Finnish Muslim Women and Conflicts Abroad

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This thesis examines the relation between the young Finnish Muslim women and conflicts abroad involving Muslims. The subject of my study arises from topical questions and events which combine conflicts and Muslims strongly. The foreign fighter phenomenon has generated concerns about young Muslims, for instance. The purpose of my study is to offer Muslims a possibility to shed light on their own perspective regarding conflicts.

The research questions of this thesis are 1) What is the young Finnish Muslim women’s relation to conflicts abroad concerning Islam or Muslims, 2) what role does Islam play in this relation and what kind of articulations does it receive and 3) how does the media function in forming a relation to conflicts abroad.

The theoretical background utilizes a perspective, which clarifies on two levels where a relation can exist between Finnish Muslim women and conflicts abroad. The effects of conflicts on a transnational level and the impacts in Finland are concentrated. Transnational Islam and especially solidarity explain the first level. The media, as well as the whole history of how the West has viewed Islam as the other, constitute important factors on the local level.

The data in my study was generated in ten qualitative research interviews, which I implemented in Helsinki during six months from December 2017 until May 2018. I analyze the data by using a content analysis to interpret the ways the informants construct their relation to conflicts abroad. My study shows that Muslim women build a relation to conflicts abroad through two kinds of paths. On the one hand, the Muslims receive conflicts via different factors, and on the other hand, they construct the relation to conflicts by themselves. Receiving consists of several negative phenomena, which especially the media generates. Islam functions as the most crucial intermediary in approaching conflicts and mostly defines the perspective.

My study reveals that the Finnish Muslims’ relation to conflicts abroad contains challenges and unbalanced elements. The scope of the effects of conflicts for them appears too extensive compared to the Muslims’ limited attempts to approach conflicts. The position of religion differs remarkably in how conflicts relate to Muslims in Finland and how they in turn relate to those conflicts. Additionally, the biased picture of Muslims as active perpetrators in conflicts differs from the reality, where the Finnish Muslim women only attempt to show solidarity for suffering fellow Muslims. The relation includes the element of inevitability, because conflicts affect Finnish Muslims without their own volition and Islam urges them to look after fellow believers.

This thesis contributes to the field of the research on Finnish Muslims. The themes of conflicts and the media have been addressed in previous research, but this study approaches them from a new angle. Prospective studies can draw on the findings of this study when approaching the topic in the future.
1. Introduction

1.1. Starting point of the study and research questions

In 2016, the Finnish Prime Minister’s Office published a study focusing on questions about young Muslim adults travelling to conflict zones in Iraq and Syria. The study delves into the reasons that explain such a mobility between Finland and the two mentioned countries. The study shows that the decisions to travel are often based on a responsibility to participate in defending other Muslims. According to the study, a strong connection and identification on a religious level felt by the people who have headed to Iraq and Syria constitute important factors accounting for leaving.¹

Such results evoked my interest in general attitudes among Muslims towards conflicts in other countries. If feeling connected with Muslims in conflict zones plays a major role in travelling to such places, how commonly do such attitudes manifest in Muslims? Does such thinking only concern those Muslims who have opted to leave? How do young Muslims usually relate to conflicts involving Muslims? What kind of thoughts do they have regarding the topic in general?

The question of the relation between Muslims in Finland and conflicts abroad forms a large subject. Some clarifications already need to be made here. At first, an examination of young Muslims is quite unspecified because of the obscurity of the term Muslim. As Teemu Pauha points out in his thesis, selecting informants for studying Muslims includes challenges. Islam covers a huge variety of communities and individuals. Additionally, there are disagreements over who is a Muslim even among Muslims themselves.²

Clearly, choosing the target group and then the informants for the study which attempts to examine Muslims requires clear conditions and argumentation. This thesis leans on the self-identification of the informants as Muslims. In other words, the informants consider themselves practicing Muslims. The concept of a practicing Muslim allows for many interpretations. In this study, the informants’ status as practicing Muslims refers to pursuing to actualize the teachings of Islam in their lives. I also confined the target group to only include Muslim women with an immigrant background in order to achieve a clearer cohesion of the group.

Secondly, the term conflict may have various meanings depending on the context. I decided that this study allows the informants to define the concept as they desire. In practice,

¹ Juntunen & Creutz-Sundblom & Saarinen 2016: 3, 45.
this meant that the informants selected which conflicts are discussed in the interviews. The same approach also concerns another term used in this study, namely a Muslim community. Despite the emphasis on the informants’ perspective, I make some useful notions of these two concepts here. A conflict can be defined as a violent dispute or a state of incompatible positions.\textsuperscript{3} The initial idea of the study is to focus mostly on conflicts that exemplify the first part of the definition, due to which the informants’ approach is confined to this part. Thus, for instance conflicts regarding legal questions that relate to Islam in other countries go beyond this study.

In this study, the informants speak about a Muslim community also from their own experiences and perspective. The multiplicity of Muslim communities can make references to them obscure. Finnish Muslims have formed groups according to their ethnicities and languages, so we cannot talk about only one but multiple Muslim communities existing in Finland.\textsuperscript{4} Hence, the informants do not necessarily refer to the same community, and this study does not concentrate on the relation of the Finnish Muslim community or communities towards conflicts abroad. However, individual Muslims as possible members of the communities introduce the topic also from that angle in the study.

I have now presented the starting point of my thesis. The research question of this study is 1) What is the young Finnish Muslim women’s relation to conflicts abroad concerning Islam or Muslims, and the sub-questions are 2) what role does Islam play in this relation and what kind of articulations does it receive and 3) how does the media function in forming a relation to conflicts abroad. The sub-questions aim to assist in answering the main research question.

The next section will introduce some points of earlier studies on Muslims in Finland and reflect on the position of my study as a part of this area of research. The following chapter offers an overview of Finnish Muslims and their backgrounds. Current conflicts involving Muslims abroad are addressed with the attempt to illustrate the scale of the central cases my informants discussed. Thus, I do not provide a detailed description of any conflict situation, but rather aspire to show what kind of conflicts formed the topical cases in the time of the interviews in 2017 and 2018.

The theoretical background chapter introduces the theoretical basis for this study. The chapter on methodological choices discusses the whole process of the study and thus

\textsuperscript{2} Pauha 2018a: 43.
\textsuperscript{3} Bercovitch & Kremenyuk & Zartman 2009: 3.
\textsuperscript{4} Martikainen 2008: 77.
continues what the introduction has already begun. The methods I have chosen for this study are also presented in this chapter. Finally, the analysis discusses the collected data in dialogue with the theoretical frames, and the chapter presenting the results explains the most important observations. The conclusion provides a summary of the thesis and a discussion on future views for research on Islam and Muslims in Finland. The chapters aim to support each other in constituting a coherent work.

1.2. Previous research on Finnish Muslims

Among immigrant religions, researchers have paid the most attention to Islam.\textsuperscript{5} Research topics have varied from formation of relations between state actors and Muslims\textsuperscript{6} to teaching of Islam in schools\textsuperscript{7}. Islam in the Finnish media\textsuperscript{8} forms a research area that constantly produces new studies, while Muslim youth\textsuperscript{9} has not been examined that often. These two topics are present in my study as well. In my thesis, young adults are in the spotlight and the media’s role between conflicts and Muslims is investigated. Despite earlier extensive study on the media and Islam in the Finnish context, my study contributes to the field in a sense that the topic is approached from a new angle. Any media form does not constitute the data for the study, but its position in general regarding the question of conflicts is considered broadly.

Plenty of studies on Finnish Muslims have focused on Tatars\textsuperscript{10} or Somalis\textsuperscript{11}, even though studies have examined some other Muslim groups as well.\textsuperscript{12} My study aspires to form a general view about the phenomenon without concentrating only on one ethnic group. In this way, my study aims to reflect the reality, where a plurality of different backgrounds is characteristic of Finnish Muslims.

The topic of conflict has received little academic attention. The study of Toby Archer examines the question of how probable it is to show sympathy for terrorism and political radicalism among Finnish Muslims.\textsuperscript{13} In his study, Archer utilizes discussions with one Finnish Imam on the theme.\textsuperscript{14} In her Master’s thesis, Nora Nuolioja approaches the phenomenon of radicalization in the same way by focusing on the views of the Muslim

\textsuperscript{5} Martikainen 2013: 11.
\textsuperscript{6} See Martikainen 2007.
\textsuperscript{7} See Lehtinen 2007.
\textsuperscript{8} See Creutz, af Heurlin and Lehtonen 2002; Maasila, Rahkonen and Raittila 2008.
\textsuperscript{9} See Hautaniemsi 2004; Pauha 2018.
\textsuperscript{10} See Leitzinger 2006.
\textsuperscript{11} See Tiilikainen 2003.
\textsuperscript{12} Sakaranaho 2008: 24–25.
\textsuperscript{13} Archer 2004.
\textsuperscript{14} Archer 2004: 60–65.
community authorities in Finland. My study adopts more of a bottom-up approach. The perspective is changed by concentrating on the insights of ordinary Muslims. Additionally, the conflict theme does not restrict itself only to questions of radicalism or terrorism.

On the whole, this thesis examines an area that has not been addressed largely in previous research on Muslims in Finland. Some of the themes discussed in earlier studies are also present in this study, but I approach them from a new angle at many places. Hopefully this study manages to offer novel ideas for research on Finnish Muslims.

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15 Nuolioja 2015.
2. Muslim population in Finland and conflicts abroad

2.1. Muslims in Finland

The formation of a permanent Muslim settlement started already in the 1860s. The first Muslims in Finland were Tatars who worked mainly as merchants or soldiers. Finally, Tatars formed the first permanent Muslim settlement of Finland by 1936.\textsuperscript{16} Thirty years later, Finland began to receive immigrants with a Muslim background. The origin of these 1960s immigrants consisted mostly of Arab countries, especially Egypt.\textsuperscript{17} From the late 1980s, Muslims with a Middle Eastern background began to arrive in Finland in increasing numbers. Particularly Shiites and Kurds from Iraq and Iran formed immigrant groups, but Turkish Kurds arrived too.\textsuperscript{18}

Despite Tatars and some other Muslim immigrants, Muslims remained quite an invisible group in Finland until the early 1990s, when the first Somali refugees reached Finland.\textsuperscript{19} Promptly the Somalis represented the largest ethnic group in Finland. Three years later the dissolution of Yugoslavia resulted in the arrival of Bosnian Muslims and Kosovo Albanians. The arrival of Muslims from different countries, for example Afghanistan, continued.\textsuperscript{20} In summary, the last thirty years have diversified the ethnic and linguistic backgrounds of Muslims in Finland greatly.\textsuperscript{21}

The current Muslim population of Finland can be divided into four groups. The majority of Finnish Muslims consists of first-generation immigrants. The second generation, which includes the children of immigrant parents or mixed marriages, forms a growing group. Converts constitute a small portion, and similarly Tatars represent a small group with their two congregations.\textsuperscript{22} Official or precise statistics on the amount of self-identified Muslims in Finland are not available.\textsuperscript{23} The estimation of 70,000 Muslims is based on the views of the experts in the field.\textsuperscript{24} The first and second-generation immigrants cover the clear majority of the Muslim population, while converts and Tatars together account for only about 2,000

\textsuperscript{16} Leitzinger 2006: 83–85.
\textsuperscript{17} Sakaranaho 2006: 247.
\textsuperscript{18} Martikainen 2013: 111.
\textsuperscript{19} Sakaranaho 2006: 246–247.
\textsuperscript{20} Martikainen 2013: 111.
\textsuperscript{21} Sakaranaho 2006: 248.
\textsuperscript{22} Pauha & Martikainen 2014: 219.
\textsuperscript{23} Pauha 2016: 220–221.
\textsuperscript{24} Pauha 2018b: 240–241.
Muslims. Such figures indicate that Finland’s Muslim population can be described as young. Approximately half of the Muslims are younger than twenty years old.\textsuperscript{25}

Muslims constitute only about 1\% of the total population of Finland.\textsuperscript{26} The majority of Finnish Muslims belong to Sunnism, while 10-15\% are Shiites. Other forms of Islam exist as well.\textsuperscript{27} The two largest Muslim organizations in Finland are Helsinki Islam Keskus and Suomen Islamilainen Yhdyskunta. Of the nearly 3,000 members of Helsinki Islam Keskus, most are of Somali origin. Suomen Islamilainen Yhdyskunta has about 1,700 members with multi-ethnic backgrounds. Both organizations represent Sunni Islam. The largest Shia organization, Resalat Islamilainen Yhdyskunta, has around 800 members. All three organizations have their own mosques besides other activities. Each of the organizations operates in the capital area, which is not a surprise, when Muslims in Finland have mostly settled down there. In addition, some major cities, particularly Turku and Tampere, have their own significant Muslim populations.\textsuperscript{28}

The religious activities of Muslims are quite unknown. Estimations say that about one third have connections to mosque communities.\textsuperscript{29} Besides multicultural mosques, many mosques have members from only one ethnicity.\textsuperscript{30} Based on mother tongue, Arabs and Somalis form the largest Muslim groups in Finland, the former including nearly 30,000 speakers and the latter almost 21,000 speakers. Kurds, Persians and Albanians constitute the next largest groups, all consisting of over 10,000 speakers.\textsuperscript{31} Clearly, one ethnic or linguistic group does not dominate the Finnish Muslim population, but rather pluralism describes the situation.

2.2. Backgrounds of Muslim immigrants

The change in the Muslim migration to Finland can be seen in terms of the factors behind the arrivals. Before 1990s, the reasons for arriving in Finland were related to employment, whereas later refugees and asylum-seekers have left their countries for manifold reasons.\textsuperscript{32} Actually, a great number of all people applying for asylum in Finland has consisted of Muslims because many crisis hotspots have been located in Muslim-majority countries. Humanitarian reasons account for approximately two thirds of the Muslim immigration to

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{Pauha 2016} Pauha 2016: 221.
\bibitem{Martikainen 2013} Martikainen 2013: 113.
\bibitem{Pauha 2016} Pauha 2016: 222–224.
\bibitem{Martikainen 2008} Martikainen 2008: 78.
\bibitem{Statistics Finland} Statistics Finland.
\end{thebibliography}
In the period from 1990 to 2013, the two largest nationalities among asylum-seekers in Finland are clearly Somalis and Iraqis. People from Yugoslavia and Afghanistan are among the largest nationalities as well. Next, I will provide a short overview of some of the largest conflicts that explain the need of Muslims from the four abovementioned nationalities to seek asylum.

In the late 1980s, Finland started to receive refugees of the Iran-Iraq War. During the next decade, the civil war in the Horn of Africa caused a great number of Somalis to seek asylum in Finland in 1990. The chaos in Somalia originated from a guerrilla war waged by armed opposition groups against the government forces in 1988. The final collapse of the country occurred in 1991. The conflict between the opposition and the government forces came to an end, but a new fight for power emerged soon. The following war in Somalia stemmed from a power struggle, and clan-based armed groups formed the different sides. Additionally, the northern Somaliland aimed to secede from the rest of the state by declaring its independence in 1993. Somaliland itself suffered from a civil war in 1992-96.

Next, the dissolving Yugoslavia caused Muslims to flee to Finland in 1993. They escaped ethnic violence and warfare. Afghanistan already had a long history of conflict, when in the mid-1990s the Taliban rose as a new group to reshape the chaotic situation in the country. The Taliban managed to dominate almost the whole Afghanistan in less than five years. The invasion of the US followed in 2001 with the goal to defeat al-Qaeda and the Taliban that hosted the organization. The US achieved its objective soon, but the security situation in Afghanistan continued to deteriorate. The insurgency intensified in 2005.

The Iraq War began in 2003, when Anglo-American troops invaded the country. The Iraqi Army was quickly defeated and Saddam Husayn and the Baathists stripped of power. However, the following years were severe for the Iraqi people, when the coalition had difficulties controlling the country. The lack of basic supplies and general mayhem drove Iraqis from their homes. Finally, by the end of 2011, the last foreign forces completed their withdrawal from Iraq, but the situation in the country has not improved remarkably.
2.3. Current conflicts concerning Muslims

In December 2010, a Tunisian street vendor protested against the police by setting himself on fire. The incident generated antigovernment protests, which led to President Zayn al-Abidin Ben Ali leaving the country. Revolutionary uprisings against authoritarian order started to emerge in other Arab countries as well. Egypt and Yemen followed Tunisia’s example. Then the revolts reached Bahrain and Libya.42

The Arab Spring reached Syria with devastating consequences in March 2011. Demonstrations spread quickly through the whole country, and the authorities’ harsh aims to repress them only intensified the protests. The popular uprising was followed by a civil war in 2012, and as a result Syria disintegrated into different political entities. Various alliances seized their own areas, such as Kurds and rebel groups that entailed moderate and new jihadi groups. The Asad dynasty also preserved their own territory.43 The Syrian Civil War caused up to 300,000 casualties during the first five years, and twelve million Syrians were displaced.44 Aleppo became the most infamous case of the Syrian Civil War in 2015. The government’s attempt to seize the city from the rebels resulted in the bloodiest fights of the Syrian crisis so far.45

One of the jihadi groups operating in Syria which managed to attract foreign fighters the most is ISIS (the Islamic State of Iraq and al-Sham).46 ISIS developed from the militant jihadist group that fought against the US-led coalition after its invasion of Iraq in 2003. In 2014, ISIS seized many important cities in Iraq, and in the summer the organization declared the occupied territory as a caliphate. One year later the caliphate controlled a vast territory in Western Iraq and Eastern Syria. ISIS ruled its territories with a harsh grip. Civilians were controlled through terror, and individual and mass executions were common. Additionally, beheadings belonged to the procedures of ISIS. In the period between 2014 and 2017, both Western and Muslim states had to encounter various terrorist attacks executed by ISIS terrorists.47

Terrorist attacks in Europe indeed form one case of conflicts concerning Muslims. The biggest terrorist acts of Europe in terms of the number of the casualties over the course of 2015 to 2017 have occurred in France, Belgium and the UK. One of the most shocking attacks, which however did not result in a massive number of casualties, occurred in the office

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44 Cleveland & Bunton 2018: 549.
45 Hämeen-Anttila 2017: 130.
46 Cleveland & Bunton 2018: 549.
of the Charlie Hebdo magazine in Paris in January 2015. The two brothers behind the attack claimed loyalty to al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). In November, Paris suffered from a terrorist act again. 130 casualties and 368 wounded people made the attack the deadliest of the decade so far. ISIS claimed responsibility for the attack.48

Next year especially the terrorist attacks in Belgium and France received attention. In March, two attacks, one at Brussels Zaventem airport and another on the subway train, took place in Belgium. All five executors had connections to the network behind the November 2015 Paris attacks. Three months later, people in Nice were attacked when a man drove a truck into the crowds. Again, ISIS declared to be behind the attack.49 In the summer of 2017, a major terrorist attack was carried out in the UK and ISIS claimed responsibility for it. All these examples of terrorist acts represent jihadist attacks.50

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict represents a long-term conflict involving Muslims. The State of Israel was established in May 1948. Less than half a year earlier, a vote on the partition of Palestine between Zionists and Palestinians was held in the UN. The proposition of a division allocating 56 percent of the land to Zionists was passed. The voting result awakened the Arabs’ rage, and a civil war between Jews and Palestinian Arabs broke out. The war waged in the Palestine territory continued until the establishment of the State of Israel. After that, battles turned into an international war, where the new state and surrounding Arab nations formed the opponents. This phase lasted until the end of the year. Israel proved victorious in both phases of the war and seized wide areas of Palestine.51

Since 1948, the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict has gone through many chapters with violent periods. Various negotiations between Israel and Palestine have been attempted as well. Results have proved weak. During the recent years, the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict received maybe the most attention when president Trump recognized Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and declared the relocation of the US embassy there, which caused opposition among Palestinians.52

The last conflict concerning Muslims presented here is the Rohingya conflict. The Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar form one of the most persecuted minorities in the country. The number of Rohingyas in Myanmar is estimated to be 1 to 1.5 million people.

51 Harms & Ferry 2012: 91–92, 94.
52 Eriksson 2018: 53.
Additionally, tens of thousands of Rohingya refugees live in neighboring Bangladesh. The Rohingya people have resided in Myanmar for generations.\(^{53}\)

The Rohingya people have suffered repression for the last 50 years, even though their situation has attracted more attention in the Finnish media just recently. The strong Burmanization policy dominates the present-day Myanmar. As a part of it, the Buddhist religion is promoted, and other minority groups suppressed. The freedom of all religions is guaranteed in the 2008 Constitution but anti-Muslim prejudices are prevalent, which reflects on state policies. As a result, the Rohingya Muslims are victims of political and ethnic violence. In the last years, military forces have targeted Rohingya villages causing casualties and burning down houses and buildings. Thousands of families have been displaced and are currently international refugees. The actions against the Rohingya people can be called an ethnic genocide.\(^{54}\)

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\(^{53}\) John 2017: 85.
3. Theoretical framework

3.1. Theoretical basis
This chapter aims to present the theoretical background for this study. I present relevant previous research, which aids to contextualize my research questions. The earlier studies have not focused precisely on the same questions as this thesis since my theoretical background utilizes a multidisciplinary perspective, which combines research from the fields of Middle Eastern Studies, Sociology, Political Science, Anthropology and Communication Studies. I have divided the theoretical background chapter into two sections. The first section concentrates on the effects of conflicts on a transnational level, and the second section concerns the impacts in Finland. Thus, my approach strives to clarify on two levels where a relation can exist between Finnish Muslim women and conflicts abroad.

The first section defines transnationalism and explains how it can be understood in the context of Islam. Then I introduce a way to approach conflicts by utilizing the concepts of transnational Islam, especially solidarity. The starting point is based on the proposition of Steven Vertovec. According to Vertovec, research on transnationalism can utilize manifold methods and entry points, and he suggests various approaches that a study may follow. One alternative suggests following the impact of an event, and that is the approach I will utilize in my study. Vertovec argues that observing how a crisis generates action and communication reveals important structures. The reactions can shed light on contexts and connections, for instance.55 Additionally, significant events reinforce the sense of local and global religious identities. Events such as the Gulf Wars or Chechnya cause reactions that lead to the strengthening of a religious identity.56 Hence, it is probable that several conflicts where Muslims are involved abroad awaken transnational feelings and interpretations according to transnational lines, which reveal alliances on a global level.

The purpose of the second section is to illustrate a theory where the link between conflicts abroad and experiences at home is elaborated. The media, as well as the whole history of how the West has viewed Islam, form significant factors here. Together they explain how remote events may have consequences in other countries. The key concepts of my study include conflict, transnationalism, umma, solidarity, the media, and Islam as the other.

56 Grillo 2004: 867.
3.2. Transnationalism

Transnationalism can be defined in many ways depending on the research field. However, the shared understanding stresses the importance of the links that connect people across state boundaries. Valentina Mazzucato summarizes that the literature on transnationalism has aided to recognize greater wholes to which individual migrants can belong.57

At first, before deepening the definition of transnationalism in this work, it is useful to differentiate between the concepts of diaspora and transnationalism, because there exist many similarities between the terms. Thomas Faist has pointed out three aspects where the emphasis of the concepts differs, even though both deal with maintaining cross-border relations. Firstly, diaspora refers to more limited groups and communities based on a nation, a religion and an ethnicity. Transnationalism provides a broader approach including all kinds of social formations. Secondly, transnationalism focuses more on a cross-border mobility, whereas a diasporic perspective prioritizes a collective identity. Lastly, research on transnationalism is directed to recent migration, but diaspora usually concerns multiple generations.58

In my study, the transnational approach is justified, because the study focuses on the first and second generation of Muslim women in Finland. They do not represent one coherent group which would share a collective identity, but rather their backgrounds vary a lot. My informants include both Sunni and Shia Muslims, and their countries of origin cover states from Asia to Africa. Thus, a diasporic perspective would not cater to the needs of my study.

As said earlier, transnationalism can be approached from multiple perspectives. The interest of this study lies on the immaterial dimensions of transnationalism which James Clifford has addressed. Clifford discusses the possibility of transnational affinities promoting the emergence of alliances. As a conclusion, Clifford writes that solidarities do not exist inevitably. He also points out the dynamics of the connections. Alliances can be reformed depending on where loyalties focus on at a given moment. To provide an example, Clifford mentions the Salman Rushdie dispute that brought forth loyalty to Islam.59

Clifford describes the feelings stemming from transnationalism by the following summarization: “dwelling here assumes a solidarity and connection there”. Clifford associates such feelings with means of survival. Belonging to a minority and experiencing powerlessness can be dealt with empowering discourses, where a connection elsewhere is emphasized.60 These aspects of transnationalism presented by Clifford concern Islam as well.

58 Faist 2010: 20–22.
60 Clifford 1994: 322.
Before moving to discussing transnationalism from the perspective of Islam, it is worth noting how transnationalism and a relation to conflicts can vary between generations. Julianne Weinzimmer has touched the issue by examining relations to conflicts outside a person’s residing country. Weinzimmer concentrates on the formation of an identity in relation to conflicts, which does not correspond to my approach. However, her study presents one interesting aspect regarding my study. According to Weinzimmer, differences exist between generations in their relations towards conflicts in their country of origin. The first generation focuses more on the conflicts occurring in their homeland. Their connections with conflicts remain more meaningful compared to the connections of the second generation.\footnote{Weinzimmer 2011: 154.}

Lotta Haikkola observes the same features by examining the second generation and its transnationalism in Finland. Haikkola argues that the second generation does not inherit their parents’ social ties, but rather have to form connections by themselves. Haikkola does not comment on relations to conflicts.\footnote{Haikkola 2012: 79.} However, a different formation of transnational ties probably reflects on how conflicts are perceived as well. My study involves both the first and second-generation Muslims which can result in different ways to see conflicts in these groups, if the remarks of Weinzimmer and Haikkola are confirmed.

\subsection*{3.2.1. Transnational Islam}

Transnational Islam can be understood either through the notion of umma or by referring to the different forms that transnational Islam can take. Such forms include, for example, migratory dynamics or educational links. Ina Merdjanova remarks that Muslim transnationalism does not represent a static phenomenon, because a continuous discussion and negotiation regarding universal norms and practices of Islam constitute a visible part of it. Multiple discourses, actors and interests exist in the realm of transnational Islam.\footnote{Merdjanova 2013: 54.} Because of this dynamic nature of transnational Islam, it is interesting to examine its possibilities in the context of geographically remote conflicts.

John R. Bowen highlights “the field of Islamic reference and debate” as an important dimension of transnational Islam. According to Bowen, the background of this phenomenon lies in the history of Islam. Universality forms an essential part of Islam, because already the Quran urges to worship the transcend God instead of various local deities. The shared practices and duties of Muslims that go beyond political boundaries support the idea of an Islamic community crossing specific boundaries and borders. Rituals and histories strengthen...
this consciousness by reproducing and reminding the community of common duties and
practices. In other words, the idea of a worldwide Islamic community strengthens as some
patterns in Islam promote the rejection of particular devotion to one’s ethnic group or a
nation-state. Merdjanova also supports the idea of Islam as a transnational power that shapes
opinions. Merdjanova observes that watching Turkish TV channels affects the way that the
Turkish minority in Bulgaria sees world politics and where they locate Islam in that context.

3.2.2. Umma
Umma represents one side of transnational Islam. The concept of umma is used to refer to the
community of believers and especially Muslims forming that community. Fred Halliday states
that umma often exists as an important term in the discourse of Islamic transnationalism.
Halliday states that the term plays an essential role in defining and legitimizing transnational
Islam and different movements, and that thinkers can utilize umma in various contexts.
However, at the same time Halliday underlines that the transnational umma has a limited
power to attract because of the diverse sentiments and interests among Muslims.

Other authors share Halliday’s notions. Olivier Roy remarks that despite loyalty to
umma, most Muslims only “pay lip-service” to the term. Instead, neo-fundamentalists have
adopted the concept. They construct umma in an abstract way as an imaginary and
deterritorialized space. Thus, umma gains a political reformulation. Peter Mandaville
considers umma a political community as well. He argues that umma experiences new
reconceptualizations again and again as Muslims aim to position Islam in the contemporary
reality.

The concept of umma clearly is complicated. Differences among Muslims as well as
ethnic and national allegiances confront the idea of a universal umma. The rhetoric of umma
does not inevitably correspond with everyday life. Hence, next I introduce how solidarity
can be applied to the discussion of transnational Islam that excludes the concept of umma.
Even though the terms solidarity and umma are very intertwined, I want to propose solidarity
as an alternative to umma, because it allows to see how conflicts can be interpreted in the
context of Islam without using the term umma.

65 Merdjanova 2013: 54.
69 Merdjanova 2013, 56.
3.2.3. Solidarity
Larry May provides a useful understanding of solidarity. May argues that identifying with a group and believing that the group’s well-being affects the well-being of its every member form significant constituents of solidarity. Solidarity also comprises shared values, beliefs and bonds of sentiments as well as a readiness to show support in adverse circumstances.\textsuperscript{70}

Mandaville brings solidarity into the realm of transnational Islam. He proposes an approach to solidarity without referring to umma, because umma does not frequently exist in articulations of contemporary Muslim transnational solidarity. Mandaville argues that transnational Muslim solidarity should be approached from the perspective of flows of material and immaterial subjects. Even though Mandaville discusses transnational solidarity in the context of movements, the basic idea of the shared understanding of what a good life stands for can be applied to Muslim transnationalism more generally as well.\textsuperscript{71}

Asef Bayat introduces the term imagined solidarity, which clarifies more the manifestation of solidarity in transnational Islam. An imagined solidarity can be compared to Benedict Anderson’s idea of imagined communities. By an imagined community Anderson refers to a phenomenon where people imagine they form a connection and a nation with other members of that nation, even though they have never met each other.\textsuperscript{72} Similarly, imagined solidarity emerges among different actors who imagine common values and interests and form a consensus. However, an imagining of shared aims occurs in various ways, so homogeneity does not characterize imagined solidarity.\textsuperscript{73}

Ülkü Güney also deals with transnational solidarity in the study that shows how British Asian Muslims feel solidarity with fellow Muslims in war zones. These wars and the way that the media represent them, Islam and Muslims generally have an impact on the youth’s sense of belonging to a global Muslim community. Identification with Muslims in war zones derives from common experiences of powerlessness and marginalization.\textsuperscript{74} Güney mentions the role of the media in constructing solidarity across state borders. This notion requires more elaboration.

3.2.4. The media
Arjun Appadurai addresses the importance of the media in relation to transnationalism. He underlines how the electronic media enable distant events to affect everyday discourses.

\textsuperscript{70} May 1996: 44.
\textsuperscript{71} Mandaville 2011: 8, 16.
\textsuperscript{72} Anderson 2007: 39.
\textsuperscript{73} Bayat 2005: 904.
\textsuperscript{74} Güney 2010: 169.
Appadurai speaks of imagined selves and imagined worlds, which the electronic media enable by providing resources. The multiple forms of the electronic media are present in everyday routines, and thus offer resources that can also produce imagined selves as a daily project. Appadurai observes that the different forms of electronic capitalism have the same kind of impacts as print capitalism does in Anderson’s arguments.\(^{75}\) Print capitalism refers to a phenomenon where the possibilities of the print technology enable groups without personal contact to consider themselves Indian, for instance.\(^{76}\) According to Appadurai, the electronic mass media can have a similar influence on a global level. Instead of nations, global collectivities emerge.\(^{77}\) Robin Cohen has also underlined the idea that the construction of transnationalism can occur increasingly through imagination in the modern world of technology.\(^{78}\)

I have now presented my theoretical approach to the relation to conflicts on a transnational level. Solidarity through an imagined connection to fellow Muslims or referring to umma offer a framework which possibly explains the relation of Finnish Muslim to conflicts abroad. In both cases, the relation is perceived via Islam and through Islamic articulations. The media play a major role as a source of resources for those articulations.

### 3.3. Local effects

Now I move on to present the theoretical frame that sheds light on how geographically distant conflicts have local impacts in different countries. Again, the media form a significant factor. According to the media dependency hypothesis, the media play an important role in providing information, because it can almost be considered the only source of it. Thus, the media also determines how information is framed or interpreted.\(^{79}\) This concerns the interpretation of conflicts as well. The power of the media to influence people constitutes a background that explains the existence of a relation between conflicts and their impacts on the lives of people connected to those conflicts in other countries. News coverage of terrorism dominating the media forms an essential factor contributing to the emergence of indirect effects of terrorism, for instance.\(^{80}\)

I begin by illustrating how Islam has been depicted in the West over time in order to understand the big picture of the images of Muslims in Western countries. Then I demonstrate

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\(^{75}\) Appadurai 1996: 3, 4, 8.  
\(^{76}\) Anderson 2007: 88.  
\(^{77}\) Appadurai 1996: 8.  
\(^{78}\) Cohen 1996: 516.  
\(^{79}\) Neuman 1992: 11.  
how these ideas surface in the media. Finally, I move to introduce the effects of these media representations in the context of conflict news. Thus, I aim to offer a theoretical frame where certain perpetual ways of dealing with Islam shape attitudes towards Muslims, which also becomes visible in the media coverage of conflicts. As a result, remote events can impact on Muslim’s everyday experiences all over the world.

3.3.1. Islam as the other
Edward Said deals with the relation between Islam and the West in the presentation of Orientalism. Orientalism illustrates a way of thought that is founded on the distinction between the Orient and the Occident. This distinction between the East and the West has directed the ways of dealing with the Orient by attributing certain characteristics, such as inferiority, to Orientals. Orientalism emphasizes the difference between “us and them”.81

Said explains how Europe approached Islam in a defensive way because of the novelty of this new religion in the early Middle Ages. Additionally, the success of Islam in conquering large territories resulted in Europe seeing Islam as a symbol of terror and devastation. Said describes Islam as “a lasting trauma” for Europe. The overall impact of these images and Orientalism continues to exist even to this day.82

Other authors have continued on the theme brought up by Said and noticed how the “othering” of Islam occurs in various forms.83 Reasons behind the circulation of certain images of Islam might have changed over time. However, the discourse on Islam has remained consistent. Elizabeth Poole notes that the discourse does not denote the existence of a static Oriental discourse, but rather new conditions of the time collide with the old discourse and produce new articulations.84 Thus, Orientalist views surface in the media today as well, which is elaborated in the next section.

3.3.2. Islam in the media
According to Said, the media deal with Islam in a very reduced way. The media narrow Islam down, which reduces the entire diverse Muslim world with all its dimensions to an evil and inconsiderate essence. This leads to an us-versus-them setting. Said sees that the images that the media feed us promote a way of thinking where people compare Islam with everything unpleasant. Certain characteristics connected to Islam evoke a feeling that we are in

81 Said 1979: 2, 42–44.
83 See Labib 2007.
84 Poole 2002: 41.
confrontation with something undesirable. As a result, responses towards Islam become confrontational and Islam is generally viewed as a threat.85

Todd H. Green supports Said’s insight of the media showing Islam only from one perspective. Green states that the media stories on Islam uphold terrorism as the most prominent theme. The domination of Muslim terrorism in news coverage has taken place after 9/11 in the USA and has led to reinforcing the connection between Islam and violence.86 Similarly, researchers have noticed that the British press tend to place Muslims in the context of conflict to a significant extent.87

Media bias can be seen in diverse cases. Evelyn Alsultany compares dealing with violent acts committed by Muslims to the portrait of violence used by Christians or Jews. According to Alsultany, the acts of Muslims are considered to represent Islam as a religion. Thus, violent examples stigmatize the whole religion leaving no room for other perspectives. A similar understanding does not dominate cases where Jews or Christians have committed acts of violence. They are not seen as the representatives of people who possess a Jewish or a Christian faith.88 Said also points out that only Islam seems to be equated with all the negative events, while Christianity or Western culture are not considered equivalent to horrors executed by a single Christian or Westerner.89

In addition, the behavior of an individual Muslim is not analyzed, but generalizations loaded with Orientalist views constitute explanations. Said raises especially terrorism as a case in point where generalizations aid to form a link between Islam and terrorism. The mass media simply play with caricatures when dealing with Islam.90 Kimberly A. Powell discusses the same phenomenon. She notes how the media do not speculate about the explanations for terrorism or psychological reasons behind terrorist acts. Instead, the media concentrate on enmity towards terrorists who are associated with Islam.91 Green also confirms the media’s little effort in humanizing or providing nuances to Muslim terrorists, in contrast to white perpetrators without a Muslim background.92

Naved Bakali, focusing on the Canadian media for time since 9/11, states that unlike people from other groups, Muslims are represented as terrorists in certain acts.93

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85 Said 1997: 8, 43, 48, 55.
86 Green 2015: 134.
87 Baker, Gabrielatos & McEnery 2013: 255.
88 Alsultany 2011: 312.
91 Powell 2011: 105.
92 Green 2015: 135.
93 Bakali 2016: 71–73.
and Joda Lloyd also observe that the choices of calling some acts terrorism and others not show anti-Muslim prejudice. According to their research, the behavior of a Muslim is more probably labeled as terrorism compared to similar behavior conducted by a White non-Muslim. Additionally, the perception of the same acts is more negative if a Muslim commits them. West and Lloyd conclude that together with other biases, this biased labeling promotes representing Muslims in a negative light.\(^\text{94}\)

All the examples from other countries mentioned above clarify how Islam and Muslims are covered in a problematic way in the media. The study from 2007, which focuses on the Finnish media and Islam, presents similar observations. Mari Maasilta, Juho Rahkonen and Pentti Raittila state that news often highlights extreme phenomena within Islam in Finland as well. The study reveals that two thirds of news stories on Islam are related to political violence or terrorism. However, according to the study, the media does not link Finnish Muslims to political violence or conflicts. Instead, conflicts in the Finnish context usually concern Islamic customs colliding with the law. Muslims in Finland are not asked to comment on violent events in their countries of origin, and thus they are not associated with violence abroad.\(^\text{95}\)

The study notes that journalism focusing on extreme phenomena when dealing with Islam might create an image that Islamism and fundamentalism represent mainstream Islam. Reasons behind a certain kind of presentation derives from many sources. The study concludes that international news agencies focus on conflicts in the Middle East, which is featured in journalism in Finland too, but the structures in the media field do not explain everything. One’s own values and suppositions hinder the media from mediating of a neutral picture of Islam.\(^\text{96}\) The consequences of all these media practices regarding Islam are discussed below.

### 3.3.3. The impact of the media coverage

The effects of representations of Islam in the media have been studied by several scholars. The connection between the media coverage on issues related to Muslims that people follow and their tendencies to consider Islam a violent religion has been observed.\(^\text{97}\) Powell points out that the manner in which the media is dealing with terrorist events promotes fear towards

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\(^\text{94}\) West & Lloyd 2017: 219–220.

\(^\text{95}\) Maasilta & Rahkonen & Raittila 2008: 34, 38.

\(^\text{96}\) Maasilta & Rahkonen & Raittila 2008: 38, 64.

\(^\text{97}\) Ogan & Willnat & Pennington & Bashir 2014: 41.
Islam.\textsuperscript{98} Anne Aly’s study indicates the existence of such a phenomenon. Aly writes that the Australian media frames terrorism as a problem that in a way leads to associating individual Muslims with fear. Her definition of this fear is based on how the media approached the September 11 terrorist attacks by constructing a battle where two opposing camps existed. Thus, a battle between “us” and “them” was created.\textsuperscript{99}

The media produce negative feelings towards Islam, which is seen in the behavior towards Muslims. Different scholars have delved into this connection. El-Sayed El-Aswad sees that the circulation of negative images of Islam by the Western media has contributed to the rise of racism towards Muslim Americans. A link between terrorist events and an increased discrimination towards Muslims exists.\textsuperscript{100} Skaiste Liepyte and Kareena McAloney-Kocaman observe that British Muslim women experienced more discrimination after the Charlie Hebdo terrorist attacks compared to the time preceding the event.\textsuperscript{101} Green remarks in the same way that hate crimes against Muslims increase rapidly in Europe and the USA each time that cases showing Muslims in a negative light are dealt with intensely.\textsuperscript{102}

It is worth noting that the influence of events does not limit to the origin country of the incidents. A major event in one country shapes how minorities are judged in other countries and might result in a growth of discrimination towards minority groups. Lorraine P. Sheridan and Raphael Gillett reflect on explanations for the phenomenon and suggest approaching discrimination as a natural outcome when something is threatening the world order. For instance, the September 11 attacks raised feelings of insecurity, which caused some Westerners to view all Muslims as a possible threat.\textsuperscript{103}

Beside discrimination, the media coverage of conflicts involving Muslims have other impacts as well. Representation of events does not only modify the behavior of other people towards Muslims, but it also influences the thoughts of Muslims. Nahid Afrose Kabir’s data reveals a concern among Muslims that they are perceived as terrorists. They experience how the media equates Muslims with terrorists which results in anxiety.\textsuperscript{104}

On the other hand, Olivier Roy points out how ordinary Muslims seem to be obliged to clarify Islam for other people. Particularly political crises compel Muslims to offer explanations regarding their faith. Thus, articulating the characteristics of Islam constitutes a

\textsuperscript{98} Powell 2011: 105.
\textsuperscript{99} Aly 2010: 97.
\textsuperscript{100} El-Aswad 2013: 45.
\textsuperscript{101} Liepyte & McAloney-Kocaman 2015: 792.
\textsuperscript{102} Green 2015: 157–159.
\textsuperscript{103} Sheridan & Gillet 2005: 196.
\textsuperscript{104} Kabir 2010: 127–130.
duty for every Muslim. Especially Muslims have to define that Islam is not violent, radical or fanatical. According to Roy, this task of every Muslim stems from a small number of legitimate Muslim authorities in the West.¹⁰⁵

4. Methodology

4.1. The basis of the study and the selection of the method

This chapter aims to introduce the methodological choices of my study. I have concentrated on considering the options in every step of the process, because questioning my own decisions is linked to the reliability of the whole work. Furthermore, the importance of the role of the researcher in the formation of a case cannot be underestimated. It is essential to assess constraints, tools, concepts and data collecting methods, because each element influences the final results. Thus, paying attention to questions such as what a researcher does while studying a topic and through what kind of processes the information is generated forms a crucial task. Simply put, the position of the researcher should be made visible. Thus, the purpose of this chapter is to explain the researcher’s choices and the whole process of the study as much as possible. Relevant observations about the methodological tools used are presented too.

Various factors lead the process of choosing the methodology for a study. Outlining the subject of a study and choosing a specific methodological basis are affected by earlier studies, trends in different fields and dominant paradigms. The researcher’s understanding of the reality, how experienced the researcher is in carrying out a study and the researcher’s personal situation and preoccupations also contribute to the selection of the methodology. The subject of my study arose from topical questions and events which combine conflicts and Muslims strongly, as the introduction chapter elucidated. The study focuses on young Finnish Muslim women. The concerns about young Muslims have surfaced in discussions about the foreign fighter phenomenon, which defined my target group. Concentrating on women is related to my inexperience as an interviewer. I preferred to interview the group closer to myself. In addition, I was uncertain of Muslim men’s willingness to speak about the subject with a non-Muslim woman. I believed that building the trust necessary in order to carry out the interviews successfully would occur more naturally with Muslim women.

My research questions tackle particularly the themes of conflicts and Finnish Muslim women. The relation between these two is in the focus, so my study represents qualitative research. The qualitative nature of the study is related to the purpose to examine what meanings the informants give for the phenomenon. A qualitative study allows to clarify the

107 Peltola 2007: 122–123.
reasons and context behind actions\textsuperscript{109}, so it serves best the goals of my study. An interview is recommended as a tool for collecting data when a study concerns a topic on which very little research has been conducted previously. In addition to that, I chose the interview instead of questionnaires because as a direct form of communication, an interview allows to deepen and clarify the informants’ answers. It also enables posing additional questions depending on how the discussion proceeds.\textsuperscript{110} In qualitative interviews, the informants are also allowed to contradict the presuppositions lying behind the researcher’s questions and interpretations,\textsuperscript{111} which I regard important.

Already before collecting data, it is advisable to be aware of the problems related to qualitative data. Firstly, the researcher’s own implicit conceptions frame information received in data collection. The researcher’s values may influence greatly the conceptions and interpretations.\textsuperscript{112} Concerning these issues, researchers are required to define the starting point of their study in terms of their own position. Clarifying the researcher’s position sheds light on the subjective elements that are relevant regarding the goals of the study. The researcher locates his own position concerning the research topic. The researcher’s position includes recognizing a basis from where he approaches the research topic and what background assumptions he possesses.\textsuperscript{113}

I acknowledge the problematic nature of the approach in my study. Connecting conflicts and Muslims may renew biased images which are based on Orientalism, as was introduced in the previous chapter. Moreover, I represent the majority population and attempt to define a minority from outside. I justify my approach by the idea of offering Muslims a possibility to shed light on their own perspective regarding conflicts. Hence, the study aims to correct detrimental discourses rather than strengthen them.

One problem concerning qualitative research I pondered in advance is related to the issue that qualitative data is about actions that bear meanings and intentions. Hence, the informants may desire to convey a certain kind of picture of themselves. In other words, the informants wish to manage the impressions that the researcher forms of them.\textsuperscript{114} However, I did not perceive such attempts occurring significantly in the data collection. During the interviews, I noticed that the informants sometimes discussed assumptions about Muslims,

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{109} Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008: 27–28.
\bibitem{110} Hirsjärvi & Remes & Sajavaara 2007: 200.
\bibitem{111} Kvale 2007: 102.
\bibitem{112} Miles & Huberman 1994: 9–10.
\bibitem{113} Pesonen 1997: 123–124.
\bibitem{114} Miles & Huberman 1994: 10.
\end{thebibliography}
while they actually replied to questions related to other topics. I took this into consideration while analyzing the data.

4.2. The interviews

The data in my study is generated in qualitative research interviews where information is gained through a conversation. An interview should be understood as a dialogue where two partners discuss a subject of mutual interest. A conversation provides access to knowledge.\textsuperscript{115} The dialogic nature of the interviews requires the researcher to reflect on the interview situations more broadly. The relation between the interviewer and the informant influences many aspects. The relation has an impact on how the themes and questions are approached, what kind of reactions and responses are delivered, and how the interviewer co-constructs meanings together with the informant.\textsuperscript{116}

It seems to me that the interviews were carried out in a relaxed atmosphere. Rastas ponders how much the interviewer should familiarize himself with the culture which the informants represent in order to carry out the interviews successfully. Before this thesis, I had not particularly concentrated on questions about Islam or Muslims in my studies. Rastas also states that identifying with or sharing similar experiences with the group make it easier to build a trustful relationship between the interviewer and the informant.\textsuperscript{117} My informants represent the same age group and gender as I do. Many of the informants are also students, so similarities in our situations in life created a common ground, which supported the creation of a natural interaction. I believe that my informants also regard the interviews as positive experiences. However, research interviews always involve a power asymmetry. The interviewer has a more powerful position compared to the informants. Thus, the interview should not be regarded as a discussion between two equal individuals,\textsuperscript{118} even though the situations might seem quite casual or informal.

Because interviews are always based on interaction and all the data and its meanings have been produced together by an interviewer and an informant, the conduct of the interviews should be considered too. The interviewer can play a big role in creating meanings by giving answers to his own questions, for instance. Then the informant only confirms these interpretations.\textsuperscript{119} In my own interviews, I also perceived how easily the way that the

\textsuperscript{115} Kvale 1996: 42–43.
\textsuperscript{116} Tolonen & Palmu 2007: 91.
\textsuperscript{117} Rastas 2005: 85–87.
\textsuperscript{118} Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 33–34.
questions are formed may direct the responses of the interviewees excessively. As an unexperienced interviewer, I needed to focus on this challenge continuously.

The form of a dialogue seems to be a clear advantage in interviewing. My study includes several terms that the informants may interpret differently, so the possibility to specify certain terms during the interviews proved mutually useful. Additionally, analyzing the answers to the questions of my study required a deeper understanding of the context, which questionnaires would not have allowed. Thus, interviewing turned out to be the most productive way to approach the topic of my study.

During interviews, the researcher can also detect the motives behind the interviewees’ statements better compared to many other research methods. Non-verbal gestures reveal meanings, too, and assist in interpretation. Simply put, interviewing permits observing at the same time. Utilizing observations as well as what possible effects doing that may have on the results should be explained in the study. I wrote down some notions from the interviews about how the informants reacted to specific questions. Mostly such observations contributed to understanding broader attitudes towards and connections to the themes, so I will not explain them in more detail in this study.

**4.3 Thematic interview**

I decided to use semi-structured thematic interviews to collect data, because a thematic interview allows more space for the interviewees’ voices. The questions of how people interpret issues and attach meanings to them are considered significant in thematic interviews. In thematic interviews, the informants are able to emphasize more the subjects they find important. As a result, the significance of the researcher’s perspective decreases. One of the aims of my study was exactly to emphasize the perspective of the informants.

The idea of a thematic interview is to approach a chosen topic by discussing different themes connected to the research questions. The themes are based on the study’s framework, so they arise from earlier knowledge about the phenomenon. Sirkka Hirsjärvi and Helena Hurme remark that the chosen themes should cover broad areas in order to reveal the whole richness of the topic. I formulated the themes both by utilizing ideas deriving from

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120 Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008: 34.
121 Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2003: 76.
from earlier studies and by assessing which angles could generate fruitful discussions. The chosen themes are related particularly to the key words of my study.

A detailed list of questions does not form a goal in thematic interviews. The same themes recur in each interview, but the form of the questions or their order may differ. Despite various wordings, the questions should guide the informants to the right path and context. In this way, the correct meaning is preserved, and the informants discuss a topic with similar relations of meanings in their minds. In any case, an interview as a conversation enables the researcher to correct instantly if the informant reacts in an erroneous way by not discussing a premeditated subject.

One common error made by an inexperienced interviewer is the inability to go beyond the planned themes. In that case, relevant information might be lost. Interviews should begin with broad and easy questions and then proceed from general questions to more detailed ones. The follow-up questions, which aim to deepen the replies of the interviewees, are based on their earlier responses. I strived to perform many follow-up questions, which compensated the scarcity of the questions planned beforehand. Additionally, I made some modifications to the body of the interview questions during the data collection, when interesting new themes emerged in the interviews.

Some usual challenges occurred in my interviews, such as the informants assuming that they should know precisely about some phenomena related to the research topic even though only their opinions and insights were asked. Hirsjärvi and Hurme caution about such situations. After these reflections on conducting my thematic interviews, next I will explicate the research process from seeking informants to the actual implementation of the interviews.

4.4. Seeking informants and implementing the interviews

I started to seek for informants in October 2017. At first, I contacted three mosques (Helsinki Islam Keskus, Suomen Ismailainen Yhdyskunta and Resalat Ismailainen Yhdyskunta) in the Helsinki metropolitan area. I visited all the three mosques in the course of the coming months and one of them even several times. I observed that young Muslim women do not go to mosques regularly. My target group was often lacking during my visits. Thus, I tried to reach

128 Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008: 104.
131 Hirsjärvi & Hurme 1991: 76.
more possible informants in other ways. I wrote on Facebook pages (Suomen Nuorten Muslimit, Kysy vapaasti kaikelta muslimeilta, Suomen Muslimit) used by Muslims. There I explained that I was doing my thesis and was willing to interview Muslims. I also visited two events in order to find informants. The first event was organized by Suomen musliminaisten foorumi and the other one was arranged by Suomen Muslimiopiskelijoiden verkosto and Suomen Somalia-Verkosto. Especially the latter one allowed me to meet a large number of young Muslim women. As the last way to find informants, I sent a message about my research to the mailing lists of Muslim Students In The University Of Helsinki – HYMO and Nuoret Muslimit ry (NUMU). Information of the study was circulated in the mailing lists.

Eventually, I managed to get informants quite equally from all sources, except through the mailing lists. Additionally, two informants were found via snowball sampling. Snowball sampling refers to a method where one informant is approached first. Then, after the interview, the informant recommends another person who could speak about the topic.132 In this way I contacted two people after two informants suggested to ask them. Both of those contacted ended up being my informants. I would describe the whole process of seeking informants easy and challenging at the same time. On the one hand, many potential informant expressed shyness towards being interviewed or doubted if they could offer a lot on the topic. On the other hand, women, who eventually became the informants for the study, considered the subject of the study and the design of the interviews interesting.

I implemented thirteen interviews altogether, the first one in December 2017 and the last one in May 2018. Hirsjärvi and Hurme remark that preliminary interviews are an essential part of thematic interviews.133 I carried out one preliminary interview, which I did not use in my analysis in the end. I used the preliminary interview particularly to identify meaningful approaches to my research questions and generally to practice interviewing. Finally, I decided to use ten interviews in my analysis. Beside the preliminary interview, two other interviews were discarded in order to keep the focus of the research more clearly defined. The ten informants whose interviews form my data are practicing Muslims. Hence, the question of the role of religion can naturally be included to the research questions. All of the informants wear headscarves and live currently in the capital area, and their ages range from 18 to 27. The informants represent the immigrants of the first and second generation with Asian or African roots.

I conducted all interviews in the library or in my dormitory. Mainly the Helsinki University Main Library in Kaisaniemi acted as the venue for the interviews. I always let the informants suggest both a time and a place for the interviews, but they usually asked me to decide the latter. The interviews were carried out in Finnish. According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme, problems might arise even though the interviews would be implemented with a common strong language. A real misunderstanding is imminent, if the researcher and the informant do not realize that they do not understand each other. Thus, I concentrated on posing plenty of specifying questions in order to avoid this problem.

4.5. Ethical questions

In this section I shortly reflect on how ethical guidelines are followed in my study. Steinar Kvale and Svend Brinkmann present that a researcher’s guidelines are traditionally connected to four fields: the role of the researcher, informed consent, confidentiality and consequences. Kvale and Brinkmann remark that applying the guidelines mechanically does not reach the goal. Situational factors should be considered. The researcher can utilize the ethical guidelines rather as a set of tools used when reflecting on the fulfillment of ethicality in the study than as final rules to apply.

Firstly, the ethical guidelines highlight the role of the researcher. Kvale and Brinkmann address the researcher’s integrity, which refers to the commitment to conducting the study morally and with allegiance to scientific quality. As the researcher, I actualized these requirements by familiarizing myself with the ethical guidelines before starting the study and by pursuing to make my proceedings as transparent as possible.

Following the ethical guidelines also includes ensuring the informed consent of the informants. Certain matters should be actualized in order to fulfil the requirements of informed consent. Informed consent involves providing the informant with information about the overall aim of the research and the most prominent features of the design. I introduced the main purpose of the study to each informant in the beginning of the interview situation by handing out a paper explaining how the interview will proceed and which major themes will be discussed. I usually provided the same information already when seeking the informants. Thus, I assured that the informants participated in the interviews voluntarily, as informed consent necessitates. As a part of informed consent, I also clarified for my informants how the

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135 Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 68–70.
137 Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 70.
Confidentiality of the interviews is guaranteed by denying access to the material by anyone else than the researcher.\textsuperscript{138} Additionally, all material, including recordings and transcriptions, was deleted after the analysis was completed.

Confidentiality guarantees that in the final work, none of the informants can be recognized based on private data that identifies them.\textsuperscript{139} Even though my study does not deal with a highly delicate topic, I resolved the question of confidentiality by using pseudonyms\textsuperscript{140} and describing informants only with general attributes. Also, the quotations presented in the analysis do not entail any identifiable information. Anonymity aims to protect the informants, but Kvale and Brinkmann note that anonymity may function in a detrimental way, if it only leads the researcher to interpret the informants’ statements arbitrarily. In that case, the voice of the informants might disappear, which would threaten the purpose of the whole study.\textsuperscript{141} Awareness of this pitfall made me handle the data very carefully.

The consequences of the research should be presented in terms of possible benefits and risks to people who participate in the study.\textsuperscript{142} I already pondered the basis of my study in the beginning of this chapter and expressed the aim of it to be increasing information about the topic. The study aspires to raise awareness of the Muslim minority in Finland and offer objective information compared to biased sources. Some of the themes generated a lot of discussion, so I believe many of the informants appreciated the opportunity to comment on certain topics. I assess that the study did not really include any intimate questions, and factors otherwise too damaging for the informants or a larger community do not exist.

\textbf{4.6 Analysis of the data}

The validity of a qualitative study is based on the researcher’s ability to justify his ways of conducting the study. Validity requires the researcher to report on how his descriptions and classifications of the studied people’s world originated.\textsuperscript{143} Hence, I now proceed to explain how I analyzed my data. Before introducing the process of analyzing the data, I return to explain some leading ideas behind the conduct of my whole study. My study employs inductive reasoning, but pure inductiveness is questionable in any research project. After all, my interview questions derived from some specific perspectives and presumptions. Thus, my approach actually involved elements from abductive reasoning described by Martti Grönfors.

\textsuperscript{138} Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 70–71.
\textsuperscript{139} Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 72.
\textsuperscript{140} Pseudonyms used in this work are, respectively, Amira, Malek, Jamila, Ranya, Rime, Ferdous, Hyatt, Arij, Ilief and Noura.
\textsuperscript{141} Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 73.
\textsuperscript{142} Kvale & Brinkmann 2009: 73.
A clear guiding principle did not exist, but general ideas assisted in the formation of the themes and questions for the interview.\footnote{144 Grönfors 1985: 33, 37.}  

A crucial point in research based on inductive reasoning is the attempt to organize data to a form which enables a reconstruction of meaningful classifications.\footnote{145 Grönfors 1985: 30–31.} However, the possibilities to generalize my results to hold true for other than my own data should be considered with caution. Quite a small number of interviews constitute my data, so I do not aim to offer generalizations in my study. I aspire to explain Finnish Muslim women’s relation to conflicts abroad, but the explanations cannot be regarded as final theoretical constructions. Rather they show some paths that future studies can take when approaching the topic. In other words, the explanations represent propositions that researches may draw on in the future.  

I started working with the interview data by transcribing recordings. Data do not have to be transcribed in great detail, depending on the research goals.\footnote{146 Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008: 139–140.} I transcribed every word and recognizable sound, but wrote down sighs and laughs only when they provided significant additional information of the informants’ statements. The repetition of some meaningless words was ignored in the transcription. In the beginning, I approached the transcribed data by creating mind maps and writing down different observations from the interviews. Conducting a study should extend beyond only following rituals or implementing conventional forms of research. Engaging in a dialogue with a study subject makes creative problem solving possible and constitutes a foundation for learning research methods.\footnote{147 Peltola 2007: 124.} Therefore, I focused on carefully familiarizing myself with the data from various angles before starting the actual analysis.  

Existing theories should function in a way that does not restrain the researcher. Sensitivity to observing the essential features of the research material remains, when the researcher does not merely lean on the chosen theories. Both questions derived from theories and questions raised from data guide when carrying out the analysis. I kept in mind that the purpose is not only to confirm already available theoretical perspectives, but also to observe different perspectives by investigating the relation between the studied case and various other perspectives.\footnote{148 Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008: 188–189.}  

I started analyzing the data by perceiving patterns in the informants’ statements. Pattern coding aims to understand recurrences and regularities in data. Pattern codes can be generated
in an early phase, but waiting until enough collected data support the codes in an unequivocal manner is also applied. The important point is just to be open for the reconfiguration of the themes and possibly applying new codes, if the data lead to different paths than in the beginning. In the end, the most compelling themes survive the recurring checks of codes and data.\textsuperscript{149}

The research questions always guide the analysis. Data does not provide answers without questions, even though it may offer hints as to what kind of questions are worth of examining.\textsuperscript{150} My themes for analysis were generated in cooperation with the research questions and the strong patterns that recurred in data. The three main themes follow the design of the interviews and the research questions, but the sub-themes entailed with them emerged more strongly from the interviews. The themes are partly overlapping, and strong relations exist between them. A strict separation of the different themes would be forced and artificial. Thus, the different themes refer to and discuss with each other in some points of the analysis.

After the composition of the themes, the process of my analysis proceeded to employ a qualitative content analysis. A qualitative content analysis generates a clear and verbal description of the studied phenomenon. A content analysis strives to achieve a compact form while still ensuring that information contained in the data does not disappear. In other words, a qualitative content analysis aims to draw a picture of the studied phenomenon by utilizing a summarized and general form. The achieved clarity of the organized data facilitates drawing credible conclusions. Critics of content analysis often point out the difficulties of achieving meaningful conclusions when the organized data is already presented as the final results.\textsuperscript{151} Therefore, my analysis aims to go further by using comparisons, paying attention to non-existing factors and leaning on discussions with earlier studies. A reflection on the specific themes in a theoretical way forms one objective of my analysis.

My interpretation of the data also aspires to ascertain meanings and relations between meanings which do not perform directly said in the interviews. Thus, interpretation leads to a comprehension beyond what is instantly apparent in a studied text. Interpreting meanings should also position the statements within a wider frame of reference by re-contextualizing, which my analysis aims to implement too.\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{148} Peuhkuri 2007: 136.  
\textsuperscript{149} Miles & Huberman 1994: 69–70, 72.  
\textsuperscript{150} Salo 2015: 172.  
\textsuperscript{151} Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2003: 105, 110.  
\textsuperscript{152} Kvale 2007: 108.
I chose 33 excerpts from the interviews to be included in the analysis. The chosen quotes illustrate well the various central angles of the whole case or introduce otherwise significant aspects to the themes. The citations in question attempt to simultaneously capture the essence and the diversity of the data. I selected the extracts in a balanced way, so that each informant’s perspective is featured in the final work and that none of the informants dominates the discussion. The excerpts were translated into English by Emma Niemi.

Before proceeding to introduce the next three chapters that constitute my analysis, I make the last remarks on this qualitative study. Even though the results aspire to reflect the informants’ thoughts in the most genuine way, they always arise from cooperation between the interviewer and the informant.\textsuperscript{153} Additionally, the impact of the researcher’s subjective views is present during the process of the study as illustrated above. Despite these factors, the final target is to mirror the world of the informants. The studied communities should also be able to support the interpretations that the researcher has made.\textsuperscript{154}

The analysis has been divided into three chapters that proceed from a more general description of the relation between the informants and conflicts abroad to chapters focusing on the role of religion in the relation and finally the role of the media. The first two chapters concentrate more on the transnational level, and the last one discusses the local level of the relation. After the analysis, the results chapter outlines the main findings and, in this way, provides answers to the research questions. The analysis chapters engage in a discussion with earlier research and the results chapter offers a new theoretical construction.

\textsuperscript{153} Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008: 189. \\
\textsuperscript{154} Hirsjärvi & Hurme 2008: 18.
5. Formation of relation to conflicts

5.1. Keeping track of conflicts
The informants use the media diversely ranging from social media to traditional print media and online versions of newspapers. Only few of the informants watch television and none of them listen to the radio. Additionally, the informants use both Finnish and foreign media sources. Several informants consider using various media sources important in order to receive a many-sided picture of news topics. An appreciation of various perspectives is also seen in the arguments on why certain sources are regarded as the most important. The informants aim to understand phenomena from different perspectives. Such a stance illustrates that the informants read about conflicts as well. None of the informants focuses strongly on one source only, and all are interested in perceiving conflicts from several angles.

The informants mostly use well-known media sources. Helsingin Sanomat is the most popular of the domestic media outlets, whereas Al Jazeera and BBC are the most followed foreign media sources. The informants read their preferred foreign sources in English. The informants rarely use small or local media sources. Thus, mainly the mainstream media decide which conflicts reach the awareness of the informants. In addition, the role of the social media as a source of information is prominent. Several informants state that news shared by their friends on Facebook help to familiarize with some conflicts.

The conflicts that the informants keep track of concentrate especially on the Middle East area. Syria and Israel-Palestine together constitute the most followed cases, but many countries in the region are mentioned at least once. The informants follow the situation of the Rohingya people most after the conflicts in Syria and Israel-Palestine. The number of conflicts the informants keep track of vary. On average, the informants say they keep track of three conflicts, including the situation in their origin country.

After this brief overview, an analysis of the relation between the informants and conflicts in other countries can begin. At first, I pay attention to the time and focus that is allocated for keeping track of a conflict. The informants’ relation to conflicts abroad in terms of the amount of time spent on following events can be described slight. Some informants even consider the expression “keeping track of” too strong. According to these informants, it seems an exaggerated way to describe their interests in conflicts.

The media mostly determine which conflicts are familiar to the informants. Actually, the media may even make it difficult to avoid being aware of some conflicts. A couple of the informants believe that they keep track of certain conflicts just because they continuously
appear in the media. Hence, their own interest in conflicts can be perceived as quite limited if it rests heavily only on the extent of the conflicts’ visibility in the mainstream media. Although two of the informants mention that they have attempted to seek more information about some conflict when the media has not provided enough or any details, unprompted activity mostly lacks among the informants.

The informants follow different media sources regularly, and the majority uses at least the sources they consider most important daily. Despite intense media use, conflicts remain a minor topic for the informants. The informants’ statements do not imply that they would focus particularly on conflict news. Amira offers one explanation to such an attitude:

(1)Most of the news I read related to the situation in Europe or to something that’s happening in Finland really have an impact on my life. Like if there’s going to be some changes in taxation, places of study or these sorts of things.

Obviously, conflicts abroad do not affect the everyday life in Finland, according to Amira. The lack of a direct connection generates a distant relation. If a person feels that a conflict does not tangibly affect him, his interest towards the case does not grow big. Several informants’ statements emphasize that they concentrate on news that affect their own daily lives. The disputes related to the use of a hijab are often mentioned as examples. Conflicts are located outside the most essential questions regarding life as a Muslim in Finland. However, the informants admit that conflicts cover a great deal of the media content on Muslims. Thus, reading about events in foreign countries occurs easily even though the informants would not deliberately aim to do that.

The informants are not highly interested in conflicts abroad in terms of the time spent on keeping or actions taken to keep track of conflicts. Most informants admit that they do not even know very well what the situations are like in various conflict zones. The informants’ relations to conflicts do not appear to be very significant on a personal level. As a matter of fact, two of the informants express quite strongly that they avoid news dealing with conflicts. Hence, they do not wish to build any relation to conflicts. On the other hand, one informant describes a conflict in her country of origin by using emotive words. Her utterances form an exception among the informants. Most informants are aware of conflicts and keep track of them sporadically, but they do not display a passion towards the topic. As emphasized above, conflicts remain distant in a sense that they do not have an influence on the everyday life of a young Finnish Muslim woman. A strongly conveyed lack of a personal relation is dominant among the informants. As a result, the informants do not pour a lot of time into keeping track of conflicts. The general relation to conflicts abroad could be described as remote.
5.2. Information sources and transnational possibilities

Several informants refer to visibility in the media when specifying reasons for keeping track of certain conflicts. The media seem to constitute the most important information source. The informants’ knowledge about conflicts rests on descriptions offered by the media, but the informants admit that such descriptions may provide insufficient or misleading messages.

Amira points out:

(2) When ISIS was in Iraq and I read the news about it, I thought that Iraq was completely under ISIS rule. The media gives ISIS and other terrorist organizations so much power and paint a very, very frightening picture of them. I’m not saying that they aren’t frightening, but it’s just that they don’t have as much power as the media lets on. If I hadn’t had relatives in Iraq, I would’ve thought that the country was finished. But then I heard that everybody lives at peace there and there’s only certain small areas where it’s happening.

Here, the informant’s own contacts allow her to receive factual information from the area that, according to the media, faces a harsh conflict. The media’s portrayal of the situation proves to be exaggerated in a negative way. Later Amira still notes that such inaccurate reportage deteriorates her trust in the media. The informants state that another problem exists in the media in relation to conflicts as well. According to the informants, the media do not handle some conflicts at all or do not enable people to gain all current information from each conflict area. However, again the informants do not show great motivation to acquire information through other means. The informants seem to accept uncertainty in relation to conflicts. All the criticism towards the media does not signify that the informants rely more on other sources when conflicts in distant countries are in question.

On the other hand, the media’s otherwise prominent role seems limited when pondering transnational dimensions. The media convey information, but no single media source appears dominant among the informants. Evidently, the informants do not blindly believe each fact the media maintains. Thus, the media is not able to provide spaces in which transnationalism could prosper in a way that alliances crossing state borders would emerge. The informants do not belong to Facebook groups or other equivalent clusters operated through the media that focus on conflict themes and support connecting to them transnationally. Again, the informants’ low level of interest can partly account for the absence of such groups among them. In any case, such transnationalism that the media would build alone and through which it would connect the informants to conflicts abroad in their daily lives does not exist.

The informants could also build transnational relations to conflicts otherwise than through the media. Amira points out above how her relatives living in a conflict area inform her about the situation there. All other informants also know people who reside in a conflict region or are otherwise well acquainted with conflict cases. According to the informants,
awareness of some conflicts, which the media does not report on, depends entirely on their friends or relatives who share their information. Malek mentions the situation of Kurds as an example. The informants seem to be able to utilize alternative sources regarding conflicts. Still, none of the informants highlight the importance of people such as friends or relatives in terms of understanding conflicts. Friends may remind them of some forgotten conflicts or relatives abroad might mention the latest incidents, but such people do not play a bigger role as information sources or contributors to transnationalism regarding conflicts.

The informants describe that they rarely discuss conflicts with their family or friends in general. Most of the informants keep in touch with their relatives in unstable countries regularly, but conflict situations do not often emerge in their conversations. The same absence of the topic applies to discussions with people in Finland. The reasons to speak about conflicts originate from current issues. Again, the media may evoke discussions or upcoming elections might raise questions. In any case, deeper levels are rarely achieved. The informants describe that conversations mostly focus on usual reflecting on incidents or explaining the Islamic perspective to non-Muslim friends, for instance. The informants tell that they converse about conflicts with both their Muslim and non-Muslim friends. According to the informants, the content of the discussions do not transform remarkably depending on the friends’ Muslim or other background. Jamila believes that she discusses conflicts more than an average person because of her friends’ involvement in many organizations. She continues by describing their conversations:

(3) And people are just like “hey, have you read this news”, “did you see this report”, and then there’s a lot of discussion. But we don’t really try to offer any solutions. It’s more like, “did you see what some other person wrote on the issue”, or that “could we do something about it in Finland, can we start a campaign on arms trade”, and these kinds of discussions.

The statement illustrates how an interest towards conflicts can emerge in the context of different organizations. Jamila’s connections to the organization and its people inspire interest in conflicts and encourage to take action. The next chapter focuses more on the informants’ own role regarding conflicts. Here the different organizations’ role in the construction of a relation to conflicts abroad is addressed. Not only Jamila but also some other informants mention their participation in the activities of various organizations. The majority of these organizations expect a Muslim background of their members. Thus, Jamila’s case is exceptional, because religious orientation does not matter in the organization that she refers to.

According to the informants, discussions about conflicts arise in all organizations. Discussions do not occur regularly, and they do not concentrate only on certain conflicts, but
rather the topics change. The informants do not consider conflicts a major theme in any organization, but the organizations allow them to reflect on a topic. As Jamila states above, the organizations do not aim to offer any solutions. In summary, the role of the organizations could be said to be sparking conversations. Simultaneously, they sometimes permit to take a more active role concerning conflicts abroad. It is noteworthy that none of the organizations approach conflicts from a religious perspective, not even when all members would represent Muslims. According to the informants, the focus lies on a political or human level. The informants do not mention any solid connections to people in conflict areas that they would maintain through the organizations. Hence, transnational relations do not form by attending the activities of organizations. Organizations do not promote in a clear way the creation of connections between the informants and conflicts abroad.

The same applies to the Islamic communities that the informants belong to. The majority of the informants go to a mosque more or less regularly. The informants visit five different mosques in the capital area. One mosque represents Shia Islam and the four others are Sunni mosques. According to the informants, conflicts are not dealt with significantly in the mosques. A couple of the informants refer to praying for victims or the imam’s mentions of recent incidents occurring in some conflict areas. Amira provides a description which summarizes the others’ insights as well:

(4) Sometimes people at our mosque inform us if there’s going to be a demonstration, for Palestine for instance. They tell us that hey, this is coming up. It’s usually in a very peaceful tone, just as how we talk about these kinds of things at the mosque. Usually we pray for our loved ones and the victims. According to Amira, the mosque mostly informs people about demonstrations related to conflicts. One informant also mentions occasional fundraisings organized by her mosque. Amira’s statement also underlines how the mosque approaches conflicts without passion. The other informants share this view. Apparently, mosques prioritize other topics over conflicts. At least according to Rime, people in her mosque prefer to raise relevant questions regarding young people’s lives. Additionally, in her opinion this approach aims to avoid negativity which supervenes from a permanent state of conflicts. Such notions illustrate more broadly the portrayals of the mosques presented by the informants in a sense that conflicts are not regarded as good or essential topics in the mosques.

It seems that conflicts are brought up in the mosques only when the members’ personal connections to conflict zones are recognized or when the purpose is to show general sympathy in prayers. Conflicts do not pertain to the main topics of Islamic communities. The interests in handling a topic partly relates to the willingness to serve the needs of the community members. Amira adds that information about conflicts and prayers for victims especially
concentrate on conflicts that occur in the mosque visitors’ countries of origin. According to
the informants, proper discussions or changing of opinions do not occur in the mosques. In
sum, mosques do not particularly offer new perspectives into conflicts, which organizations
sometimes manage to do. In addition, mosques do not seem to engender transnational
relations concerning conflicts. However, general encouragement to charity and informing
about demonstrations can support already existing transnational ties related to the topic,
although religious communities do not handle conflicts regularly.

Apparently, the informants have many links varying from personal relationships to
belonging to various organizations, which all handle conflicts occasionally. However, none of
such connections manage to construct transnationalism between the informants and conflicts
abroad. Even possible relatives in countries in conflict do not produce a stronger connection
to the events. The next section approaches this question from the perspective of family
members in Finland, but relatives abroad are handled shortly as well. The analysis will focus
especially on parents and examine if they provide some new angles to understanding the
informants’ relation to conflicts abroad.

5.3. The family and conflicts abroad
Other people’s impact on understanding conflicts abroad is mostly confined to conveying
current information, as was illustrated in the previous section. Communication with relatives
offers an opportunity to gain knowledge about situations in different places, but the
informants do not regard discussions about conflict
s with relatives as plentiful. This section
analyses other aspects that family members bring to the informants’ relation towards
conflicts. At first, I should emphasize that despite of a regular communication with remote
family members, the relation can be described superficial. Some informants even state that
they do not feel that they have that much in common with their relatives abroad. Hence, the
topic of conflicts does not naturally exist as a big part of conversations, when discussions
cover only the most everyday topics. Nonetheless, conflicts sometimes affect ordinary lives.
Ranya illustrates this as follows:

(5)But last fall, when there were these bigger explosions, of course we called them right after and asked if
everything was okay, but we didn’t talk about politics then either. Mostly we asked if everyone was all
right, if there were any problems in the district they lived in and if they felt threatened by anything. That
sort of thing.

Obviously, concerns enter to the picture whenever bombings or comparable incidents occur.
Ranya describes that conflicts emerge in discussions mostly when they may affect relatives
physically. The same description comes up in some of the other informants’ statements as
well. Conflicts cause negative feelings because they constitute a real threat for people that the
informants know personally. Not all informants consider being very close with their relatives abroad, but they still admit the importance of such people as family members. Thus, although conflicts do not become salient cases for the informants or affect their personal lives per se, conflicts seem to play some role indirectly via relatives. Family members in conflict countries bring situations closer and trigger reactions in the form of worrying. In this way, conflicts become more tangible for the informants and they have to face the consequences of the conflict situations.

The same effect exists in a different form in the relation to family members in Finland who have a closer connection to conflicts. Several informants’ parents have personal experiences of conflicts. They have lived in a country when a conflict has arisen or have fled because the atmosphere has grown tense. A personal relation to events can be seen in reactions, which in turn affect the people around. Rime recounts:

(6) That you see that even though your parents left the place in the 90s, the same situation and the same people still remain there. The same situation goes on, and the latest things that happened there were these big attacks. It has touched me personally to see my parents’ wounds open again because they have lived through the same situation.

Rime’s statement demonstrates how the other person’s pain becomes more tangible when the suffering person is your own mother or father. Conflicts do not remain remote regarding some relatives that you have not even met in years. Additionally, caring does not concern physical injuries, but emotional well-being forms the main question. Observing an important person suffering from a close proximity brings a new set of meanings to a conflict. The consequences of a conflict can be noticed. Later in the interview, Rime expresses a hope that her parents could deal better with the past, but she speculates that it will not occur when the situation in their country of origin continues to be unstable. If the parents cannot escape the impacts of the conflicts after all, neither are their children able to be completely immune from them. Rime does not describe that her parents’ reactions would harm her well-being deeply, but that regardless of that, their misery is painful to watch. The conflict seems to influence and penetrate into the everyday life in an undesired way.

The statement above does not imply that Rime could identify with her parents’ feelings. It implies that they deal with conflicts differently. Such difference between the informant and her parents’ relation to conflicts is common in the interviews. According to many informants, their parents have a more personal and closer stance. This corresponds to the observations of Weinzimmer, who compares the first and second generation. Some of the informants and their parents fit this classification perfectly. On the other hand, all of the informants in my study approach conflicts chiefly in the same way, even though they
represent both generations. Apparently, how close the relation becomes depends more on the
time spent in the new country than in the place of birth. Each informant of the first generation
has lived for most of her life in Finland, which is almost as long as the second-generation
informants.

Anyway, differences in relations to conflicts in one’s country of origin exist between
the informants and their parents. A few of the informants underline that their parents simply
know better about the situations in their countries of origin, so the informants cannot
understand conflicts in a similar way to their parents. Malek notices that the older generation
also speaks more about conflicts and follows events more intensely by using local media. All
these observations illustrate well the differences between generations. The informants cannot
share interests or deeper feelings with their parents concerning conflicts, so approaches are
not transferred to the next generation. The younger generation builds their own relations to
conflicts by themselves. Haikkola states that the second generation needs to construct
transnational links independently. According to my interviews, the younger generation is
generally forced to do so, and transnationalism regarding conflicts is formed independently.

Feelings and interests related to conflicts abroad constitute only one of the differences
between the informants and their parents’ relation to conflicts. The majority of the informants
recognize differences more broadly in a general approach to conflicts, not only regarding a
conflict in their country of origin. Several informants claim that their parents interpret
conflicts more from only one perspective. According to Amira, her parents always blame
certain countries if something horrific occurs. Most of the informants recognize the same
phenomenon. According to the informants, their parents hold a very narrow view concerning
situations abroad. As a result, the informants cannot share their parents’ opinions, but they
aim to broaden their outlook. Amira concludes:

(7)On the whole, the way my family talks at home is very provocative. Every time something happens
everyone gets so angry and against everything. At home, I’m the so-called westerner, and I’m like hey,
that’s not really the case. When we talk among our family, it’s usually me who tries to soften the others’
opinions and views since they are quite strong.

Amira describes that she approaches issues more like a Westerner, which in this context refers
to a more neutral stance. Instead, her parents seem to have very strong views regarding any
turn of events. Such insights appear unfamiliar and unpleasant to Amira, so she attempts to
soften these opinionated stances. This shows that efforts to adopt her parents’ views do not
exist, but she prefers modifying their approaches. Clearly, Amira builds pictures of conflicts
independently from her parents’ opinions as all the other informants do as well.
The informants believe that the older generation’s biased views rise from many sources. Personal experiences as presented above have an influence, because they allow to connect difficult memories to current events. This does not explain everything. Two informants suggest that propaganda from their country of origin still resonates in people’s attitudes. Contrary to their own critical approach to reading news, the informants’ parents follow incidents more from fewer sources, and a once learned way of thinking guides their interpretation, according to the informants. For instance, the informants do not automatically consider that their country of origin could not also be responsible for the escalation of conflict events, as opposed to their parents’ reading about the situation. Evidently, the difference between the approaches is also based on the use of different media, which strengthens understanding events from a certain perspective. If the media do not offer clear spaces where the informants’ transnationalism would prosper, at least the media seem to contribute to sustain their parents’ thoughts formed earlier on conflict zones.

However, all the informants do not identify big differences between their and their parents’ relation towards conflicts. Their parents’ unbiased opinions unify all such cases. Apparently, experiences and feelings related to conflicts of one’s country of origin easily separate the informants from the older generation, but the general opinions about conflicts may meet, if an openness for new perspectives exists among the parents. In conclusion, the differences in feelings reflect how the significance of conflict events decreases when proceeding to the approaches of the younger generation. Identifying oneself with strong feelings becomes challenging and the partiality dominating the interpretation of any conflict’s developments diminishes when comparing the informants’ generation to an older one. The influence of the family in forming opinions of or closer ties to conflicts seems limited. Nevertheless, family members may bring events closer.

5.4. Feelings regarding conflicts
The previous sections outlined an overview that portrays the young Finnish Muslim women’s relation to conflicts abroad as distant. Feelings evoked by conflicts support such a picture. The informants describe their emotions most often with the word ‘sad’ when they think about conflicts. Understandably, conflicts cause negative feelings and sadness is one of the most common ones. The informants associate sad feelings with the suffering of the people in conflict zones and with the victims’ innocence of the reasons that have led to the current situation. Especially children are mentioned as innocent sufferers. Ranya summarizes well the overall view:
Personally, I feel kind of sad, because I think it’s always wrong when innocent people get hurt. It’s always fundamentally wrong when someone who’s innocent has to suffer because a head of state has done something.

Ranya comments on the matter on a general level. Sad feelings do not concern any specific situation or a group of people. The other informants’ feelings also relate mostly to generic observations about conflict situations. Only one’s own vision of what happens in warfare, for example, evokes a desperate feeling. Such a position confirms that the informants are not well aware of what is currently occurring in certain conflict zones. Undetailed descriptions support a perception that the informants do not keep track of any conflict very closely. The informants do not have strong emotions towards particular conflicts, so the distance towards them remains. Because the informants do not specify events, places or people when describing their feelings, general hopelessness relates to the mechanisms of conflicts that are considered unfair.

The previous section already analyzed to some extent the informants’ relation to their countries of origin from the perspective of their family members. The analysis focused on comparing the informants and their parents’ relation to conflicts in their countries of origin. Now I focus specifically on what thoughts the informants have concerning conflicts in their countries of origin. Each informant follows the situation in their country of origin. All of these countries are currently not affected by acute conflicts, when an acute conflict is defined as inflicting casualties and posing a threat of everyday violence. However, the situation can be described fragile everywhere, sometimes resulting from unrest in neighboring countries as well.

The informants’ relation to the events in their countries of origin varied. Almost each informant calls her country of origin her homeland, but patriotic reactions or views are otherwise absent. Principally, the informants do not seem to have a much closer relation to their countries of origin compared to other countries in conflict. Using the word homeland does not gain any confirmation from the informants’ other statements. According to the informants, they do not identify strongly with the people in their countries of origin. Ferdous forms an exception by stating:

(9) This may sound very patriotic, but in a way you think that hey, these are my brothers and sisters that were killed here. So, they are like my blood, bones and skin. Maybe because of that you can sort of identify with them more or feel more compassion.

Ferdous relates to people in her country of origin in a passionate way. She considers the connection quite deep. Thus, the informant believes that she is able to identify with the situation of these people. The other informants actually offer almost an opposite approach. Several informants admit to not have a clear understanding of the events in their countries of
origin. In that case, identifying with people in conflict situations is also challenging. However, the informants feel that conflicts in their countries of origin concern them more than native Finnish people. The informants’ responses also imply that Finland is anyway closer than a country of origin in terms of feeling of belonging. Malek ponders the differences between a relation to one’s country of origin or any country that is geographically closer in terms of conflicts:

(10) But then again, if there’s a conflict in some European country, you kind of relate to it too because you live in Europe yourself. It feels that both are so close to you because you live in Europe, and at the same time you’re a Muslim and from Africa, too. If something happens in Europe, you follow the news quite a lot, because you think that ‘Oh no, it’s so close’. And then, if something happens in a Muslim country, you follow the news quite a deal, too. So, you’re kind of in the middle ground, when both are so close to you.

Malek concludes that she in some ways identifies with both cases. She positions herself in the middle when comparing conflicts in Europe or in Africa. The majority of the informants can agree with such a stance. Their identification with their countries of origin cannot be described intense, but the informants do not regard the situations in their countries of origin as indifferent either. Anyway, deep reactions do not exist. Conflicts in their countries of origin do not touch the informants thoroughly, but the places and situations inevitably concern them through their own roots.

The informants’ reactions to conflicts originate from general sympathy for suffering people. The feelings do not focus on any specific place. Even the countries of origin do not mainly evoke stronger feelings. Feelings connected to conflicts abroad indicate that the Finnish Muslim women’s relation to them is quite remote. The quotation above already leads to the themes of the next chapter. Malek states that she follows the media coverage of conflicts in Muslim countries because she is a Muslim from Africa. The next chapter aims to provide insights into how religion is connected to conflicts in the informants’ views.
6. The role of religion

6.1. Islam and conflicts

The question about the position of Islam in relation to conflicts does not appear dominant in the responses of the informants. The informants do not instantly connect religion to conflicts. Actually, some distance between the two is considered desirable among the informants. Several informants underline how conflicts belong to the political sphere and therefore religion should be clearly separated from these questions. Jamila encapsulates her thoughts as follows:

(11)I’m the kind of person who doesn’t want to mix religion and politics together. And I think that if something happens in a Muslim country, it doesn’t readily mean that it’s a Muslim issue. If you think about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example. If you want to start dragging religions into it, we have Islam, Judaism and Christianity, too. I think it’s really, really problematic, since I see it as a purely political matter.

Jamila argues that issues do not automatically become relevant in terms of Islam if they occur in a Muslim country. According to Jamila, this implies how religion forms its own domain which should remain independent. She sees confusing religions with conflicts as very problematic and provides the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as an example. The other informants share the view that religion as a part of a conflict causes problems. Some informants ponder how religion is misused in the context of conflicts. The informants criticize practices in which religion has been intertwined with politics. One informant mentions cases where a country encourages its citizens to fight in the name of Islam as an example of this. Opposing the inclusion of religion in conflicts seemingly relates to one’s own observations of how the combination of religion and politics leads to a poor outcome. Thus, not only the importance of not mixing religion too easily with issues that are originally unrelated to it, but also perceiving bad consequences resulting from such situations has influenced the opinions of the informants. They prefer a non-religious approach to conflicts.

Additionally, according to the informants, discussion on conflicts do not prevail in Finnish mosques, as was elaborated in the previous chapter. The informants suppose that reasons for this are related to the political nature of conflicts and the aspiration to distinguish between religion and politics in a religious space. The informants value such a practice, because mosques should remain open for everyone. Ranya states that everyone has their own opinions, but people are equal in a mosque, so politics do not belong there. Hence, the mosques do not urge discussions about conflicts, according to the informants’ experiences, and they wish the mosques would maintain such an approach in the future as well.

However, a clear separation between religion and politics does not signify that a religious approach is completely excluded when building a relation to conflicts. Importantly,
the informants’ negative attitudes towards the role of religion in conflicts concern strongly only the political dimension. Conflicts as such should be interpreted and approached in the realm of politics, but people in conflict zones form a different view. People encountering daily the horrors of war or otherwise suffering receive a more humane approach in the informants’ statements. Here religion is also addressed. Islam appears to be a unifying force. Many informants associate a closer relation to conflicts in Muslim countries with a common belief and a shared culture. Conflicts still remain quite remote. Hyatt comments on this as follows:

(12) It’s just because they’re closer to us culturally and we have something in common through religion. You can maybe identify more with the people there, but on the other hand you can’t, because they’re living in a totally different situation than we do. But we have something in common.

The statement expresses an ambivalence that illustrates many informant’s insights regarding conflicts in Muslim countries. Similarities with people in conflict zones are recognized. Identifying with them is mainly based on the same religion and culture originating from a shared faith. Despite the resemblances, only a few of the informants conveys a picture that they could identify with Muslims in conflict situations without hesitations. The informants do notice unitive factors, which should generate the feeling of identification, but such as Hyatt above, they struggle to actualize such feelings.

The difficult relation becomes apparent when the informants refer to a responsibility regarding Muslims in conflicts. Interestingly, a bond with other Muslims is linked to an idea of responsibility. A couple of the informants clearly bring up how they feel obliged to keep track of conflicts involving Muslims. The informants do not describe this as a burden. On the other hand, one informant reveals that she does not actively keep track of conflict news and, as a result, has a guilty conscience. Arij comments on the same theme:

(13) After all, it has seemed like there’s this responsibility, since we pretty much share the same culture and the same language, Arabic. Every Muslim has it, but most of them can’t speak Arabic. But those in the Middle East know the language because it’s their mother tongue. And then there’s the religion, which is so vast that everyone is considered brothers and sisters – in a religious sense. That sets a duty to look after our brothers and sisters.

Clearly, the suffering of Muslims in other countries creates responsibilities. According to Arij, Islam includes an idea of caring for Muslims around the world. The statement follows Bowen’s argumentation that thoughts on common duties arise from the nature of Islam, because Islam promotes the view of the Islamic community spanning beyond specific borders or boundaries. Duties concerning fellow Muslims do not limit to certain countries or ethnicities, which features in the informants’ thoughts as the sections above illustrate.

The same attitude of caring for fellow Muslims is expected of Muslims abroad as well. One informant recollects how someone once wondered why she without a Middle Eastern
background is so interested in the area. He also questioned if people in the Middle East would show as great an interest as her towards her country of origin. The informant concludes her account by assuring that people from the Middle East would care if their own situation was better. Caring appears as a universal obligation. Thus, according to the informants’ statements, such a duty concerns Finnish and all other Muslims.

Bayat’s term imagined solidarity explains the sentiment of the responsibility to look after other believers. The informants do not have contacts to all conflict zones and they do not emphasize that a communication with locals would play a crucial role in their relation to conflicts. Thus, the responsibility emerges from an imagined sense of sharing the same duty without actually personally meeting with all the Muslims in conflict zones. In other words, the informants’ transnational Islam is composed through shared beliefs with people in conflict zones. Islam unites all believers together in the imagination of the informants and encourages loyalty towards fellow Muslims in different circumstances. In this way, the identification with Muslims in conflicts is linked to a responsibility derived from Islam.

In this connection, it is good to return to the role of the media in building transnationalism towards conflicts. If transnational Islam is based on the imagination with scarce real contacts, information about conflicts is needed to know about situations and thus be able to construct a relation to them. As Cohen and Appadurai emphasize, the modern technology assists hugely in that. Although any specific media platform does not constitute a space for transnationalism among the informants, the media offer extensive resources for transnationalism by acting as the main information source about conflicts abroad.

It is noteworthy that the informants do not refer to umma when they speak about a connection between all Muslims. None of them argues that belonging to the same umma obliges to care for other Muslims’ well-being. The informants only use the words sisters and brothers, as Arij above does. Apparently, umma does not play an important role in understanding global relations among Muslims in the realm of conflicts. Umma does not naturally come up in the interviews, so the concept is not considered appealing enough or it does not serve the needs of the informants in other ways, which prove Halliday and Roy’s observations of the term’s lack of attractiveness. Transnational Islam gains its legitimization among the informants through other concepts.

One prominent feature in the informants’ relation to conflicts relates to a lack of identification with the emotions of the people in conflict zones. As discussed above, identification is based on external factors. Religion and culture unite, but the informants do not say they relate to the feelings that Muslims in conflict zones have. Hyatt’s quotation
earlier in this section describes such an ambivalent feeling of identifying with Muslims in conflicts. The informants do not compare their lives in Finland with those of people abroad. An unfair treating experienced by Muslims in conflicts does not find a correspondence with the informants’ daily lives in a way that identification would occur spontaneously. On the contrary, the informants seem to consider it difficult to closely identify with these Muslims. They do not detect similarities or shared experiences in terms of the everyday life. This differs clearly from Güney’s study, which suggests that the powerlessness and marginalization of British Muslims strengthen their identification with suffering fellow believers in conflict areas.

The lack of sharing experiences on an emotional level may indicate that attitudes towards the Finnish society and the larger population are quite positive or at least neutral. The informants do not bring up that they encounter systematic discrimination because of their Muslim background. They do not identify with victims in conflict situations by associating their own possible misery with them. Hence, Clifford’s idea of transnationalism as a means of survival due to a minority status does not exist among the informants. They do not aim to build a connection somewhere else as a part of the empowering discourse.

Perhaps the almost nonexistent role of Finland in conflicts contributes to the informants’ general attitudes. The minor role of Finland in crises abroad does not require the informants to analyze their relation more deeply. The situation is different for Muslims in Western countries that actively participate in conflicts occurring in Muslim countries, when a common wrongdoer can even be shared. In summary, the informants relate to Muslims in conflicts by sharing a faith, not by identifying with their feelings originating from bad experiences.

It is essential to notice that the informants do not offer a conclusion that Muslims are always victims in all places and at all times. Actually, the informants do not even focus only on the conflicts in Muslim countries in the interviews. A few of the informants note that most conflicts occur in Muslim countries, but naturally victims deserve attention regardless of their background and the same general negative feelings relate to all conflicts. This also supports the observation that the informants do not particularly concentrate on suffering Muslims nor do they feel justified to only speak about victims with a Muslim identity. In any case, responsibilities towards Muslims separate them from other people in conflicts. Lastly, Ilef presents a new angle on how religion reflects on the relation to conflicts:

(14) We have this concept in our religion that God tests people in different ways, and that those who are suffering or dealing with a different situation in life than we do have God’s grace and help and that they
get rewarded. That God rewards them for their patience and what they are going through. In a way, that gives you consolation. Illef discusses conflicts from a religious doctrinal perspective which concerns suffering people. She comforts herself with the thought of justice served in the end. Trusting that everything has a purpose helps to accept horrible destinies. Islam allows an angle where suffering will be rewarded, so it does not seem so irrational. In other words, the religion offers hope when understanding situations in conflict zones becomes more and more difficult. The religion does not only combine people transnationally, but faith can function on a personal level by explaining the broader picture. Such a view does not collide with the separation of religion and conflicts discussed above. Conflicts still concern the realm of politics, but personal faith helps to accept unfair events that people have to encounter. Islam does not explain conflicts now and here. The religion just provides calmness because there is a meaning behind each act and suffering.

6.2. One’s own role
The informants argue that Islam obliges all Muslims to look after each other. How is such a duty implemented in practice or do the informants only acknowledge it without actually acting on it? The first chapter of the analysis presented a distant relation between the informants and conflicts abroad. Thus, understandably, the informants do not continuously perform as active operators in their relation to conflicts. However, a few ways to make a difference emerge in the interviews. Ranya recounts:

(15) Let’s take the conflict in Syria, for example. Of course I participated in protests and all when it began. Of course we talk about it a little, but as sad as it sounds, we know that as individuals we can’t do much else than show solidarity and that’s about it. Well, you can always donate old clothes. Maybe do as little as spread the word that hey, if you have something to spare and want to donate to a charity, here’s a good cause. It’s better than nothing.

Ranya enumerates a few means how Muslims in Finland can contribute to aiding people abroad. Other informants mention similar ways to help. Participating in demonstrations comes up as the major opportunity among the informants to affect the lives of people in conflicts. In addition to Ranya’s list, the informants mention fundraising and praying for people and better days. The activities include both material and immaterial subjects streaming, which Mandaville highlights as essential in the context of transnational Muslim solidarity. Apparently, the informants believe in showing solidarity for fellow Muslims by both concrete acts and intangible thoughts. Each informant mentions at least one of the acts presented above, but not all of them imply that they themselves actively participate in these acts in reality. Anyway, expressing solidarity through deeds and words is recognized as a good way
of having an influence among the informants. Such attitude and activities can be interpreted as the actual implementation of the duty of caring for Muslim sisters and brothers.

Transnationalism actualizes in the form of various actions with the main purpose to show caring for Muslim fellows. The informants’ statements about acts of aiding underline precisely showing empathy. Instead, aspirations to have real impacts are not expressed. The informants’ statements do not indicate a trust in having a power to actually influence matters, as Ranya’s statement above already proves. Malek has also lost her confidence to really achieve something by organizing demonstrations:

(16) People try to participate in demonstrations, even though I don’t believe anymore that they make a difference at all. You just feel like you can’t do anything about anything. It’s like you can’t help or have an impact on anything.

Malek’s belief in actually making a difference appears weak. This is reflected on a decreased willingness for involvement in demonstrations. Malek only refers to the aims of other people to participate. Frustration illustrates her feelings and has led to a lack of motivation to act. Several reasons can exist behind such an attitude. Firstly, the continuous nature of conflicts makes people drained. Conflicts seem ceaseless and consequently any aims to aid appear insignificant. Some of the informants bring up how they feel that conflicts never end. Secondly, Malek perceives her personal possibilities to influence matters as negligible. Of course, the informants’ general remote relation to conflicts do not support the formation of a passion to influence and a trust in their own chances to make a difference. Additionally, interests in caring for all Muslims widely without focusing on any specific group undermine achieving results anywhere. Other factors can be traced too. Noura points out that her position does not enable her to influence matters greatly:

(17) It’s always sad, and since I can’t do anything about it, I don’t really know how to take it [a conflict] in. You just have to accept what’s going on. And maybe in the future, if you have more power, you can speak out and do something about it. But since I’m this young, I don’t think I can do anything.

The statement above describes how the prospect of having an impact on conflicts as a young person appears unlikely. Noura’s realistic view still encompasses hope after all. She admits current constraints, but does not exclude the possibility of influencing matters in the future. Another informant also expresses a wish to make a difference through a certain organization over the course of time. Some of the informants clearly do not completely reject the prospect of contributing one day. The informants’ insights seem to be divided into two groups. Others accept their minor roles and do not expect changes in that. The minority expresses the possibility of being capable of acting influentially in the long run. Their plans are not clear, but a little bit of optimism is present. Despite the differences in their views, the informants agree on the responsibility of the decision makers and rulers. The previous section discussed
how the informants prefer approaching conflicts from a political perspective. Such attitude also directs the informants to expect solutions from political leaders, not from ordinary people like themselves. Some informants even express their disappointment towards current politicians regarding conflict resolution.

In general, a lack of trust in possible ways or personal chances to contribute in aiding people in conflicts is dominant among the informants. Such factors in turn show in motivation. Rime explains her own low level of motivation by stating that coping with all personal issues forms enough challenges. The capacities are simply limited and do not allow to play a bigger role in relation to conflicts abroad. Interestingly, Rime connects the topic to the question of foreign fighters as well. She does not understand the phenomenon, and accentuates how one cannot assist in such a way:

(18) We’ve always had the kind of mindset that we don’t participate in any extreme actions. My parents have always said that everyone has to personally, because we have the five daily prayers. If you can’t even get through those, how could you help other people. Those extreme actions that some people take are on no account right.

Rime highlights the absurdity of leaving for fighting abroad when the basic duties of Islam are not even fulfilled. Her parents have instructed her in that way. Besides unmet religious obligations in everyday life, Rime condemns the phenomenon otherwise as well. Later she accentuates that acting as a foreign fighter does not belong to Islam. Similarly, a few other informants comment on the phenomenon. Each of them judges such behavior. One informant wonders how some Finnish Muslims end up traveling in order to fight in the ranks of ISIS, for instance. She does not recognize which issues attract people to leave when you cannot even speak the language. Other informants point out other problems in foreign fighting. They ponder the difficulty of ensuring fighting for the right side and the wrong of killing from the perspective of Islam. Islam says that killing one person equals killing the whole society, explains one informant. Consequently, according to the informants, fighting does not constitute an acceptable way to solve issues.

Foreign fighters do not generate a lot of discussion among the informants. Less than half of the informants bring up the issue, and they mostly comment on it shortly in the middle of other topics. However, the informants do not avoid the issue. It seems that the informants just do not consider foreign fighters to be a big issue or at least they do not have a lot to say about such people. This implies that the phenomenon does not generally concern the informants. Only one informant says that she knows someone who has left for fighting, but the case is still not connected to her life. She only mentions her perplexity related to the
announcement of leaving, because she regards foreign fighters’ way of thinking as frightening.

Interpreting why foreign fighters do not form a more essential topic among the informants is challenging. After all, the media has offered much space for the phenomenon of foreign fighters. Maybe a lack of close personal experiences of people ending up foreign fighters and the understanding that Islam does not approve fighting account for the small number of statements about the issue. The informants simply do not deem the phenomenon worthy of discussion. In addition, according to the informants, the topic is not dealt with in the mosques, except in one location. The informant who speaks most about the issue attends the activities of that mosque. However, mainly the media introduce the phenomenon to the informants. Because the religious communities do not start conversations, the informants are not forced to ponder the question more broadly.

6.3. Israel-Palestine
Each informant tells that they follow the news on the conflict country which represents their or their parents’ country of origin. The majority’s personal relations to conflicts in those countries do not differ significantly from other conflicts, even though relatives bring the situations closer. However, as most conflicts, the conflicts in the countries of origin do not engender strong feelings or opinions. Even though the media coverage of certain places such as Syria and Myanmar is largely followed by the informants, it does not cause more particular emotions or reactions. One conflict among the most followed cases forms an exception, namely the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which differs from all other conflicts in a couple of ways.

Firstly, Israel-Palestine evokes interest among the majority of the informants, even though it does not possess the same acute character of the crisis as the other two news topics that the informants follow the most. At the time of the interviews, Israel has mostly drawn attention because of president Trump’s proposal to relocate the embassy of the USA from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. Secondly, the situation in Israel-Palestine area has a longer history than the ongoing Syrian war or the persecution of the Rohingya people. Thus, also the conflict has featured in the media for a longer time. Malek refers to the media’s big role when pondering reasons for the extensive interest in Israel and Palestine. Then her speculations take another direction:

(19) The Palestinian conflict reminded me that it probably means something that the mosque, a sacred place for all, is located there. Everyone wants it to themselves, so Jerusalem and the holy mosque might have quite a big impact on the issue. Everyone is interested.
According to Malek, the interest in the situation of Palestine relates to religion as well. In addition to the presence in the media, an important religious site located in the area feeds people’s interests. Israel-Palestine represents a place that generally unites Muslims. Such religious roots of the interests in the conflict area distinguish Palestine from other conflicts. The religious relation to Palestine is not strongly expressed among the informants. However, the informants refer to Palestine if they provide examples of a subject of demonstrations. Solidarity towards the Palestinian people manifests in a clearer manner compared to people in other conflict areas. Regardless of the scarcity of religious explanations to keep track of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict, some kind of symbolic value of a holy place may have turned it into a notable case. The significance of the conflict is conveyed through some of the informants’ statements in terms of arguments and expressions of feelings. Generally, conflicts generate negative feelings, but the situation of Palestine is the most often used example in case the informants express stronger opinions:

(20) The situation in Palestine has gone on for years and years now. It’s such an unfair situation because everyone is aware of it, each and every state and probably all people, too. But the situation is still getting worse and worse. In a way, I don’t think that we ever, or at least in the coming years, achieve a reconciliation, because of the Great Powers. Well, USA and its allies are sort of on Israel’s side in this matter, and because of that, Western countries don’t necessarily dare to defend Palestinians and their rights so fiercely as I think they should. Nothing is really done to help the situation. So much injustice is happening.

Ferdous clearly shows that her empathy is reserved for Palestinians. She recognizes that the problems are derived from super power politics which hinder reaching solutions. The statement implies that Ferdous has an overall view of the conflict. Any other conflict does not produce a similarly clear stance among the informants. Otherwise conflicts remain distant, but three informants plainly express their support for Palestinians. As was noted above, Palestine’s situation constitutes a popular topic for demonstrations. Supporting the Palestinians’ rights seems to be a common aim that unites the informants from different backgrounds. Naturally, the complex nature of many other conflicts complicates choosing sides or demonstrating only for one group. However, one of the informants even emphasizes the distinct character of Israel-Palestine. Hyatt tells that she knows a lot of people who think that Israel should not exist and that the area is really Palestine. Her experience does not illustrate a broader reality but confirms that the events in Israel-Palestine provoke strong feelings among Muslims.

In sum, the informants’ feelings related to Israel-Palestine differ from reactions to other conflicts. Sadness generally exists, but a feeling of unfairness is often repeated, as in Ferdous’ quotation above. Using the adjective ‘unfair’ strengthens the perception that the informants palpably support one group of people and express more feelings towards them in the conflict.
in question. Even though the interest in Israel-Palestine may initially originate from some religious views, the informants do not emphasize them. Perhaps Palestine symbolizes something in the Islamic world and thus has received a lot of attention from the Finnish Muslims too, but the feelings related to the conflict are expressed without an explicit reference to religion.
7. The role of the media

7.1. Problems of the media

In the first part of the analysis, the media proved to constitute the most important source for keeping track of conflicts. The second part pointed out the importance of the media as a resource to build transnationalism through the imagination. This third part deals with how the media also play an essential role in the process of how conflicts affect the informants’ everyday lives. I begin the analysis here by introducing how the informants perceive the media in the context of conflicts in order to identify the consequences of the media better. As pointed out earlier, the informants use very varied media sources when following the news on and reading about conflicts. Interestingly, in the end they bring up similar observations of the media’s manner of portraying conflicts involving Muslims. Mostly they associate negative notions with the news that the media produce on the topic. However, not all thoughts are completely negative in content:

(21) I think that when you talk about conflicts between Muslims, they are presented in the news like no one can speak out as an outsider about what is right and what is wrong. Maybe that’s the reason why [the media] speculate how things are working out and what’s going on there. I don’t know any better what’s going on there.

Rime’s quotation illustrates that the problem is not located in what the media reports on remote conflicts that occur between Muslims. She does not exactly think that the media provides wrong information. She believes in the media’s attempt to report on conflicts truthfully, because she does not have any better information. The statement also reveals that in Rime’s opinion, the media is impartial regarding conflicts in far regions. As exposed in the first part of the analysis, the relation to conflicts abroad is distant for the majority of the informants. Such a view is conveyed in the statement above. Assessing the media becomes challenging or even unnecessary when conflicts do not evoke strong feelings and one’s own knowledge is limited.

Thus, the informants do not judge all media or the media’s way of handling conflict news, which is important to notice. The media is not thoroughly condemned. Furthermore, some problems in conflict news coverage are not considered that bothering from a personal perspective. The interviews reveal such shortcomings involving issues relating to the briefness of the news or the media not generally reporting broadly enough on conflict situations. The informants do not stress such issues, so they do not represent significant factors to them. The media’s core role in the informants’ relation to conflicts exists in other issues. The next sections present problematic features that the informants recognize in the
media’s relation to conflicts involving Muslims. Such features influence their lives and therefore the informants express plenty of arguments when pondering the media’s practices.

7.1.1. Framing

The problems in reporting news that seem to really affect the lives of the informants spin considerably around a question how the news is framed. Stigmatizing turns out to be the issue mentioned most often during the interviews. Now, the reflections of the informants do not discuss news reporting on long-term conflicts, but rather how the media depict terrorist acts. According to the informants, news coverage of terrorist attacks carries one clear feature.

Malek states:

(22) Usually, for some reason, people don’t want to use the word ‘terrorist’ if the matter is not related to Muslims. It’s mostly a label that Muslims have gotten. But I don’t think that someone who kills other people is very much a Muslim or considers themselves to be one.

Malek feels that the media automatically label perpetrators as terrorists when they are identified as Muslims. According to her view, the media simply reserve the term only for Muslims. Nearly all informants share the observation that similar acts executed by non-Muslims are never called terrorism. The informants state that the media does not focus on the perpetrator’s background at all when they have been pronounced a Muslim. A non-Muslim case would be dealt with by pointing to mental health issues. The informants also notice that recognizing terrorists as Muslims often occurs quickly based only on a certain kind of name or physical appearance. Hyatt notes that the media always associate a foreigner or an immigrant with a Muslim background. Such associations and labelling as terrorists exemplify the act of othering and an Orientalist approach, which forms a continuum for the long-standing attitudes of the West towards Muslims and Islam.

In her quotation, Malek also ponders how such labelling of terrorists as Muslims would not seem a justifiable choice even if the perpetrators had a Muslim background. This acts as a reminder of how being born into certain religion does not correspond with practicing or representing that religion in real life. According to the informants, such a tendency of the media to continuously label terrorists Muslims without seeking any further evidence or justification constitutes an essential problem. Additionally, the informants do not understand why a potential Muslim background or the perpetrator’s habit of practicing Islam or any other religion must be mentioned in terrorism news at all.

In the informants’ opinion, the close relation between terrorism news and Muslims also illustrates well the bigger picture by showing what kind of news usually include Muslims. The informants note that news involving Muslims tend to be negative in content, and that
conflicts and terrorism account for a huge part of all news coverage. Hence, positive news that would bring the matter into balance is missing. Noura concludes:

(23) If a Muslim does something good, people don’t always mention that they’re a Muslim. They’re just a citizen of that country or some other person. But people don’t emphasize that a Muslim did something good. It’s more like, if something bad happens and a Muslim is somehow tied to it, people emphasize much more that it was a Muslim in question.

Noura argues that people are called Muslims only in a negative context and that the media rarely report if Muslims have done something good. This observation supports Said’s notion that the media offer a very narrow picture of Islam and Muslims. The lack of positive images of Islam in media contents sustains the problems of Orientalism. As the informants remarked above, Orientalist views cause various problems in the media. The informants emphasize similar issues than Bakali, Powell and other researchers. Thus, the informants regard some of the same questions that studies have already dealt with earlier as important. However, other problems related to the media and conflicts are addressed among the informants as well.

7.1.2. Terms

Amira states that terms used in terrorism news are generally problematic. In addition to continuously identifying terrorists as Muslims, she considers that a broader use of certain terms creates a problem:

(24) I think that overall the Finnish media uses problematic terms. Because of that, when I’m reading some article it’s sometimes difficult to understand what they are trying to say. The words they use don’t really mean anything to me. I think that they’re used in a wrong way.

According to Amira, the Finnish media use terms that should not be applied because of their confusing meanings. She refers to the use of the terms extreme Islam, radical Islam and moderate Islam. The problem with such terms seems to relate to painting a picture of Islam consisting of radical and moderate branches. However, Amira continues by stating that there is no such group as “moderate Muslims”, because Islam is only one. In her opinion, the separation between radical and moderate Islam does not represent a positive manner of dealing with conflicts, even though the media possibly do not aim to cause harm by such a distinction, but rather attempt to distinguish between terrorists identified as Muslims and the Muslims in Finland.

When coming up with terms such as radical and moderate Muslims, trouble may emerge from two sources. Firstly, they just do not belong to Amira’s self-understanding of Islam, which leads to a conflict when news coverage does not correspond to one’s own reality. Thus, the media challenges one’s religious insights, which causes frustration and confusion. From her perspective, the media simply offer false information.
Secondly, the separation does not actually distance the two groups, because after all they end up under the same main category, Muslims. What follows is that according to the media, terrorists are Muslims. Then it does not matter if a Muslim represents moderate views, if anyway in the big picture they belong to the same main group with terrorists. Hence, they are potential terrorists because of Islam. This also further explains why news coverage of terrorist attacks is described stigmatizing among my informants. Labelling terrorists as Muslims and categorizing these radical Muslims as belonging to Islam together with moderate believers result in identifying all Muslims as terrorists. Alsultany writes about the same phenomenon where violent incidents stigmatize the whole religion. On the other hand, Maasilta, Rahkonen and Raittila view that the Finnish media do not associate Finnish Muslims with violence, which contrasts with the experiences of my informants. However, the same study admits that the media convey a picture of fundamentalism as mainstream Islam. This relates to the problem that the informants are forced to share their religion with groups that in their eyes do not represent Islam. Arij introduces another challenging term:

(25)That kind of thing doesn’t just happen. And it’s not like we’re trying to convert people at gunpoint. Yeah. I don’t understand the term [Islamization] at all. Should it even be used?

Arij questions if the term islamization should be used at all in the media. Again, the term favored by the media clashes with how a person perceives her own faith. Arij does not recognize the phenomenon that islamization refers to, and definitely does not identify with it. The concept of islamization implies that there are similar problems to radical and moderate Muslims. An incongruity between the term and one’s own understanding and practicing of Islam makes the concept poor for Arij. Creating a completely new conflict originating from Islam without an equivalent in the real world reinforces the picture of how Orientalist views dominate. Once again, Islam poses a threat for West.

7.1.3. Double standards
Malek points out to the inequality existing in the Western media’s treatment of Muslims. According to her insight, such an inequality exists in the context of conflicts when considering the amount of attention that victims receive. Terrorist acts committed outside Europe, mostly those in Muslim majority countries, do not gain as much media coverage as those executed on European soil. She ponders how such an unfair manner of dealing with different people exists on Facebook as well. Malek remarks that after terrorist attacks in Europe, a lot of Facebook users change the cover photo in their profile into the flag of the affected country in order to display empathy for the victims. Such a phenomenon does not
occur after terrorist attacks carried out in countries with a Muslim population. Malek encapsulates her thoughts as follows:

(26)Some time ago there was one in Egypt, too. Many people died. I can’t remember if it was a bomb or something else. But well, I tried to find information about it on Facebook, for instance. You had to scroll quite a bit on Ilta-lehti’s website to find anything, even though many people had died. Finally, there was in small print a mention that this many hundreds of people have died… So, sometimes you get the feeling that is it just a westerner’s life that matters.

The notion describes the feeling that there is generally an unequal approach towards victims from different backgrounds. A lacking interest in Muslim victims again raises questions of othering Muslims. In the previous sections, the informants claim that the media mention Muslims only in a negative light, especially when focusing on terrorism. Now the absence of Muslims in the role of victims in relation to terrorism strengthens the impact of othering. According to my informants’ views, in the media, Muslims are always the perpetrators of terrorism but never the victims of it.

In addition, Malek later observes how Western people are interviewed when terrorist acts have taken place, and in this way, they are brought nearer to the readers or viewers. She admits that this evokes empathy for them in contrast to Muslim casualties outside of Europe, who are only numbers on the pages of media outlets. Other informants also raise the question if it is right to speak about dead people only as figures without any compassion. As a result, the audience does not even get a chance to identify with these victims, because they appear as a faceless mass in the media. Ferdous continues observing the same theme:

(27)Another example was that people, or rather some extremists think that Muslims are terrorists and Muslims cause this and that. Then people say that Muslims cause so much bad to happen in Europe, for example. But when you read statistics, it’s actually the terrorists that cause more damage to Muslims. So, most of the victims are actually Muslims.

Ferdous confirms the inequality of the representations of Muslims as victims of terrorist acts. She points out how the dominant perceptions of Muslims only as terrorists do not correspond with the reality, where they are also targets. The suffering of Muslims does not gain attention, which leads to a wrong impression among the public. Simply put, according to the informants, a chance to know and sympathize with Muslim victims does not exist.

7.2. Effects of conflicts and the media

The three previous sections have illustrated how the informants feel about the way the media deal with conflicts. The biggest issues raised by the informants are related to framing. The media’s way of framing especially terrorism news has implications that the informants are forced to deal with. Ranya discusses the issue:

(28)Almost every single time you hear about some terrorist attack and go to school or work the next morning, you feel people looking at you in a different way. I don’t want to say better people because I don’t know if that determines the goodness of a person, but the calmest people, they stare. But then there’s those who walk up to you to say things to your face.
The quotation illustrates how terrorist attacks influence Ranya’s everyday life in Finland. She has to confront antagonistic reactions from other people. The link between media framing and the media’s negative treatment of Muslims after terrorist attacks seems well-grounded. In the earlier sections, the informants introduced problems of framing that maintain harsh attitudes towards Muslims. Thus, every new terrorist attack and news circulating a certain image of the perpetrators create a seedbed for hostile attitudes and acts against Muslims. The phenomenon feeds itself in the long run. One informant feels that the general atmosphere towards Muslims in Finland has become worse. During the recent years, several terrorist attacks have taken place in Europe and other conflicts in Muslim majority countries have been covered in the media. Hence, the dissemination of news portraying Muslims continuously in a negative light has contributed to the emergence of tough attitudes.

Not all informants share the experience of facing more suspicion after terrorist attacks. However, the majority of the informants state that they or their close ones have faced hostile behavior. Some of the informants’ comments also express that they perceive the threat of harmful acts as real even though they do not have personal experiences. Jamila tells how after one terrorist act in Europe she was afraid of jogging outside in the evening, because someone could attack her. Thus, the question is not serious only if Muslims face more hostile attitudes and acts in public after conflict news. The problem arises already if they feel like they are a possible target of aggression each time a terrorist act occurs in Europe. If the fear of confrontations stemming from their Muslim background affects their daily life, it creates a real problem even though the feared actions would never actualize. Both experiences and intensified fears without concrete actualizations deserve attention. Actual experiences as well as fear of hostilities affect people by increasing negative feelings, so neither should be overlooked. Additionally, actual confrontations feed the fears because anxieties are not generated in a vacuum. Ferdous’ statement summarizes the thoughts of many of the informants:

(29) The first thought is that hopefully it’s not a Muslim. That as a first reaction people might kind of resort to hatred. The statement confirms the conception that the media’s influence quite directly leads to expressions of hatred. Therefore, conflicts abroad have direct impacts on the informants’ lives. Even though the continuous negative media content about Muslims sustains the unpleasant image of them, current incidents seem to activate people. Each new terrorist attack triggers hostility towards Muslims. Such a chain of events is recognized by Liepyte, McAloney-Kocaman and Green as well. The informants seem to experience similar reactions as Muslims elsewhere in Europe and the USA.
The quotation above also reveals how reacting to terrorism news immediately involves a concern about one’s own well-being. The first thoughts focus on possible effects on one’s own life. This indicates that fears are constructed even before reading the news, so that negative influences start gaining ground instantly when hearing about terrorist acts. Negative impacts do not only emerge from other people, but difficult feelings developed in one’s own mind bother as well. Ferdous’ hope that a perpetrator would not be Muslim reflects an increased stress about the issue. The concerns sometimes even influence one’s own actions, as Hyatt explains:

(30)And especially if there’s just been a terrorist attack, it’s more delicate for a while. So, more than usually, I’m trying to look as western as I can and speak Finnish loudly, so that people can see from a distance that I’m a Finn.

Hyatt says that she modifies her behavior after terrorist attacks in order to highlight that she is a Finnish person and not a threat for people around her. In this way, the events in other countries force Hyatt to focus on her appearance for the sake of other people in Finland. The statement implies that she feels she is viewed as a threat so strongly that she must alter her own behavior accordingly.

Because all of the informants are women and wear a scarf, the question of the scarf’s role in how conflicts influence people via the media should be addressed shortly as well. Some of the informants mention that the scarf makes their religion visible differently compared to Muslim men’s faith. This potentially increases the fear of hostile reactions towards them after news of a terrorist act. None of the informants articulate that the scarf constitutes a problem or causes more harmful acts against them. However, as a recognizable representative of the group, a Muslim woman with a scarf forms an easy target. The concerns about how people will express hatred towards them after Muslims are depicted as the perpetrators of terrorism in the media imply that the informants affirm they are easily recognized as Muslims. After all, the scarf makes a difference. This means that conflict news concerning Muslims may affect differently the female and male members of the community.

7.3. Other effects
Arij offers another perspective to the discussion of the impacts of terrorism news. She has experiences of people associating her with terrorist acts in a way that they ask her to clarify the case. She is supposed to have all the information related to the terrorist act that occurred. Arij wonders why people assume she knows more than any other person. Again, people seem to easily associate terrorists with all Muslims which is seen even in relation to knowledge about acts. Additionally, another informant tells how after terrorist attacks she has to
underline for other people that such acts are not accepted in Islam. Both of these informants’ experiences support Roy’s views that Muslims are expected to explain their religion, especially in periods following violent cases.

Expectations set for Muslims seem to create a real problem for the informants. Namely, the interviews brought out a tiredness of representing all Muslims all the time. Some informants aim to carefully avoid giving too confident answers. For example, one informant underlines how other Muslims could perhaps think differently about issues compared to her answers. The other informant also frankly states that she only represents herself, not the whole Muslim community. These statements strengthen the understanding that the informants are frustrated with representing all Muslims and the way that such an attitude towards them in public has unwanted impacts on their lives. Obviously, dealing with Muslims as a homogeneous group and the individual members of it as the representatives of the whole group affects their everyday life experiences so strongly that some of the informants feel the need to fight back. Jamila points out why such generalizations of Muslims in the media and elsewhere are detrimental:

(31)Personally, it feels really bad to be a Muslim and to be depicted as a terrorist, murderer and all the likes. So yeah, I don’t think it’s normal to wake up every day to listen to this talk that Muslims this and Muslims that. It just creates confrontation. I think it’s a big risk. I think that if someone feels left out, it will result in problems in the society.

Jamila believes that the media’s style of framing information generates an ‘us versus them’ mentality in the society, which threatens to turn some of its members into outsiders. Each negative depiction feeds the feeling of not belonging to the society. Jamila states how it is unhealthy to be constantly accused of terrorism and other horrors. All such allegations complicate the building of positive views about oneself and a good relation to the society. Another informant also imparts how unpleasant comments tell you to “go home” to make you doubt if you are at all welcome here in Finland. In this way, conflicts and the media’s portrayal of them weaken the sense of belonging and endanger the creation of good relations between the Muslim minority and the majority population in Finland. According to the media, Muslims pose a threat, and Muslims react to such a portrayal by questioning their position in the society.

Jamila’s quotation also reveals that the problem does not only relate to how Muslims perceive their situation in relation to the society, but also how it affects their identity formation. The statement mirrors how she considers the persistent portrayal of Muslims as terrorists and other negative figures bothering. Jamila seems to feel frustrated about the conflict between her own Muslim identity and the image given from outside. In any case, she
describes herself as having a good self-esteem, so the issue does not become a big problem for her. Actually the biased image conveyed by the media encourages one to know one’s own religion better. On the other hand, in the background there is a concern for what the continuous output of negative images of Muslims in the media causes for people who may still be insecure about themselves and their faith. Ilef confirms the challenges of the media coverage for her part at least:

(32) And, on the other hand, how conflicts and terrorist acts get treated in the media. It feels all the time like they’re trying to discredit Muslims. Yeah, it feels like an internal struggle, that hey, it isn’t like that in reality.

Ilef’s statement expresses how the picture of Muslims offered by the media evokes difficult feelings. The media offend her self-understanding in a harsh way. Ilef seems powerless in the face of the media coverage and does not bring up any ways to improve the situation. The mention of an internal battle describes how she has to handle issues on her own. Ilef and Jamila’s concerns and anxiety related to the way the media present Muslims corresponds with Kabir’s remarks about distress among Muslims caused by the equation of them with terrorists in the media. The media’s way of dealing with conflicts seems to generate inner challenges for Muslims when they aim to figure out their own place in the society or the meaning of faith. On the other hand, just the continuously presented erroneous image of Muslims causes distress. Rime points out another problematic impact of conflicts concerning relations between Muslims:

(33) I see it as a problem, maybe the main reason for it is that it causes more conflicts involving people that are not even connected to it. If someone says something and someone else thinks it’s wrong, it causes a conflict here, even though nothing of the sort is happening here.

This time conflict news coverage influences how Muslims think of other Muslims in an unpleasant way. Rime is tired of following conflict news because they stir up animosity between the Muslims in Finland. She argues that confrontations between Sunni and Shia Muslims exemplify such consequences. Rime states that Sunnis and Shias do not oppose each other in their everyday life in Finland, but the news can awaken such feelings. Interestingly, she claims that experts engender this image of confrontation between the two major denominations of Islam.

Another informant shares a personal experience of how her statement was used in a newspaper to enhance the confrontational image between Sunnis and Shias by separating the quotation from the original context. The story reveals that even the Finnish media sometimes aims to strengthen the picture of conflict existing among Muslims. Above Rime considers such news detrimental as they deteriorate relations between Muslims from different backgrounds. Thus, conflict news does not only affect the attitudes of the non-Muslims, but
also of those in and between Muslim communities. Again, the problem also relates to the manner of how Muslims are defined from outside in a harmful way.

Conflicts have a powerful influence on the informants’ lives through the media. Actually, the effects of the conflicts grow stronger when the media provides information with a certain emphasis. The wide range of harmful conventions of the media recognized by the informants shows how extensively the media tend to show Muslims in an unfavorable light. The influences of these practices are shown in the non-Muslims’ increased hostility towards Muslims, the controversies among Muslims, and Muslims’ challenges to find their place in the society and form a solid understanding of their own religion and identity. These impacts penetrate many levels from the questions of being a member in the larger society to personal considerations of faith. Each impact challenges the informants to question their own position. Conflicts and the media together as a powerful combination result in an abundance of negative causes.
8. Results

8.1. Building the relation
The Finnish young Muslim women’s relation to conflicts abroad is constructed through two kinds of paths. One path entails all consequences of conflicts for Muslims in Finland. Both physical and mental effects are generated via different intermediaries, of which the media represent the most prominent one. Here Muslim women can be considered receivers. The other path allows an active role for Muslim women as approachers of conflicts. Islam functions as the most crucial intermediary in this path and mostly defines the perspective. These two paths show that Muslim women build a relation to conflicts abroad by themselves, but conflicts also form connections to Muslims in Finland.

Schema 1 above demonstrates how the different components are placed in the paths and how these components influence each other. The straight arrows express that the intermediaries affect the way of how the two main groups, the conflicts and the Muslim women, eventually approach each other. In other words, the intermediaries modify the angle of the approach. The blue arrows illustrate the path from the Muslim women to the conflicts, and the orange arrows show how the conflicts influence the Muslim women through the intermediaries.

The blue and orange arrows reveal that the two paths do not constitute completely independent zones, but rather that especially the Muslims receive conflicts via different factors, which in turn influence their own approach to the theme as a whole. Thus, building a
relation towards conflicts occurs as a part of the circle where the Muslim women first encounter the effects of distant conflicts in their everyday life, and then their way of dealing with conflicts derives from those experiences. The Muslim women react to the effects of the conflicts, which reflects on their general relation to conflicts abroad. Concurrently, the approach, constructed independently from the impacts of conflicts, exists.

The left side of schema 1 shows the circle of impacts. The path on the far left focuses on Muslims as receivers. Receiving consists of several negative phenomena, which emanate either via the media or family members. Conflicts themselves do not affect young Muslims who do not consider the conflicts as having direct impacts on their ordinary life. Instead, the media and relatives make the remote conflicts concern the Finnish Muslim women. The undesired effects involve mental stress originating from anxiety about the well-being of one’s close ones, biased labelling and images of Muslims produced by the media, fears for threats posed by other people, and personal battles of faith, identity and the relation to the wider society. Fears for physical and verbal attacks are occasionally concretized, so undesired impacts are not only limited to mental consequences.

The media constitutes the most prominent intermediary in the path. The impact of the media could be summarized into an idea of conflicts abroad defining Finnish Muslims excessively. Conflicts influence indirectly the questions which they do not concern at all in the first place, such as the sense of belonging to the society. Conflicts determine considerably how others perceive the Muslims in Finland and even how they themselves consider issues. The undesired position summarizes all influences on Muslim women caused by conflicts abroad.

Conflicts contribute in a negative manner to a young Muslims’ life. Thus, as a natural reaction, Muslim women aim to distance themselves from conflicts, which is illustrated in the chain in the middle of schema 1. Principally remoteness describes the young Muslim women’s relation to conflicts abroad. Conflicts seem to follow Muslim women more than they follow conflict news. The surrounding world strongly connects Muslims with conflicts in the Muslim women’s experiences. Therefore, opposing such associations reflects on their own understanding of conflicts. For instance, a clear stance of separating religion from conflicts contrasts with the media’s portrayal where Islam continuously reappears in the context of conflict news. In this way, the negative consequences of conflicts identified in one's own life modify the way of approaching conflicts abroad.

Islam represents another essential factor which shapes Muslims’ approach towards conflicts in other countries. This is introduced on the far right in schema 1. Islam largely
explains the angle of Muslim women actively building a relation to conflicts. None other factor is able to engender transnational ties that would support the importance of the connection to distant places in the context of conflicts. The role of family members relates to how the young Muslim women receive conflicts, but a capacity to guide their approach lacks. Instead, Islam offers a perspective where conflicts concern each Muslim and require paying attention to them. Islam guides Muslims to care for fellow believers in the middle of the conflicts. An imagined unity with all Muslims engenders solidarity. Different demonstrations and fundraisings express such loyalty towards people who share the same faith. Especially the situation of the Palestine people appears a legitimized object for showing solidarity.

Despite a clear ideal of solidarity among Muslims, an ambivalence illustrates the young women’s insights. Even though assisting others is considered important, the trust in the significance of one’s own efforts varies. Additionally, the feeling of responsibility characterizes the solidarity of the Muslim women. Thus, again the relation to conflicts abroad partly develops without one’s own volition. In the views of the Muslim women, solidarity does not pose as an asset, but rather the idea of solidarity obliges to care for others. Similarly, the young Muslim women do not strongly identify with suffering Muslims in conflict zones. A lack of identification results in the absence of production of empowering discourses among the Muslim women. Shared religious beliefs and culture unite, but the Finnish Muslim women are not able to connect their own experiences with people in conflicts.

8.2. Imbalance
The paths described above, which explain how Muslim women receive and approach conflicts, expose an imbalance prevailing in the young Finnish Muslims’ relation to conflicts abroad. The Finnish Muslims’ role as receivers dominates the construction of the relation compared to their role as approachers. The impacts of conflicts reflect on many areas of life, but the active approach derives chiefly from religious views. The great number of these impacts do not correspond with the Finnish Muslims’ minor interests and attempts to focus on conflicts abroad.

A similar imbalance exists in the comparison of the features of the position that the Finnish Muslim women have as receivers and approachers. Several negative impacts through which Muslims receive conflicts locate Muslims as active agents in the conflicts. Specifically, the media frame Muslims as wrongdoers and guilty of horrors. The negative impacts imply that Islam accounts for conflicts in a significant manner, whereas the Muslim women approach conflicts with the conviction that religion is not involved with the question of
conflicts as such. They only concentrate on the victims of conflicts and do not aim to participate in conflicts themselves in any level. Thus, the biased picture of Muslims as active perpetrators in conflicts differs from the reality, where the Finnish Muslim women only attempt to show solidarity for suffering fellow Muslims.

The significant contradiction between how conflicts label Finnish Muslim women and how they actually perceive conflicts mirrors the impacts of the long history of Orientalism. Biased views derived from Orientalism still guide how Muslims are placed in relation to conflicts. Such orientalist insights force Muslim women into specific frames which do not allow adopting a positive role concerning conflicts. Hence, constructing a relation to conflicts entails a great number of factors over which Muslims do not have control. The space to create a relation to conflicts is confined.

Orientalism leads to a situation where conflicts define Muslims more than Muslims desire. As a result, not only possibilities to embrace a positive role lack, but also chances to not have a relation at all appear scarce. Evidently, relations between the Muslim women in Finland and conflicts involving Muslims in other countries contain challenges and unbalanced features, which in many respects stem from influences of Orientalism.
9. Conclusion
This thesis has examined the relation between young Finnish Muslim women and conflicts abroad involving Muslims. The relation proved to be comprised of two main ways. On the one hand, conflicts in other countries reach Finnish Muslims by having multiple impacts on their lives, and on the other hand, the Muslim women in Finland construct the relation to conflicts by themselves. Both paths entail factors which ultimately define the approach. Conflicts engender negative effects for Finnish Muslims through the media, and the Muslim women approach conflicts particularly from the angle of Islam.

This thesis aimed to shed light especially on the Finnish Muslims’ own perspective. Their relation to conflicts abroad was shown to contain challenges and unbalanced elements. Conflicts penetrate into issues and questions about identity and position in the society in an undesired way. The scope of the influences of conflicts appears too extensive compared to the Muslims’ very limited way to approach conflicts. The angles and especially the position of religion differ in how conflicts relate to Muslims in Finland and how they in turn relate to those conflicts. The roots of this imbalance can be traced back to Orientalism.

The relation includes the element of inevitability, because conflicts affect Finnish Muslims without their own volition. Islam also urges Muslims to look after fellow believers. The relation between conflicts and the Muslim women is partly formed involuntarily. The media and Islam greatly affect the formation of the relation, whereas other factors such as family have little power to influence it. Islam functions as the most powerful factor regarding transnationalism among Finnish Muslims in the context of conflicts.

This case study presented one overview of Finnish Muslim women’s relation to conflicts abroad. Future research can continue to various directions and specify a more focused approach. Prospective studies can focus on only one group of Muslims with more detailed questions regarding conflicts. On the other hand, conflicts proved to stigmatize Muslims strongly. Recognizing other similarly stigmatizing factors and pondering ways to correct their impacts constitute one prospect for future studies. Another interesting topic would be to examine the differences between generations among Muslims. The conflict theme already revealed differences, but questions concerning one’s faith or trust in one’s possibilities in the Finnish society could be investigated by comparing the representatives of different generations. Additionally, topics that Muslims themselves consider important should be surveyed. Islam and Muslims in Finland afford multiple interesting topics for future studies.
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Appendixes

Interview themes and questions
Median seuraaminen / Use of the media
- Mitä mediaa käytät? (lehdet, tv-kanavat, sosiaalinen media, radio jne.)
  /What media do you use? (newspapers, tv-channels, social media, radio etc.)
- Kuinka usein käytät niitä?
  /How often do you use them?
- Mitkä ovat tärkeimmät lähteisi?
  /What are your most important media sources?
- Miksi ne ovat tärkeimmät?
  /Why are they the most important ones?
- Mitkä ovat tärkeimmät lähteisi ulkomaan uutisten seuraamisessa?
  /What are your most important media sources regarding foreign news?

Muslimeihin liittyvät ulkomaan uutiset / Foreign news concerning Muslims
- Mitä uutisia seuraat?
What news do you keep track of?
- Minkälaisia ne ovat?
  /What kind of news are they?
- Miten koet uutisoinnin?
  /How do you perceive the construction of these news?

Muslims and reportage of them
- Mitä konflikteja seuraat?
  /What conflicts do you keep track of?
- Miksi seuraat näitä?
  /Why do you keep track of these conflicts?
- Mitä lähteitä käytät ja miksi?
  /What sources do you use to keep track of and why those sources?
- Miten koet uutisoinnin?
  /How do you perceive these news?
- Miten suhtaudut näihin konflikteihin?
  /How do you perceive these conflicts?

Näkemykset konflikteista / Insights of conflicts
- Mitä ajatuksia konfliktit herättävät?
  /What thoughts do you have concerning conflicts?
- Mitä konfliekteista puhut perheen kanssa?
  /What do you talk about conflicts with your family?
- Mitä konfliekteista puhut ystävien kanssa?
  /What do you talk about conflicts with your friends?
- Miten konflikteja käsitellään moskeijoissa?
  /How conflicts are dealt with in mosques