

THE SACRED TEXTS EXPERIMENT: IMAGES OF RELIGIOUS OTHERS AND THEIR ROLE IN FORMING ATTITUDES TOWARDS ACCEPTING MUSLIM REFUGEES IN POLAND

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Contemporary discourse on refugees arriving from the Middle East to Poland revolves around two poles of the problem: the postulate of empathy towards people threatened by war and a danger that these people can supposedly impose on Poland and other EU countries. The religious factor seems to play a significant role in this discourse. Refugees who come from predominantly Muslim countries form a group of special interest for media, politicians and public opinion. In this context, it is important to examine how Poles perceive Islam, and how this image may be associated with attitudes towards accepting refugees. The aim of the study was to analyse narratives about Islam and the religious Other, emerging from partially structured interviews (N=31). The questionnaire, containing citations from the Bible, the Quran and holy scripture of new religious movements (the Bhagavad-Gita) served as the trigger for interviews conducted after filling in the questionnaire. The respondents' task in the questionnaire was to assign – based on their own knowledge of the subject – these quotes to one of the scriptures. Because of the small and non-representative research sample, the results obtained did not allow for generalizations. However, they

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provide an important indication (to be tested in future research) how the most frequent associations with Islam (aggression, violence, and the lack of respect for women's rights) might translate into attitudes towards accepting Muslim refugees in Poland.

Keywords: the image of Islam, refugees in Poland, attitudes towards new religious movements, image of the Bible, the image of the Quran

THE IDEA OF AN EXPERIMENT

Contemporary discourse on refugees from the Middle East living in Poland revolves around two poles of the problem: the postulate of empathy towards people threatened by war and a danger that these people can supposedly impose on Poland and other EU countries. The religious factor seems to play a significant role in this discourse. Refugees who come from predominantly Muslim countries form a group of special interest to media, politicians and public opinion. The topic of Poles' reception of Muslim refugees therefore forms an important, socially relevant research subject. The image of a Muslim refugee, given the religious character of this collocation, may be seen as a representation of the religious Other. Therefore it may be necessary to analyse how Polish citizens perceive religious Others (especially those coming from distant cultures and/or having different from Christian religious beliefs), and what is the place of Muslims in that picture. Followers of new religious movements were once visible Others in the Polish media discourse (especially in the nineties of the 20th century) so it may be interesting to compare these images, as both are strongly media- and stereotypically-based. In this study, we decided to go beyond direct questions and conducted a research pertaining to the attitudes towards religious Others using a quiz-like questionnaire constructed for the purposes of this research. The questionnaire has served as a stimulus during the interviewing process and qualitative data analysis.

In the process of research design, we were inspired by the media street-survey. In the survey journalists have approached pedestrians (e.g. Dit is Normaal 2015) quoting excerpts from the "Quran" (actually being a fragment of the Bible) and asking respondents about their reflections on the quotations. They also asked about the nature of such views (they were confronted afterwards with the fact that the quotations did not come from the Quran, but from the Bible). After familiarising ourselves with those media surveys, we thought about a more methodologically strict tool that could provoke the discussion about respondents' personal beliefs and prejudices towards the religious Other.

We were curious how respondents perceive Islam and the Quran, as well as a text from NRM's (the religious Other) as compared to the Bible and the Christian tradition. The conducted research aimed at providing some initial insight into the following questions:

- What makes respondents label a given material (quotations from the sacred texts) as an excerpt taken from their own cultural background or categorizing them as Other?
- What are the features of the Other? In what ways can the image of the Other differ if religion as a factor is included (Islam, new religious movements)?
- Do respondents have knowledge about the Bible, the Quran and new religious movements?
- What stereotypical images of the religious Others will emerge in the research? What can be the consequences of holding such stereotypical beliefs?

DATA AND METHODS

A questionnaire with six sets were designed. Each of them consisted of three quotations from sacred texts of three different religious traditions, namely the Bible (both Old and New Testament), the Quran, and the Bhagavad-Gita. The latter was used an example of an ancient text being operative in the field of new religious movements (NRM's). The respondents' task was to pair each quotation to the respective source text. Participants were informed that in each set all three source texts were present. The questionnaire consisted of six sets of quotations presented in a different order. Examples of sets are listed in Table 1.

Table 1.

Sets of quotations included in the research questionnaire²

Instruction; Please assign each quotation to one sacred text: (quotations from all sacred texts are represented in each set^a):

A. The Holy Bible
 B. The Quran
 C. Sacred texts of contemporary new religious movements

² We used Polish translations of the sacred text in the research, therefore the quotations provided here may vary slightly from the Polish texts.

Table 1 continued

<p>Set 1</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. During instruction, a woman should be quiet and respectful. I give no permission for a woman to teach or to have authority over a man. A woman ought to be quiet. (1 Tim 2, 11–12) 2. And among His Signs is this, that He created for you wives from among yourselves, that you may find repose in them, and He has put between you affection and mercy. (Quran 30: 21) 3. Those who take shelter in Me, though they be of lower birth-women, merchants as well as workers, can approach the supreme destination. (Bhagavad-Gita, 9, 32)
<p>Set 3</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I do not see how any good can come from killing my own kinsmen in this battle...sin will overcome us if we slay such aggressors...therefore it is not proper for us to kill our friends. (Bhagavad-Gita 1, 31, 36) 2. Buckle on your sword, each of you, and go up and down the camp from gate to gate, every man of you slaughtering brother, friend and neighbour. (Ex 32, 27) 3. Perhaps God will make friendship between you and those whom you hold as enemies. And God has power (over all things), and God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. (Quran 60: 7)
<p>Set 5</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. And fight in the Way of God those who fight you, but transgress not the limits. Truly, God likes not the transgressors. (Quran 2: 190^b) 2. A person is said to be still further advanced when he regards all-the honest well-wisher, friends and enemies, the envious, the pious, the sinner and those who are indifferent and impartial-with an equal mind. (Bhagavad-Gita 6, 9) 3. So kill all the male children and kill all the women who have ever slept with a man; but spare the lives of the young girls who have never slept with a man, and keep them for yourselves. (Num 31, 17–18)

^a The source of the text are added here in brackets, and were not a part of the original questionnaire.

^b In quotations from the Quran the word “God” instead of “Allah” was used. Otherwise it would be very easy for respondents to identify the quotation.

In the questionnaire, all of the quotations from the Bible intentionally presented content that can be considered as not compatible with contemporary European values e.g. homicide, violence, inequality of men and women (the selection of the quotations was made in accordance with topics to be represented). Quotations from the Quran and the Bhagavad-Gita were of the opposite. They presented values and ideas with which our respondents – as socialised in the European culture – could sympathise. In the process of selecting appropriate quotations for the questionnaire, two experts were consulted: a scholar in the domain of contemporary Islam, and a scholar in the field of biblical studies. Two of the research team members were specialists in the field of new religious movements,

therefore no further consultations were needed in that matter. The quotations from new religious movements' sacred text were also selected deliberately. The chosen group/movement should be in some way similar to Christianity and Islam in order to maintain the consistency of the research tool. Quotations obviously too different from the Bible/Quran could make the respondent's task very easy from the logical point of view. The movement should also be representative for the Otherness factor in the Polish environment. Taking these prerequisites into consideration, the Bhagavad-Gita (in its ISKCON – as the organisation meets the criteria of being a NRM – translation, by B.S. Prabhupada, in its Polish edition), was chosen as an example of a contemporary new religious movements' sacred text.

The interviews were conducted after respondents had filled out the questionnaire. In the beginning of the interview, respondents were asked for reasons for assigning each quotation to a specific religious tradition and, after confronting them with the correct answers, they were asked for further comments. Semi-structured interviews covered respondents' views about Islam, refugees, new religious movements and religion in general. The fieldwork was conducted by students enrolled on a course "Psychology of new religious movements" at the Institute for the Study of Religions, Jagiellonian University, Poland. The research procedure consisted of three stages. During an introductory class the students were familiarized with research instruments and instructions as to how to conduct fieldwork (both questionnaire research and interview). During a mid-term class, review of initial pilot material took place. Necessary changes in the procedure as well as additional clarification and instructions for students were provided. Finally, at the end of the semester, students presented and discussed outcomes of their fieldwork. Research materials were assessed for methodological correctness, and only the best, most developed interviews, meeting strict methodological standards were included into the final analysis.

The research sample consisted of two age groups; youth (16–19 years, N=10) and adults (29–80, N=21 respondents). The first one was in the early stage of the process of developing ideas and representations about refugees and religious Others. The second had, more life experience that could also influence their views. Similarities and differences between results obtained from both groups were also analysed. Respondents were selected by snowball sampling. The final research sample was extracted from initially approached respondents for methodological strictness and richness of data collected. The final research sample consisted of 31 people, selected from approximately 60 interviews. The group's demographic data is presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Research sample

	31 respondents	
Age	Adults (29–80)	21
	Youth (16–19)	10
Gender	Women	20
	Men	11
Place of residence	City with a population over 500,000	21
	City with a population of 100,000 to 500,000	2
	Town with a population of 10,000 to 50,000	3
	Town with a population below 10,000	1
	Village	4
Religious affiliation	Catholicism	19
	Christianity (general)	3
	Buddhism	1
	Unaffiliated	6
	Other	1
	No data	1
Family religious background	Catholicism	28
	Christianity	1
	Atheism	1
	No data	1

The answers in the questionnaire and interviews were both a subject of analysis. As the research sample was not statistically representative, the quantitative analysis was restricted to “respondents’ performance” number of correct answers per questionnaire. In the qualitative analysis of the interviews, standard coding procedures according to guiding principles of constructivist grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006) were employed. As the main idea of our research was to perform an exploratory study, we introduced grounded theory as a methodological background, which is useful for delineating categories within collected narrations, outlining possible paths for further research and theory development (Engler, 2011). The main focus of research was not the questionnaire and its results, but the qualitative analysis of interviews which followed the questionnaire. Therefore, the questionnaire played the role of a trigger for further interviews and discussions on the image of Islam and refugees (in the context and contrast to other religious traditions, namely Roman-Catholicism and NRM’s).

It was expected that respondents would share their opinions far more openly and reflectively than they would do if asked directly about opinions pertaining to Muslims and Islam. This study might be considered as an experiment rather than a standard questionnaire. The study's findings contribute to broadening the perspective on the reception of refugees in Poland by introducing the role of religious factors in attitudes towards refugees.

RESULTS

The main analysis was based on interviews which were stimulated by the process of assigning quotations to the particular holy scripture and familiarising respondents with the correct answers. Nevertheless, the quantitative data also provided an interesting insight into the objectives of our study. Table 3 presents data on the average number of correct and incorrect matchings of quotations. In general, recognising quotes from the Quran and the Bible was much more problematic than those from the Bhagavad-Gita. The average number of correct answers per quotation was 1.17 for the Quran, 1.77 for the Bible, and 3.13 for the Bhagavad-Gita. Respondents often confused the quotations from the Bible with those from the Quran, which was provoked by the purposive selection of quotations.

There was no significant difference neither in the number of correct answers between both age groups nor between male and female respondents, except for the fact that on average women surpassed men in recognising quotations from the Bhagavad-Gita. The inhabitants of large cities (with populations over 500 000 people) made incorrect pairings less frequently compared to those coming from smaller cities and villages.

In the qualitative analysis, two themes appeared frequently: (1) violence in general and (2) the inequality of men and women in the Quran and in the conduct of Muslims. 23 respondents associated this tradition with religious wars, homicides, stoning, cruelty, attacks, terrorism, e.g.:

- “The Quran is brutal...killing, everything is about killing, for you to go from a gate to gate and kill. That is my association with the Quran” (M17);
- “In the third point ‘I do not see how any good can come from killing my own kinsmen’ is definitely not the Quran. Because it is concerned...with... with killing your friends” (F70).

Furthermore, one of research participants, while referring to the violent nature of the Quran, mentioned Syrian refugees or “invaders from Syria”, as they have been labelled: “I marked the first (passage) as the Quran, because the Quran

is a religion of peace that calls for invading and converting others. The word ‘invaders’ in the quote makes me think of the Quran. As we can see today: invaders from Syria” (F52).

The topic of the low status of women in the Quran reiterates with the same frequency, as 23 respondents raised it during interviews, e.g.:

- “I can tell, at every turn, that this religion, which is the Quran, is the most humiliating for women, and in this sense...in that direction my answers followed” (F68)’.
- “It will be the Quran, it is for f**k’s sake chauvinistic, sexist, or other, it definitely will be the Quran” (F17).

Table 3.

Results of labelling quotations from sacred texts by different groups of respondents (N=31)

Average number of answers (rounded up or down to the nearest second decimal)	Incorrect answer: Assigning the Quran instead of the Bible	Incorrect answer: Assigning the Bible instead of the Quran	Correct answer: The Bible	Correct answer: The Quran	Correct answer: Holy scriptures of a contemporary NRM
All respondents (31)	3.70	3.17	1.77	1.17	3.13
Youth (10)	4.00	2.90	1.40	1.30	3.50
Adults (21)	3.55	3.30	1.95	1.10	2.95
Women (20)	3.74	3.32	1.68	1.05	3.42
Men (11)	3.64	2.91	1.91	1.36	2.63
Residents of large cities (21)	3.45	2.80	2.20	1.40	3.35
Residents of smaller human settlements (10)	4.20	3.90	0.90	0.70	2.70

The negative image of the Quran was accompanied by the lack of familiarity of the actual content of the scripture. 11 interviewees declared that they do not know this text at all, while 9 of them had distinctly unfavourable attitudes towards it. Prejudices against the Quran were furtherly juxtaposed with the impact of mass media (seven respondents) and the threat of contemporary terrorism (six respondents). Some interviewees said that they identify unfavourable quotations as an excerpt from the Quran due to the recent news concerning terrorist attacks: “These texts... I associate them with the present situation, the terrorism in

the world. That is the reason for my answers. I looked at them mainly from the perspective of the Quran. I do not know the Quran, I admit, but presently the only association I have with this religion is violence” (M48). Associations with the Quran were predominantly negative, approximately three quarters of respondents connected it either with violence or with gender inequality. Only one category which can be labelled as positive emerged during the research. Three interviewees said that Allah is a forgiving, thankful and appreciative God. And therefore they correctly labelled a quotation that expressed these characteristics as an excerpt from the Quran (42:23).

Passage 42:23 from the Quran is a perfect turning point to the analysis of associations with the Bible, since this quotation was incorrectly identified as an excerpt from the Bible (12). 12 respondents characterised the God of the Christians as forgiving and merciful. Mercy, love, and kindness were the most reiterating issues pertaining to the Bible that were raised by the interviewees (15), e.g.: “when a person ‘regards all-the honest well-wisher, friends and enemies’... The Bible. Why? Because it is full of love” (M56).

Nevertheless, associations with the Bible were not overwhelmingly positive. Eight respondents mentioned violent behaviour which can also be attributed to the Bible. Six interviewees raised the issue of discrimination against women in the Bible, however, another six claimed that this holy scripture advocates the equality of men and women.

Nearly half of the respondents (14) stressed the difference between the Old and the New Testament. According to them, Christianity is based primarily on the New Testament, and the Old Testament is an ancient literary work, a compilation of historical anecdotes and rules that are no longer in force: “They say that it is like tradition, and not knowledge that should be applied in everyday life. Like tradition – yes. Different times – different era. The Old Testament primarily has historical value” (F52). Furthermore, nine respondents noticed similarities between the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and the Quran. Six were vacillating between these two holy scriptures while filling in the questionnaire.

After learning the proper answers, six interviewees accused the research team members of a manipulation of sorts. They stressed that the quotations were taken out of context, biased, inadequately translated from original languages, or simply there was a mistake in the questionnaire, e.g.: “I say honestly this translation...if so, that depends on the translation. To be honest I have never seen such a quotation. I do have the Bible, I have read it more than once, but I do not remember that kind of formulation, or I have some other translation, or it is a version of sorts” (F52). On the contrary, three respondents expressed

the willingness to review their negative image of the Quran, they also contested their views about the Bible as a result of participating in the research. Overall, 13 respondents who perceived the Quran negatively and the Bible favourably remained confident about their beliefs. This contrast is evident in the following statement: “‘Sin will overcome us if we slay such aggressors’ – it is not understandable for me, but this killing, this blood is all but savage beliefs, one doesn’t know what can be found in such a religion [...] in the Quran” (F80).

The most frequently recurring theme in the interviews which was used as justification of assigning a given text to the new religious movements category was what we called here a “third choice option”. 19 respondents outwardly admitted using this strategy in assigning quotations to one of the three possibilities: they firstly assigned quotations that seemed to fit within the two monotheistic traditions, and the quotation left was – more or less automatically – assigned to the new religious movements category. Another method used in the process of assigning quotations to new religious movements was a linguistic identification, which occurred directly in 13 interviews. Those quotations which seemed – in the eyes of respondents – as “linguistically appropriate” for new religious movements (and – analogically – linguistically inappropriate for the Bible and Quran), were assigned as belonging to the group of contemporary new religious movements’ sacred texts. The method of choice here was based on an impression: when the language of a given text (vocabulary, verbs, syntax etc.) was interpreted by respondents as modern, they were more eager to assign the quotation to the new religious movements category. One of the respondents used a metaphor to describe the nature of supposedly new religious movements’ language, considered in the case as non-complicated, but otherwise specific: “Here...the language is...very easy. Like the First Secretary of the Polish United Workers’ Party [...] sacred text of new religious movements again! Just like the previous, the language is as of the First Secretary” (M43). Also, if the language sounded somewhat ancient, the possibility of a quotation coming from new religious movements was often ruled out, as in the example: “This quotation is in contemporary Polish [...] I don’t think that a different language was used, but thoughts were articulated differently in those times” (F52).

Approximately one-third of respondents (11) said that they have little (or no) knowledge about new religious movements (sometimes the quoted examples of movements were used as an exception, like “I don’t know these movements. Maybe Jehovah’s Witnesses a little” (F70). Six respondents also noted in that context that they do not have adequate knowledge about religious texts in general. Two denominations occurred in the interviews as examples of new religious movements: Hare Krishna (7, probably the International Society for Krishna

Consciousness) and Jehovah's Witnesses (7). Other religious bodies, such as the Pentecostal Church (2), Mormons (1), Methodists (1) and Quakers (1) were also quoted as examples. Three respondents said that new religious movements may be Christian in general (3), and one observed that there can also be Islamic new religious movements (1).

Associations with NRM's were predominantly positive, leaving only three categories with negative connotations (communism, lack of God figure, cults, one reference for each). One category was labelled as neutral otherness (3). New religious movements were, in the first place, connected with the lack of coercion in religious matters (8). It was in most of cases a direct reference to set no. 6, in which a quotation from the Quran, (2: 256), being the first item in the set, started from the phrase: "There shall be no compulsion in [acceptance of] the religion". Respondents justified their choice by referring to other religious traditions e.g. "There shall be no compulsion...I choose new religious movements, because I think that the other ones coerce to religion" (M45), "this does not sound like the Bible, and I don't think that it is the Quran either (F16)", "new religious movements, because – above all – in the Holy Bible or in the Quran there is a warrant of sorts, 'believe in God'" (M18).

New religious movements were further associated with modernity (9), peace (8), and love (5). In one case, a connection of those features occurred in one peace and love *in vivo* category: "I think that new religious movements – maybe because they make me think of hippies – promote friendship, and, as it is said – Peace and Love" (M19). Modernity was one of the main features of the movements, as in the interview with a woman from Podhale (a mountain region, south of Poland): "I marked this, as those modern...these modern techniques are a little bit fucked up...mind-boggling...for my old head" (F80). Furthermore, in this interview the "modernity argument" was also used in the evaluation of aggressive behaviour connected with religion: "Killing anyone does not befit our Catholic religion...modern religions the same [...] killing is not generally accepted, neither in Catholic nor in modern religions" (F80).

New religious movements were also connected with sympathy (4), knowledge (3), morality (3), openness (3), East (3), Buddhism (2), and joy (2). In one of the interviews, the term new religious movements evoked associations with Buddhism, as semantically similar categories in the respondent's views: "I was thinking about Buddha here [laugh] about Buddha at this moment, because Buddha was...right...more tolerant, open" (M52). Nevertheless, most of the associations presented above were connected with the "otherness" of new religious movements.

Table 4.

Qualitative analysis: categories

	Categories
The Bible	Mercy, love, and kindness in the Bible 15 The difference between the Old and the New Testament 14 The God of the Bible perceived as forgiving and merciful 12 Similarities between the Bible and the Quran 9 Violence in the Bible 8 Equality of men and women in the Quran 6 Inequality of men and women in the Quran 6
The Quran	Violence in the Quran 23 Inequality of men and women in the Quran 23 Similarities between the Bible and the Quran 9 The influence of mass media on the negative image of the Quran 7 The influence of current world events on the negative image of the Quran 6 The God of the Quran perceived as forgiving and merciful 3
Sacred texts of contemporary NRMs	“Third choice” option 19 Linguistic identification of NRMs’ texts 13 Professing little knowledge about NRMs 11 Professing little knowledge about sacred texts 6 Equality of men and women in NRMs 3 Examples of NRM: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hare Krishna 7 • Jehovah’s Witnesses 7 • Christianity in general 3 • Pentecostal Church 2 • Mormons 1 • Methodists 1 • Quakers 1 • Islam in general 1 Associations with NRM: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of coercion 8 • Modernity 8 • Peace 7 • Love 5 • Sympathy 4 • Knowledge 4 • Otherness 3 • Morality 3 • Openness 3 • East 3 • Buddhism 2 • Joy 2 • Ritualism 2 • Lack of God 1 • Cults 1 • Communism 1

DISCUSSION

Respondents encountered serious difficulties while trying to differentiate between quotations from the Quran and from the Bible. The mistakes they made can be partly explained by the selection of quotations included in the questionnaire which could easily be misattributed. The quotations from the Bhagavad-Gita were labelled correctly more often even though the selected passages from the holy book of the contemporary Krishna movement, like the quotations from the Quran, were supposed to carry positive images. The majority of interviewees associated Islam with violence, homicide, and gender inequality. After familiarizing them with the correct answers pertaining to the Bible, which actually embodied brutality, immorality, and the low status of women, they could not identify with its values and ideas either. The respondents were left with “the third option”. As a result, the majority of them perceived otherness of new religious movements favourably, while the otherness of Islam was regarded unfavourably.

An interesting observation can be made when we think of what was the major source of negative associations with the Quran. Seven respondents pointed to the influence of mass media and six to current world events as reasons for labelling the given quotations as excerpts from the Quran. The frequency of public expressions of negative stereotypes concerning Muslims, their culture, and their religion has intensified after the September 11, 2001 terrorist attack (Hoover, 2006: 235–237; Palmer, Gallab, 2006: 186–188). Moreover, Western media tend to present Islamic fundamentalism rather than liberal or conservative beliefs (Palmer, Gallab, 2006: 186). Indeed, media coverage had a great impact on the perception of Islam by the respondents. The majority of Poles have never met a Muslim in person, “[...] many Poles learn about Islam and Muslims indirectly through mass-media” (Górak-Sosnowska, 2014: 12). And therefore, it is arguable that current global events influenced them directly. We may assume that the hateful public discourse which is employed by some journalists, politicians, and social media activists (Górak-Sosnowska, 2014) may be the main source of respondents’ negative associations pertaining to the Quran. Among 13 respondents (9 Catholics and 4 with no religious affiliation), strong negative attitudes towards the Quran contrasted with positive attitudes towards the Bible.

The hateful public discourse should be further juxtaposed with stereotyping. 11 respondents declared the lack of knowledge about the actual content of the Quran. Simultaneously, 9 of them had a radically negative image of this holy scripture, associating it with violence, terrorism, chauvinism, and backwardness. Their beliefs were formed on stereotypes which are understood, for the purposes

of this article, as knowledge structures based on durable, powerful and emotional impressions of groups in questions held by many people (McGarty, Yzerbyt, Spears, 2002: 31–36; Stangor, 2009: 2–4). Prejudices against the content of the Quran overlap with the discrimination of Muslims and anti-refugee attitudes. Stereotypically, all the refugees from the Middle East are categorized as adherents of Islam. The process of stereotyping becomes potentially dangerous when overgeneralization occurs and others are perceived as a homogenous entity without individual differences (Hamilton, Sherman, Crump, Spencer-Rodgers, 2009: 182–185). Moreover, according to the intergroup threat theory, threats cause the emergence of negative stereotypes. They can be divided into two fundamental types: realistic and symbolic (Stephan, Ybarra, Rios Morrison, 2009: 44). Due to their small number in Poland, the refugees from the Middle East do not present a realistic threat for Poles, rather a symbolic one. Their norms, values, and beliefs are perceived as strongly contrasting with Polish culture, and therefore the “flood” of others might have a destructive influence on Polish tradition (Soral, Winiewski, 2015: 321). The crucial factor of underpinning the negative image of the Quran and Muslim refugees is the lack of knowledge based on face to face contact. Multiple studies indicate that direct intergroup contact typically and under optimal conditions reduces intergroup prejudices and conflicts (Pettigrew, Tropp, 2006). In Poland, the sequence of events is different. The lack of direct contact between Poles and Muslims does not provide any counterbalance to the spread of prejudices but, to the contrary, prejudices stimulate fear which in the longer run creates stress and aggression towards prospective refugees who might be admitted to Poland.

14 respondents stressed the difference between the Old and the New Testament, and pointed to the fact that the majority of Bible quotes in the questionnaire came from the Old Testament which they considered as an “outdated” part of the Bible with no impact on the current Roman Catholic religion. Such a perception justified respondents’ own insufficient knowledge of the content of the Bible and helped them in coping with the unfavourable image of the scripture delivered in the course of the research. This is despite the fact that according to the official dogma of the Catholic Church, the Old Testament and the Old Covenant have never been revoked (Catechism of the Catholic Church: para. 121). Moreover, the resemblances between the Bible, especially the Old Testament, and the Quran were noticed by nine respondents. While the Old Testament was considered as a collection of historical anecdotes, the Quran was perceived as a vital, inspirational text which strongly influences the everyday behaviour of Muslims.

The “choosing the third option” category was a base for labelling citations from the Bhagavad-Gita, as the NRM text points to the fact that respondents’

sense of competence and opinions in that aspect were rather vague comparing to their certainty of knowledge on Christianity and Islam. It also may be the case that respondents did not previously encounter any written information or media coverage about NRM's. It is worth mentioning the "otherness" factor that accompanied narrations about such religious currents, especially if we take into consideration that Jehovah's Witnesses, both with Hare Krishna, were identified as new religious movements. Jehovah's Witnesses, being a millenarian Christian religious organisation, officially recognised by the Polish state, and the fourth largest – in terms of numbers – religious denomination operating in Poland (after Catholicism, the Orthodox Church, and Protestant denominations), still may be labelled – as the respondents confirmed – as a "new" religious movement, alongside other groups. It may not be that astonishing when we consider a cultural factor here – Poland is predominantly a Catholic society, in which all of the religious currents that do not profess connections with Polish global or regional history, may be labelled as "new" (simply that they may be relatively new to contemporary Poles, which was the research sample).

Yet another strategy to ascribe a new religious movement category to the certain citation was based on a linguistic identification, as some respondents, instead of analysing the content of a quotation, concentrated on its language. The results confirmed the power which language executes on the social images of religious groups. Instead of calling them "cults" they were labelled in the questionnaire quite neutrally as "new and contemporary religious groups". Therefore, they become associated by respondents with modern groups well suited with contemporary times, offering freedom and independence and contrasting with old religions imposing many restrictions on their followers.

The quiz-like form of the questionnaire provoked – in a way – some of the psychological features of gaming (win-or-lose) to occur in the research, mainly the need for having a good score at the end. And therefore participating in the research unlocked the cognitive mechanisms concentrated on finishing the task as effectively and successfully as possible. The observation that a quiz-like form of the questionnaire may have aroused the need for having a high score among respondents can be important for understanding their reactions after being confronted with the correct answers and learning about their own mistakes. These circumstances provoked two reactions: six interviewees accused the questionnaire authors of manipulation or ignorance, while the other three respondents contested their unfavourable perception of the Quran and favourable image of the Bible as a result of participating in the research. The former claimed that the researchers were biased when choosing the quotations and their translations. The latter expressed the willingness to learn more about the

content of the Quran and of the Bible. These contradictory reactions helped the interviewees to deal with the lack of knowledge about the holy scriptures of their own religious tradition and about the Quran.

The results of surveys conducted on a Polish national sample (CBOS 2016; CBOS 2016a) and on a youth subsample (Hall, Mikulska-Jolles, 2016) demonstrate that attitudes towards Muslim refugees are grounded in a highly emotional discourse combined with minimal knowledge about their most conspicuous (according to respondents) feature – religion. The situation resembles the discourse around NRM's entering Poland in the 1990s. It is worth mentioning here Karpov's comparative study (2002) on religion and tolerance in the USA and Poland. There are some specific features in religious discourse that may be predictors of intolerant attitudes – “theocratic beliefs” in the case of Poland or “evangelical doctrinal orthodoxy” in the USA. NRMs were also indiscriminately accused of sharing culturally non-accepted values and harm they may bring to Poland. The list of dangers connected with NRMs included such accusations: threat for national security, terrorism, drug abuse, organised crime etc. (Doktór, 2000). The response of the media and politicians at that time could be described in terms of “moral panic”. The current reaction to the possibility of accepting refugees by Poland bears numerous similarities. Needless to say, in the case of Muslim refugees, social media supply the public with multiple news items about Muslim terrorists around the world, and support the perception of Poland as a besieged fortress which needs to be defended against a faceless wave of dangerous terrorists (Hall, Mikulska-Jolles, 2016). The dehumanisation of refugees in the process of media transmission serves two goals: to increase fear and to lower a sense of empathy and limit the ability for critical reasoning among the audience (Hall, Mikulska-Jolles, 2016).

The current discourse in Poland around Muslim refugees is somewhat paradoxical for several reasons. The number of refugees in Poland since Poland ratified the Geneva Convention in 1991 remains low. The number of people who have ever encountered a Muslim person does not exceed 13% (CBOS 2016), even in large cities, and in academic centres which likely might have a higher quota of international students and Polish students travelling abroad, the number is still low. Research conducted in the academic city of Wrocław in 2003–2016 by Ziad Abou Saleh (2016) on a sample of 2,047 students found only 19 participants (0.9%) who ever met a Muslim. At the same time the number of people who currently believe that Muslim refugees constitute a threat for Poland, and they should not be offered any shelter in the country, is rapidly increasing – from 21% in May 2015 to 57% in February 2016 (Hall, Mikulska-Jolles, 2016; CBOS 2016). The decline of a positive trend towards accepting

refugees has been connected with the political debate about relocating them to various countries of the EU, including Poland. Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska, who in 2013 studied online anti-Islam sentiments in Poland, observed: “So far Poland sticks out in the reports of Islamophobia in Europe with hardly any such cases [...]” (Górak-Sosnowska, 2014: 10). Two years later this sentence seems a bit out of date, and currently the aforementioned author tests four different explanatory hypotheses for, as she calls it, “platonic islamophobia” in Poland (Górak-Sosnowska, 2011: 18; Górak-Sosnowska, 2016).

The first of them pertains to possibly negative experiences Poles had with indigenous Muslims – the Tatars who have resided in Poland for years. This explanation remains unwarranted, because there has not been any problem with the Polish Tatar minority worthy of note and who in fact are well blended into local communities (i.e. villages like Bohoniki, Kruszyniany, Krynki in the north-east of Poland) and create, if anything, an important tourist pull factor for visitors, resulting in an additional source of income for those communities. The people who arrived in the 1950s and 1960s to study in Poland form the second group of Muslims in the country. Some of them got married, adapted and remained in Poland for good. Another group of Muslim students came to Poland in the 1990s, within various students’ exchange programs or as participants of educational programs in English (mostly medical studies) implemented by various Polish universities. Their presence in the public space is very limited, and that could be said also for the other Muslim groups in Poland (Kubicki, 2007).

Górak-Sosnowska (2016) suggested that strong negative attitudes towards adherents of Islam, together with a very limited exposure to “real Muslims”, and linked with the “global Muslim” image, may provoke negative attitudes towards receiving refugees in Poland. Allen (2010: 98) points towards the discourse around the “global Muslim” as a threatening figure distant from local experience (or lack thereof, like in the case of Poland). The second reason presented by Górak-Sosnowska (2016) is related to the cultural and religious homogeneity of Poland, in which any Otherness in an otherwise homogenous community alerts locals to the possible danger it might pose. Gordon Allport (1954) stipulated that such a negative attitude might be changed if direct contact with a negatively perceived group will take place. One of the Polish researches (Soral, Hansen, Bilewicz, 2014) demonstrate that a simple exposure to the Other does not automatically dissolve negative attitudes, but on the contrary, might facilitate its further development. This may likely happen if contact remains very limited and unmonitored. In fact, there has been a case of a small town of Łomża, near Warsaw, where inhabitants of the Refugee Reception Centre and people with refugee status (mostly Muslims in both cases) become victims

of aggression from the local population. Locals started to perceive them as unjustly using social benefits offered by the state “on the expense of the local underprivileged population”. The research demonstrated that both groups (locals and newcomers) virtually did not know each other, gossip was circulating, populist views dominated the discourse around refugees and their reasons for coming to Poland. Mutual relations slightly improved after an intervention geared towards more frequent contacts, and local inhabitants were provided with information about the life situation of refugees (Soral, Hansen, Bilewicz, 2014).

The third argument pertains to the *sui generis* mirror effect. Poles’ negative attitudes towards Muslims may be replicas of attitudes presented in Western media and propagated by populist political parties in other EU countries. Some anti-Muslim sentiments are encountered by Poles living and working abroad, and can be transplanted to Poland into different political and cultural contexts. Such sentiments may develop on a fertile ground of fear, as stimulated by news in the media about terrorists attacks in other EU countries performed by “Muslim terrorists”.

The fourth argument represents the regional version of the third one. It refers to the profile of CEE (Central East European) countries which consistently are on the top in EU polls as most negatively responding towards accepting refugees and scoring also high on not accepting any people who are ethnically or religiously different. In the case of Visegrad countries, only 2–8% of the populations believe that their countries should accept refugees, while 32–62% opposed accepting any refugees under any conditions (CBOS 2015) For Poland there is a clear differentiation between not accepting unspecified refugees (53% of the population refuses to receive them) and not accepting refugees from specific regions (66% of Poles rejects refugees from the Middle East and North Africa, while only 35% consent to welcoming refugees from eastern Ukraine) (CBOS 2016a) Similarities between CEE countries in public opinions towards refugees is explained as an output of shared political heritage – membership in the Soviet Bloc. The membership imposed political and cultural homogeneity of all countries involved, and caused the relatively high separation from countries outside the Bloc. Therefore, exposure to any kind of diversity was restricted as well. As an output fear and dislike of the Other may occur. Muslim refugees fall under the joint category of disliked Other because of both ethnic and religious categories.

After the careful analysis for accepting or refusing the aforementioned arguments, Górak-Sosnowska (2016, p. 203) postulates that Polish Islamophobia may be comprised of two main factors, the first endogenous and the other external:

“The endogenous factor is the homogenous ethnic and religious social structure of Polish society. Being under exposed to Others, one is unable to get to know

them, and so fear of the Other can perhaps be viewed as a rational reaction. [...] Here the external explanation plays a role—it seems to be the transplanted discourse from outside of Poland, mostly from Western Europe and the Middle East, which provides the negative content of the stereotypes and, due to the geopolitical circumstances, it is very strong and emotionally appealing.”

The most recent research dealing with prejudices and negative stereotypes towards refugees in Poland was led by the Association of Legal Intervention (*Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej*) at the beginning of 2016 (Hall, Mikulska-Jolles, 2016). 60 semi-structured interviews were conducted on a group of young (18–30) respondents. The sample consisted only of people who answered “no” to the question if Poland should accept refugees from countries where a military conflict occur (therefore the results should be approached with caution), although the obtained results supported research conducted on a larger sample in which the youngest respondents (18–24 years old) presented negative attitudes towards accepting refugees (CBOS 2016a).

The concept of a refugee may be seen as synonymous with a Muslim person who predominantly is also seen as a terrorist. The statement “Not all Muslims are terrorists but all terrorists are Muslims” expresses this conviction (Hall, Mikulska-Jolles, 2016: 63). Both concepts – Islam and Muslim culture – are seen as interchangeable and perceived as a homogenous entity without any differences between countries and regions (therefore all kinds of dangers which refugees might create are rooted in their religious identity). These shared, universal characteristics of Muslim culture: violence, expansion and war, along with abuse towards women, are connected with their religious convictions. Muslim culture also endangers European identity and contributes towards what is often called “the Islamization of Europe”. Islamization might translate into converting already existing churches into mosques, building new mosques, imposing Muslim dietary rules on Poles, and expecting Poles to renounce their own literature and coerce them to reading the Quran instead. According to the sample in question, the Roman Catholic religion is considered as a very important factor in Polish and European identity, restricting its activities or even eliminating it from Poland may open the door for another religion, and therefore identity, to take its place. The laicization of Europe is causing a gradual decline of identity, leaving Europeans helpless in front of the vigorous and active Islam. It is worth mentioning that Islam is seen as an underdeveloped form of religion which could be compared to Christianity from the Middle Ages. According to respondents, Christianity evolved but Islam did not, and remained anachronistic and unchanged from its primordial version.

In this image, refugees are seen as invaders whose religion might destroy and change an already weakening European identity. Islam is pictured as militant,

radical, shrewd, cunning, and supporting inequality between genders (Hall, Mikulska-Jolles, 2016: 84). Interestingly, such inequality is seen as possibly impinging on women's rights on the job market in Poland, because Muslim employers, due to cultural restrictions of direct contact with women, might refuse to see them as a part of the workforce.

The image of Muslim men as aggressors remains stable, even when respondents mentioned that their personal experience of meeting refugees does not confirm such convictions and admitted that their knowledge about Islam is limited. In very few cases respondents reflected on the possible multiple interpretations of Islam, alongside with multiple possible interpretations of the Bible, and admitted that both texts can be used either for justification of violence or for preventing the violence.

Refugees are seen as a source of violence in several ways; they might bring to Poland their internal conflicts, they might aggregate in ghettos which – in the course of time – will become dangerous zones for Poles; some of them might also, at some point, follow recruiters from ISIS; and last but not least, they might be victims of Poles' violent behaviour. According to some respondents, Poland does not have a tradition of tolerance, and attitudes labelled as tolerant are not developed among the Polish society. The influx of refugees is seen as incompatible with Poland's interest, because of their supposed lack of ability to work and to contribute to the national income. Some of the respondents have tried to reconcile negative attitudes towards accepting refugees with obligations rooted in their Roman-Catholic religious identity, which encompasses helping people in need. They claimed that their duty is to help their own people first (including the postulate of protecting them) and only afterwards to help Others (who also may be seen as impinging on the safety of fellow citizens, Hall, Mikulska-Jolles, 2016: 70).

Internet materials, especially blogs, information portals, social media and YouTube were perceived as reliable sources of information (Hall, Mikulska-Jolles, 2016: 101). School, in general, was absent from the narration, and did not occur as a significant source of new information pertaining to the subject. Only one respondent in the mentioned research referred to a religious instruction class at school during which an (unsuccessful) attempt was made to open a discussion about refugees (Hall, Mikulska-Jolles, 2016: 110).

The happening organised in February 2016 in Poznań, Poland by *Młodzież Wszechpolska* (All-Polish Youth, a right-wing, nationalistic organisation) may provide an interesting illustration to the analysis discussed here. The members of this organisation impersonated terrorists, wearing *galabiyas*, with their heads covered with *kufiya* scarfs and mock machine guns, distributed pamphlets

contesting the opening of a Muslim information centre (Klimowicz, 2016: 4). The discussion around Polish identity endangered by the possible arrival of Muslim refugees is much broader than the one pertaining to refugees themselves. Moreover, it is juxtaposed with the issue of Polish autonomy in the European Union. Acceptance of refugees is seen as being imposed on Poland by the EU, against Poland's best interest, and against historical justice, since Poland never benefitted from colonies in the Middle East and Africa, contrary to Western countries and therefore does not bear any responsibilities for the tragic fate of people from these countries (Hall, Mikulska-Jolles, 2016: 92).

Still the predominant discourse in Polish media, both social and traditional, concentrates around the role of Islam, which is seen as an important factor pertaining to the cultural otherness of Muslims and refugees (and the abhorrent and dangerous features of such otherness are often presented). Islam is perceived as a major factor preventing the successful adaptation of refugees. Therefore, we have a *pars pro toto* discourse here: a single feature of the refugees' identities (religion) strongly influences the whole image (Górak-Sosnowska, Markowska-Manista, 2010).

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