did not focus on IRN or the organization of Islam in Norway when doing those interviews, some of the interviews did contain material

that was relevant. When referring to these older interviews, the original date of the interview is provided directly in the full text.

3.2.3 Fieldwork and informal observations

My interpretation of the data and the evidence is also informed by fieldwork and observation in mosques and Islamic organizations in Norway which was ongoing for several years. This fieldwork started in 2008, when I began doing work on what would become my master's thesis. Since working with that thesis, I have made a habit of visiting mosques, Islamic organizations and organized Islamic events at regular intervals. I have also kept in touch with many of the persons with whom I became acquainted at that time, both meeting them face to face and interacting with them on social media. In 2017 and 2018, I also participated as an observer in a joint programme between the municipality of Bergen and the mosques in Bergen, which was attended by imams, mosque activists, and employees in the municipality and Norwegian public services. This program included several conferences and study tours abroad, which allowed me to get a good glimpse into the mosque landscape outside of Oslo.

This fieldwork, and all of these informal observations over the years, also inform the analysis in this thesis. Over the past 11–12 years, I have probably had prolonged informal interactions with activists in mosques and Islamic organizations in Norway numbering in the high hundreds. One of the most important functions this fieldwork serves is to provide me with *hunches* – ideas about where to look and what to search for. These hunches may or may not be confirmed in more systematic surveys of the data. In addition, I have done observations during this fieldwork which serve as data points in their own right.

3.3 Assessing and working with the data

To work systematically with this data, the interview material and the key documents of IRN – the statutes and written statements from the organization – were imported into NVIVO for systematic analysis. I coded the data using two coding schemes (or "nodes"). One coding scheme was historical, where sections which had to do with different periods or events got different codes. The other coding scheme was based on themes and topics – such as *theological difference*, *generational conflict, media pressure,* etc. Work with the data was done in an iterative process involving several steps.

3.3.1 Determining a historical timeline

The first step simply involved arriving at a timeline for what the IRN did and what happened at the different stages, as this type of historical timeline did not yet exist. This involved reading and re-reading the material, both the written sources and the interviews, and assessing the evidence. A basic methodological principle is the use of triangulation: to use several sources of data to increase the chance of arriving at the truth. In a historical work like this, arriving at a truth through triangulation is not always possible. Sometimes, there will be only one source. This makes the information conveyed by the source less trustworthy. When writing, I attempt to clarify the epistemic status of what I tell about. What level of confidence can we have that a certain event happened?

Particular methodological questions arise if that single source for an event is an oral interview. Among qualitative researchers, there has been a tendency in recent years to treat interviews as more valuable for getting insights into norms and discourses in different communities, rather than as being windows to the truth as such (Lamont and Swidler 2014). This is an important function of the interviews in this thesis as well. Interviews provide insight into the discourses among actors and groups in the IRN, but in a study which has an explicit goal of establishing a historical timeline, there is no getting around the fact that interviews *also* serve as windows

onto what actually happened at certain points in time. A central methodological question is therefore the degree to which the interviewees remember accurately – or report truthfully – about events which happened in the past. Memory is tricky, and people usually reconstruct the past based on current expectations and ideas. When assessing what people told me during interviews, I used some basic rules of thumb:

The first rule of thumb was to trust what people say about *actual events* more than their *interpretations* of these events. If somebody tells me that they had a conflict with another person, it is not unlikely that such a conflict actually occurred. But their interpretation of why this conflict occurred will likely be biased and cannot be taken at face value to the same degree.

The second rule of thumb was to assess the degree to which an interviewee seems reliable in general. Can the content of what he or she says be backed up by other sources? During the course of my interviews I quickly became aware that some interviewees seemed more reliable than others. Some interviewees could tell me about events that occurred more than 20 years ago in remarkable detail, and what they said would often check out in other sources. These same interviewees would often also point out when they were unsure about what had occurred. Other interviewees would tell me about events with great confidence, even though I knew during the interview that the written record told a very different story. These interviewees often expressed less doubt about their own memory as well. Throughout the thesis, I gave greater weight to what the interviewees of the first type told me than what I heard from interviewees of the second type.

The third rule of thumb is to assess what strategic or ideological interests the interviewee might have. If an interviewee has a high strategic or ideological interest in telling me a certain version of events, I need to have this in mind when assessing the content of what they say. But even bearing all of this in mind, contemporaneous and primary written sources are trusted more throughout the thesis than retrospective oral interviews.

3.3.2 Understanding why events occurred

The second step involved understanding why certain key happenings occurred – such as the foundation of IRN, or important decisions, or the eruption of conflicts. I began by trying to understand the accounts and narratives of the people who were involved. Why did they think that this or that happened? What was their interpretation of it? The next step was to see if systematic patterns would come to the fore. Did many of the interviewees talk about similar occurrences? Did they attribute it to the same reasons? How did their interpretations align with other patterns one could see in the data? When working with the data I continually refined the coding and attempted to find systematic patterns. I also looked into explanations and theories that have been applied to similar cases elsewhere and assessed whether these explanations could cast light on the processes in this case.

3.3.3 An abductive and analytically eclectic (re)analysis

The final step was *analytically eclectic* and *abductive*, going back and forth between the data and the theoretical grid I rely on: How can my data be explained by the theories and concepts I employ? Are there existing theories that do a better job than others at explaining the patterns we observe? Do new mid-level theories need to be developed?

When writing up the findings and analysis, I wrote and rewrote large parts of the thesis three times. The first time involved writing out the story in a relatively straightforward, empirical and historical manner. It was the chronological history of the IRN from A to Z, full of both important and less important details.

This draft was then assessed by me, my thesis supervisors and an internal committee at my institute. What patterns were there? Which events were important for the trajectory of the organization, and which developments were peripheral? Were my causal explanations sufficiently supported by the data? During this abductive process, some of my initial theories and explanations were discarded, and new theories and explanations were introduced. I initially assumed, for example, that

generation would be an important explanatory factor – that actors belonging to the first and second migration generation would approach the conflict in different ways. While generation does play a role in the overall dynamics of the Islamic field in Norway, it did not turn out to be decisive internally in the IRN. Furthermore, it was only late in the process that it became clear to me that much of the conflict in the IRN revolved around organizational strategy.

Following this process, I did a substantial rewrite of the draft. The second time, I wrote the thesis in a theory-centric way, organizing the material according to several theoretical concepts. At the end of this process, I realized that it had become too deductive: I had become carried away by some of the theoretical concepts, and these were probably not supported by the empirical material I had at hand.

The third round of rewriting led to the present thesis. I attempted to simplify the theoretical concepts and arrive at some basic theoretical concepts that could do a lot of explanatory work: *Meta-organization*, *organizational strategy* when dealing with *multiple pressures*, and a corporatist structure where *reputation* was more important than *representation*. The chapters are still arranged more or less chronologically. But the chapters are also structured according to theoretical topics. Each chapter or part is structured around one major analytical question, although each of the chapters also contains some historical and empirical material which may be peripheral to this topic. In this way, the thesis attempts to fulfil the twin aims of explaining a particular outcome – the trajectory of the IRN – and developing and refining theory which can be applicable to a larger family of cases.

The final step was to shorten the thesis. The different rounds of revisions had turned it into a behemoth of text, and I needed to assess what information was most crucial for the larger argument of the thesis.

3.4 Limitations of the study

Even though I have tried to assess the data as impartially and objectively as I can, and I have tried to obtain as much relevant data as possible, some important limitations remain. The most important limitation is that I have not been able to access the internal archives of IRN. I was told by several actors that the complete historical archives of the IRN vanished in 2010, due to a burglary and the loss of the secretary general's laptop at the time. I was not granted access to the archives of the IRN from the subsequent years either. I was, however, granted access to the archives of Oddbjørn Leirvik, which contain much material from MKR, and the archives of Bente Sandvig, which contain much material from HEF.

This may create biases. The version of IRN's history that is preserved in these archives is the version of the IRN that was seen from the outside, albeit from friendly outsiders. The questions and issues that MKR and HEF saw as important may not have been the issues that were seen as most decisive within the IRN. In the latter part of the 2000s, for example, MKR placed much emphasis on joint statements on issues like freedom of belief and violence in intimate relations. Accordingly, these issues are the object of much scrutiny in their archives. What does not receive any scrutiny are some of the issues that were tremendously important to IRN internally, but not to the outside world. These issues include the thorny question of halal slaughter, for example, which is heavily debated internally among Muslims, but not very important to the general public or MKR, and the coordination of the holiday calendar. When working with the archives, I therefore needed to be mindful that there may have been important events and developments in IRN which were not recorded in these archives.

For the latest developments, when conflicts erupted, a central challenge is that almost none of the actors I spoke to had been neutral during these conflicts, neither on the inside nor on the outside of IRN. When they spoke to me about what happened, their perception was in all likelihood biased by their role in the conflicts. Some of them may also have tried, consciously or unconsciously, to influence my

analysis and the conclusions in this thesis through their statements. When dealing with their statements, I needed to take these interests into account.

3.5 Research transparency and ethical concerns

Finally, there is no getting around the fact that my own biases and judgments may inform my conclusions, even though I have tried to assess the data as objectively as possible. This is a qualitative work, where my own analysis of the events that transpired is central. I am under no illusion that I can be free from biases. In 2011 I was for example appointed to the contact/dialogue group between the Church of Norway and the Jewish community in Norway, as a lay representative from the Church (I was appointed due to the fact that I spent several years of my childhood in Jerusalem, and speak Hebrew fluently). Due to stays abroad I was not able to attend many of the meetings, and when I began working on this thesis the contact group had in any case become dormant. There is nevertheless a danger that this affiliation could predispose me to have a positive outlook on the kind of dialogue that took place between IRN and MKR. Throughout working with the material in thesis I have attempted to be mindful of such possible biases, and to think through whether the conclusions I draw are supported by the data or not.

The central question for readers of this work is remains whether what I write can be trusted. The best way to achieve the trust of the reader is to ensure a sufficient level of transparency – to make "the essential components [of the] work visible to fellow scholars" (Moravcsik 2014, 48). In an influential discussion of the different components of research transparency in qualitative work, Andrew Moravcsik distinguished between data transparency, analytic transparency and production transparency. *Data transparency* "affords readers access to the evidence or data used to support empirical research claims" (Moravcsik 2014, 48). In this thesis, this is possible only to a certain degree. As the oral interviews were done on the condition of anonymity, they cannot be made publicly available in complete form. Most of the

interviews contain material that would make it easy to identify the speakers to people with some knowledge of the Islamic scene in Norway. But given that I list the people I interviewed in Appendix B, they can in principle be contacted and asked whether what I wrote in this thesis rings true to them.

Most of the written sources, on the other hand, can *in principle* be made publicly available. The totality of the written sources I consulted – the Norwegian media sources, secondary literature, Leirvik's and Sandvig's personal archives, the postings on IRN's website – amounts to several thousand pages. All of these sources cannot be made easily available. What I do instead is to reproduce in Appendix A what can be regarded as some key documents from the IRN, such as the different iterations of the statutes. When providing these documents, it becomes possible for the reader to assess whether my analysis of these documents is reasonable.

In addition to data transparency, *analytic transparency* is also essential. Analytic transparency "requires that scholars provide an account of the basis on which they reached particular conclusions" (Moravcsik 2014, 49). Even though I attempt to reproduce some written sources in the appendix, my own analysis remains central, as the complete oral and written material has not been available to anyone but me. I therefore need to be as transparent as possible about how I reach my conclusions. When writing, I attempt to clarify the epistemic status of what I tell about. What level of confidence can we have that a certain event happened? What level of confidence can we have that the explanations I propose are correct, as opposed to other explanations? Throughout the empirical chapters I therefore attempt to weigh what explanations may be possible and be transparent about the reasons why I favour particular explanations. The ideal of analytic transparency also implies openness about the process that led to the claims and findings in the thesis at hand. To claim that I had a perfect theory-driven hypothesis ready from the very beginning, for example, which I then investigated by carefully looking at the data, would be misleading. It is more honest and transparent to be open about how the process actually unfolded: that I started out with some theories and hunches, from which I

discarded several and took up new theories and explanations during the research process which provided a better fit with the data.

In addition to the issue of transparency, it was important to think through ethical issues throughout the work with this thesis. As Islam is a heavily politicized field in Norway, conducting this study required an emphasis on informed consent, privacy and confidentiality. Norwegian guidelines on research ethics state that research subjects are entitled to confidential treatment of all information about personal circumstances, and that research data should usually be anonymized (Norwegian National Research Ethics Committee 2016, 13–15). I ensured consent by telling the informants about my research project before each interview. I made it clear that participation was voluntary and that they could refuse to answer any questions. I also emphasized that all citations would be anonymized in the thesis. I said that I would ask them in advance if I wanted to use any of their citations with their full name and would respect it if they declined such a request.

An additional ethical requirement when doing qualitative research is the ideal of not causing harm to those one does research on. The Norwegian ethical research guidelines state the following: "Researchers [...] have responsibility for participants not being subjected to serious or unreasonable pain or stress. The risk of causing minor strain must be balanced against both the benefit of the research for society and the value for the participants" (Norwegian National Research Ethics Committee 2016, 18). In this study, there is a risk that my research may cause pain or stress to people who have been involved in the IRN. As will be seen in some of the next chapters, there are several actors in the IRN who experienced a heavy personal toll as a result of their involvement in the IRN, in particular relating to how they felt treated by the media. Some actors in the IRN have even gone through bouts of personal depression. Given that this study is the first scholarly study of the IRN, any negative depictions of particular persons may add to this stress. At the same time, it would be impossible to describe the IRN's history without talking about some of the actual persons involved. Some of them have moved on from the IRN and would maybe prefer not being associated publicly with the IRN anymore. But it would not be

possible to anonymize the names of the two secretary generals of the IRN, for example. How should this be balanced against the larger benefit of the study?

This is a dilemma without definite answers. Revealing everything, so as to provide an account of IRN's history which is as complete as possible, may put living persons in a negative light and have adverse effects on them. Leaving out certain details to protect people's privacy may on the other hand make the account less complete. I have attempted to solve this dilemma through a balancing act. Details which may put particular persons in a negative light and which I do not deem essential for understanding the trajectory of the IRN have been left out. Where it was not possible to understand the trajectory of the IRN without describing particular actions by particular persons, I have included the most essential details. I have nevertheless tried to present the persons and their actions in a nuanced way, and to use wording they will hopefully be comfortable with. It is my hope that I have found a balance which provides a good account of why events unfolded as they did, while at the same time respecting the persons involved and not causing them any unreasonable harm through the act of writing.

PART II.