



Austrian Muslims Protest Against Austria's Revised "Islam Act"

Farid Hafez

To cite this article: Farid Hafez (2017) Austrian Muslims Protest Against Austria's Revised "Islam Act", Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs, 37:3, 267-283, DOI: [10.1080/13602004.2017.1379693](https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2017.1379693)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13602004.2017.1379693>



© 2017 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 25 Sep 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 518



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Austrian Muslims Protest Against Austria's Revised "Islam Act"

FARID HAFEZ 

Abstract

Austria legally recognized Islam in 1912 and has thus been characterized as a "liberal" country regarding the inclusion of Muslims. But when the law was revision in 2015, it was largely criticized as discriminatory, anti-constitutional, and authoritarian towards the Muslim minority. The paper asks how a number of different social movement organizations and networks have framed their political participation, protest, and activism. It asks what demands were expressed regarding justice, criminalization, alienation, discrimination, and other contested issues. The paper also ponders the implications of political inclusion versus distance from the system for Muslim agency, as the protest movement ranged very widely from state-affiliated institutions to state-independent individuals.

Introduction

Academic interest in Islam and Muslims in the West has increased tremendously and recently culminated in book projects such as *The Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, to mention only one among many. This paper builds its theoretical foundation on Social Movement Theory (SMT), which has recently become popular for the study of Muslim movements, including those in the West. To mention but a few outstanding works: Asef Bayat has investigated Muslim movements not only in the Muslim world,¹ but also in the Global North and South.² Quintan Wiktorowicz has also used SMT for his research on Islamist movements in the Muslim world³ and the UK.⁴ The political scientists Joel Fetzer and J. Christopher Soper have studied the state's accommodation of Muslim religious practices in the public sphere in Britain, France, and Germany through the lens of SMT.⁵ Scholars such as Helen Rose Ebaugh have studied global Muslim movements that are also active in the West.⁶ The common ground these researchers share—as reflected in their choice to use SMT for analysing Muslim movements—is that they do not dismiss Muslim movements as irrational or proclaim them indoctrinated and deluded by a politicized religion. Rather, they examine them through the prism of the many theories that SMT offers for understanding various forms of protest politics, participation, and symbolic challenges.

Generally, there is a debate questioning the role religion can play in social movements. Some argue from a normative perspective that religious movements by their nature cannot be progressive social movements, while others see faith as a strong force for

Farid Hafez, Ph.D. (political science, University of Vienna) is lecturer in the Department of Political Science, University of Salzburg and Senior Research Fellow at Georgetown University's "The Bridge Initiative". In 2017, he was Fulbright visiting professor at UC Berkeley, and in 2014, he was visiting scholar at Columbia University, New York. He is the editor of *Islamophobia Studies Yearbook* and co-editor of the *European Islamophobia Report*.

social movements.⁷ These opposing statements can be evaluated empirically by referring to religious social movements that make use of central SMT tools. Scholars argue that religious and social movements have much in common, both structurally and ideologically.⁸ Some even suggest that religious institutions also provide resources for progressive movement mobilization.⁹ Nevertheless, Muslim movements remain marginal in the vast literature on SMT.

This article will scrutinize forms of protest used by Muslim movements to challenge a law on religion. Within SMT, Della Porta and Diani define protests as “non-routinized action in which channels of influence are opened through the activity of a series of collective actors”.¹⁰ Although protests are common to many democracies, they further point out in the same text that “protests go beyond the routinized forms of participation in representative democracy”. While everybody including political parties may use protests, social movements are more likely to do so due to their restricted access to policy-makers.¹¹ As Michael Lipsky explained in 1965, even politically impoverished groups can aspire to engage in protest, as they depend not on direct utilization of political power, but on the mobilization of people to enter the political arena.¹²

This paper will open with a short description of the political landscape surrounding the case study of the Austrian “Islam Act” of 2015 (“Introduction”). After a brief introduction to the case (“The Case”), it will describe how this social movement arose and profile the main social movement organizations (SMOs) and individuals constituting the movement, but also the relevant formal institutions (“The Protesters”). The section “The Demands” will cover the protest movement’s demands, presenting the various forms of protest, the demands, and the chronology of the legislative process. This will allow us to examine how Muslim movements tried to play a role within a minority context as agents of their own futures. This paper asks how a number of different SMOs and networks framed their political participation, protests, and activism to affect policy-making. What were demands regarding justice, criminalization, alienation, discrimination, and other contested issues during this debate? The paper also asks the implications of political inclusion versus distance from state institutions for Muslim agency, as the movement of protest was very broad, ranging from state-affiliated institutions to individuals highly independent of the state. What is the price of state recognition for such formal institutions as the Islamic Council in Austria? Does more distance from state institutions lead to more radical protest by networks that are not connected to state authorities? Some studies in Germany have revealed that churches, which are funded and administered by the state, position themselves much nearer to the state and are not grassroots-oriented or part of critical civil society.¹³ This may also be the case for the Islamic Council.

The methodology used for this analysis is thick description, as developed by Clifford Geertz,¹⁴ and process tracing as described by David Collier.¹⁵ First, the paper will investigate the vast material produced during the months under consideration, including press releases, interviews, video footage of protest speeches and debates, and so on. Due to the Internet’s significance for the protest, it was very easy to access the many protest tools that were documented online. Second, alongside narrative interviews with leading protesters, it will analyse focus group interviews with four leading protagonists of the main groups involved in the protest to delve deeper into relevant issues and obtain insight into how meaning is constructed during these processes. This is necessary to understand the *meaning* actors gave their protest in different phases.

The Case

Austria has long been known for its “tolerant” approach towards Muslims. Based on the recognition of Islam as a state religion in 1912, Muslims established a legally recognized public body in 1979, which is now one of 16 legally recognized churches and denominations. As Islamophobic election campaigns by far-right parties focused more and more on Muslims, formally “centrist” parties joined the fray, employing Islamophobic populism to gain votes. Subsequently, public discourse in the political elite shifted from a “tolerant” paradigm¹⁶ to increasingly exclusionary rhetoric and politics.¹⁷ This development has recently culminated in an amendment of century-old Islam Act.¹⁸ While the Islamic Council itself—the legal representative body of Muslims in Austria—welcomed the prospect of a new “Islam Act”, even initiated it, the text of the proposed law for Muslims and the eventual act was not welcomed wholeheartedly. In Austria’s Second Republic (since 1945), a number of laws for churches and religious communities have been amended. According to the former undersecretary Werner Jisa, a law “is always made for and with the respective church and not against it”.¹⁹ According to Austria’s neo-corporatist and consensus-oriented politics,²⁰ it was assumed that the new “Islam Act” would likewise be arrived at along these lines. But when the draft of the new Islam Act was presented on 2 October 2014, the Islamic Council criticized it and even published a very critical statement.²¹ While in the end, it accepted it begrudgingly, it seems that internal frictions—which had always existed within this institution²²—were so intense during the negotiations²³ that no coordinated politics on the Islamic Council’s part can be inferred from its actions. Rather, different voices could be heard from within the Islamic Council. These frictions even culminated in the demand for the resignation of IGGiÖ President Fuat Sanac made by two Islamic Council regional leaders in Upper Austria and Salzburg.²⁴ The reason for this was the poor negotiation result in the new Islam Act.

Chronology of development of Islam Act in Austria

2 October 2014	Government presentation of draft law
2 October–7 November 2014	Review process for the draft law
3 December 2014	Meeting of Council of Ministers
13 December 2014	Call for the Islamic Council President to step down
13 January 2015	Meeting of Constitutional Affairs Committee
12 February 2015	Meeting of Constitutional Affairs Committee
25 February 2015	Meeting of National Parliament (<i>Nationalrat</i>)
12 March 2015	Meeting of Federal Council (<i>Bundesrat</i>)
30 March 2015	Signing of law by Federal President

Source: Personal research

While the Islamic Council oscillated between protest and cooperation with the Austrian government during the negotiations, a number of aspects were striking: the draft of the Jewish law in 2010 had received only 10 statements within the formal review process, whereas the draft of the Islam Act received more than 150. In the case of the Jewish law, the progression from the draft’s issuance to the law’s implementation took one and a half years. In the case of the Islam Act, this period lasted only about half a year.²⁵ Ariel Muzicant, then president of the Jewish community, recalls that “the draft was elaborated in an academic tranquillity between the ministry official and the Jewish community”.²⁶ While only 1 of the 10 statements for the draft of the Jewish law was critical towards it, a vast majority of more than 130 were critical of the draft for the Islam Act.²⁷ A number of formal statements and academic articles criticized the draft,²⁸ which was not changed substantially after the criticism. Most importantly, the Islamic

Council's criticism was not taken into account when arriving at the final wording of the law and the Islamic Council even objected to the final text of the law,²⁹ while its president—its main leader, who legally represents the Islamic Council—positioned himself reconciled with the law and even praised the new Islam Act as exemplary.³⁰ In the end, the president of the Islamic Council sent a letter to the ministers that entailed a “clear basis to recommend approval” to the law,³¹ although the official bodies of the Islamic Council were not asked. The law was hence formally adopted by the national parliament on this premise.³² The highest Muslim representative's support laid the basis for the protest that emerged within the Muslim community and created this social movement.

During this period from 2 October 2014 to 31 March 2015, when the law was signed by the Chancellor and the President, a number of SMOs, networks, scholars, and individuals were engaged in protesting against the 2014 draft of the Islam Act advocating a change in the text.³³ Various forms of protest were used. The following section will present the main Muslim player in this protest.

The Protesters

On the one side, the Islamic Council itself protested against the draft of the new Islam Act. It represents the majority of mosque umbrella organizations, which in turn represent hundreds of mosques throughout the country.³⁴ The Islamic Council is very much a state-affiliated institution. Its 400 teachers for religious classes in the public school sector are paid by the Ministry of Education. On the other side, the Austrian Muslim Youth (*Muslimische Jugend Österreich*, MJÖ) and the Muslim Civil Society Network (*Netzwerk Muslimische Zivilgesellschaft*, NMZ) were the loudest protesters. Also, artists, such as the rapper MC Nasihat, produced rap songs against the Islam Act that were shared widely in this social movement.³⁵ Aside from the NMZ, a new network called the Initiative of Austrian Converts (Initiative Österreichischer Konvertitinnen und Konvertiten) was created to give voice to a minority within the Muslim community. In addition, a number of other Muslim organizations, mainly—but not exclusively—affiliated with the Islamic Council, participated in the protests, but to a smaller degree. While a large number of non-Muslim institutions such as the socialist youth, students, and pupils organization of the Social Democratic Party also protested against the law,³⁶ my focus in this article is on Muslim agency. We will later discuss these strategies in relation to the Islamic Council's protest. A large number of negative responses to the law came from non-Muslim institutions and individuals, especially the Protestant Church (which is the fourth largest church after the Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims) a large variety of protest forms was initiated on the side of the Muslims themselves.

This paper looks at how Muslims asserted agency in order to have an impact on the publication of the law. Agency is defined here as the potential capacity of people—individuals as well as institutions—to act independently and make their own free choices to determine their future.³⁷ Scholars such as Giddens, who subscribe more to the structuralist school, tend to focus on structures as constraining activities of agents, while also seeing in them enabling mechanisms for agents to be able to act. This paper pays closer attention to agents while remaining aware of Giddens's idea of the “duality of structure”.

Austria, with its corporatist system, includes different interest groups in the policy-making process. Hence the Islamic Council, as the legally recognized corporate body that represents Muslims by law, was a main actor. The corporatist system means that

interest groups and government representatives negotiate behind the scenes without the public's participation.³⁸ As such, the Islamic Council can be seen as a civil society actor with strong links to the political system. In some ways it depends on the system, for example, its public school teachers are paid by the government. In other ways, it is independent in terms of internal affairs and decision-making. Although the Islamic Council is not an umbrella organization, it represents a vast majority of the prominent Muslim organizations in Austria.³⁹ When the draft of the Islam Act was presented on 2 October 2014, the government argued that it had been negotiated with Muslims "in a respectful dialogue".⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the president of Islamic Council argued that it was not the final draft and that he had already protested against certain articles in the draft.⁴¹

But in the eyes of the MJÖ and the NMZ, the Islamic Council had simply done a bad job and was co-responsible for the outcome.⁴² This led to a series of protests in the months that followed. The MJÖ is a long established SMO with more than 30,000 sympathizers and a long history dating back to its foundation in 1996. The MJÖ was even the Islamic Council's official youth organization from 2004 to 2011. It receives financial support from the Austrian Ministry of Youth and belongs to the Austrian National Youth Council, a semi-governmental entity that represents the interests of 53 youth organizations with different political leanings, religious affiliations, and so on. Thus, this is an SMO that is institutionally connected to power structures. By contrast, the NMZ is a rather young movement that explicitly identifies as "anti-hierarchical", "independent", and "self-determined".⁴³ The NMZ includes Muslims from different organizations, representing different trends, as well as non-affiliated members. In their declaration of "Who We Are", they call for a critical distance from political power and media. They criticize the "restriction of civil rights" and the "implementation of surveillance structures". While the MJÖ, as a youth SMO, claims around 30,000 sympathizers, the NMZ is a small and dedicated civil rights group that was established in mid-October in protest against the draft for a new Islam Act.⁴⁴ A Facebook page titled "No to the Islam Act" (*Nein zum Islamgesetz*)⁴⁵ worked as a distributor of collective information on the Islam Act debate, its defenders, and especially its critics.

The Demands

The two ministers had presented the draft law during the Islamic Council president's stay in Mecca. Hence, no direct reaction could be given to the draft law. The Islamic Council published a press release one day after the presentation on 3 October, which was short but clear in its message. For the Council, it seemed that the public debate on Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) had affected the draft law. They stated that they were concerned about the Islam Act losing its "recognizable nature". Consequently, they called for a revision of the draft law.⁴⁶ But due to the fact that the Islamic Council was one of two main negotiators, the mutual trust between the players of the NMZ, the MJÖ, and the Islamic Council seemed to be severely damaged, which led to a large protest. For the activists of the MJÖ, the fact that the Islamic Council president was on Hajj (pilgrimage) in Mecca during the ministers' presentation and only returned a few days after the presentation, leading the establishment Muslim organizations to wait for him, combined with the fact that the review process was reduced from eight weeks to five, meant that they could not trust the Islamic Council as an ally.⁴⁷ While both the MJÖ⁴⁸ and the NMZ⁴⁹ praised Austria's tradition of legally recognizing Islam, their criticism progressed far beyond that of the Islamic Council over the course of the debate. The media seized upon the Islamic law to

create a debate from the very first day on, but most criticism was quite diplomatic at the beginning, whether from the Islamic Council or from legal experts.⁵⁰

Fighting for Equal Rights and Defending the Austrian Constitution

Only five days after the government ministers presented the draft law on 2 October, the MJÖ organized the first press conference on the issue. It was the first organization after the Islamic Council to criticize the draft law. In their press release on 8 October, they repeated the main aspects that were already brought up by the Islamic Council. And they went a step further. For them, the draft law's message was: "You don't have a home here. Austria does not stand by you!".⁵¹ According to the MJÖ, the draft law would play into the hands of extremists such as ISIL, as it conveyed that Muslims were not equal to the rest of the society. The MJÖ argued that security issues and an Islamophobic atmosphere would lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy in creating new extremists. It criticized the draft law as an "attack on religious freedom" and the "opposite of equal treatment". This was related to section 2 (2), which states that "Islamic Religious Societies enjoy the same legal protection as other legally recognized Religious Societies [...] as long as these do not conflict with statutory provisions" and which was consequently interpreted as deeming Islam to be a religion whose fundamentals contradict with national law. This was criticized because no other law of religion contained such a clause and because this general rule was already in the national constitution. So why include it explicitly in the Islam Act alone but not in the law governing any Christian, Jewish, or Buddhist denomination?

The MJÖ also criticized that the draft law would diminish the existing Muslim civil society because any group that is organized based on the law of association would be forced to become part of the Islamic Council. This imposition of a compulsory hierarchy would also put an end to any Muslim civil society. The MJÖ also accused the state of interference in a denomination's autonomous affairs, which would violate the constitution. The MJÖ's press release reveals a strong legal approach whose arguments are backed by legal knowledge. This points to the highly educated personnel and academic expertise available to this SMO. The following paragraph summarizes MJÖ's criticism quite well:

The authors of the draft bring damage to the internationally respected success story of legal recognition and equal treatment of all religious denominations in Austria. We are against the discriminatory special provisions for religious minorities. This is a disgrace for Austria in terms of human rights and democracy. It not only destroys an exemplary model of recognition, which is unique in Europe, but also breaks with a tradition of more than 100 years of peaceful and respectful coexistence between Austrian citizens of different beliefs.⁵²

This statement reveals MJÖ's strong attachment to the Austrian political system for dealing with Islam in the past. It also reveals that the criticism stems from a specific understanding of human rights and democracy that is based on the Austrian constitution itself. What is questioned is not the political system, the constitution, or the church-state relationship. Rather, the draft law is questioned as being a departure from the current system. Following this press release of 8 October 2014, a second press conference was organized on 14 October 2014 where the MJÖ presented an alternative draft law.⁵³

This press conference concentrated on five aspects, criticizing the draft law and stressing that it was against the Austrian constitution. It presented its alternative draft as being

based on the Protestant and Jewish laws and hence according to the principle of parity, the standard of equal treatment of all churches and denominations. Secondly, it denounces that the new Islam Act would regulate the relation between the state and all existing and future Islamic denominations, unlike all the other laws on religions, which operate between the state and a single denomination. The government's draft law actually explicitly referred to the Islamic Council and the Alevi Islamic Community, which had gained recognition in 2013 and only represented a small group within the Alevi community.⁵⁴ The third aspect was that Muslim civil society should not cease to exist. Fourth, the MJÖ demanded equal treatment in regard to the institutionalization of Islamic Theology at the University of Vienna with the same rights as the Protestant Church (the right to select its own personnel). Fifth, it demanded its own liaison in the ministry in charge of religious affairs, as Catholics and Protestants have.⁵⁵

A week later, the MJÖ launched a citizen's initiative⁵⁶ to demonstrate in the context of parliamentary action against the law. A citizen's initiative is a petition gathering signatures of Austrian citizens above age 16 to force the national parliament to discuss an issue. By December 2014, 21,000 people had signed the initiative, but it was silenced by the constitutional affairs committee in June 2015 with the argument that the law had already been passed in March 2015.⁵⁷ Parallel to the launching of the citizens' initiative, the largest Muslim umbrella organizations, which are all represented in the Islamic Council,⁵⁸ launched another petition, which was also promoted as a "citizen's initiative" but was in fact not registered as such. According to ATIB members, the petition mobilized a few thousand signatures.⁵⁹ Activists from the MJÖ interpreted this "initiative" as a means by the Muslim establishment to subvert the efforts of the *de facto* opposition.⁶⁰

By using a form of protest within the political system, the MJÖ clearly demonstrated that it accepted the rules of the game. The citizen's initiative included the aforementioned alternative draft of an Islamic law. The message was clear: "We want equal rights as citizens. We are not second class citizens with an extra law."⁶¹ As such, the MJÖ was very clear in promoting alternative options to the government. Kücükgöl says the MJÖ never believed it would be able to present its alternative draft as a new law, but that the "aim was actually to show the Islamic Council and Muslim agents in general what a dignified Islam Act could look like".⁶² For them it seemed like being a self-confident subject was at the core of this struggle. In fact, in an interview the president of the Islamic Council told me: "We have to realize that we are the weaker party and be happy with what we have. When it comes down to it, there is no country in Europe that respects Muslims as much as Austria."⁶³ The MJÖ's activists also saw a generational and cultural barrier between themselves and first-generation Austrian Muslims immigrants, who still had ties to their countries of origin:

They criticized the MJÖ for proposing its own draft law. In their eyes, we were disrespectful to the government. [...] They simply have a different understanding of democracy and definitely a narrow understanding of what participation in a political system looks like.⁶⁴

The MJÖ's seemed thus to be motivated by self-respect, a do-it-yourself spirit, and an identity politics that concentrated on what the MJÖ calls the "Austrian-Muslim identity".⁶⁵ Besides these generational and cultural frictions, the alternative draft served a strategic goal. The MJÖ presented their draft assuming it could put more pressure on the government by mobilizing people.

The NMZ was established because of discontent with the draft law. At the first meeting, three main grievances led to the organization's formation: (1) discontent with

official policy-makers' treatment of Muslims, (2) a lack of transparency, and (3) the lack of strong Muslim leadership.⁶⁶ The network included members of organizations—including the Islamic Council itself—as well as independent individuals. During the first meeting, four working groups were founded to organize a press conference, a public hearing, and a statement responding on the law. Like the MJÖ, the NMZ praised the long-standing legal recognition of Islam in Austria and this “institutionalization unique in Europe”.⁶⁷ The statement asked whether this “positive climate” had now been abandoned due to political partisanship. The NMZ criticized the draft of manifesting a general suspicion towards Muslims. It argued that all churches and denominations shall be treated equally and that Muslims should not be subject to a different legal framework. Additionally, the NMZ criticized the future ban on Muslim associations, which are organized according to the law of associations. While the NMZ welcomed the desire to institutionalize Islamic Theology at the University of Vienna by creating a separate faculty similar to the Faculty of Catholic Theology or the Faculty of Protestant Theology, it disapproved of the fact that the faculty staff was not required to be Muslim and again treated differently from other churches in terms of the legal relationship between the church and the university. The statement's criticisms were quite similar to those of the MJÖ. Alongside the MJÖ, the NMZ put more emphasis on the timing of the draft law's presentation to the public. It took issue that this coincided with a time period of intense debate about the terrorist group ISIL. On 30 October 2014, the NMZ organized a press release to not only criticize the draft law, but to also connect this issue with wider issues of Islamophobic discourses, the debate on ISIL and the Islam Act and how this debate impacts the climate of living together.⁶⁸

The protests of the social movement against the new Islam Act clearly exhibit all three traits used to describe social movements.⁶⁹

- (1) These were based on a conflictual collective action, promoting the change of a draft law. The conflict was identified and then framed by the players' analysis. Thus, they all shared a common interpretation of the situation, which they attempted to change.
- (2) There existed informal networks between SMOs like the MJÖ, networks like the NMZ, individuals actively sharing information, and people supporting the citizens' initiative. Via a Facebook page, information was shared by many players. Individuals moved from one entity to another, participating in the rally organized by the NMZ. And individuals from the NMZ participated in lectures and panels organized by the MJÖ to inform people about the draft law. People from all three entities and beyond shared goals, information, and resources, in person and virtually.
- (3) Collective identities developed. Based on shared goals, participants in the social movement developed a collective identity that united them. The participants in the MJÖ and the NMZ saw themselves quite clearly as pioneers in the struggle for anti-discrimination and equality.

Collaborating Apart from and in Concert with the Islamic Council (IGGiÖ)

By 20 October 2014, only five statements, including the MJÖ's, had been submitted to parliament. On 30 October, three of the Islamic Council's eight regional branches submitted a joint statement. Until then, mostly university scholars, NGOs, and individuals had presented statements.⁷⁰ The MJÖ argues that their discussion with other experts was crucial for understanding that a change to the law could only happen if the denomi-

nation in question objected to the law. Austrian political culture, especially in regard to religion policy, is very much a culture of consensus. In the history of church–state relations there, a law regarding a religion had never been implemented against the will of the respective church or denomination.

For these reasons, the MJÖ—although they did not believe the Islamic Council was a trustworthy partner—prevailed upon the Islamic Council to speak out against the law. According to this strategy, the group put its focus “not on the Islamic Council, although they were equally responsible and at fault for the draft, but rather on the government”.⁷¹ The MJÖ also believed that “many of the strong institutions in Austria would only trail the protest if the Islamic Council protested against the law”.⁷² And in fact, the MJÖ never attacked the Islamic Council during this crucial time period.

In tandem, the NMZ, the MJÖ, and other individuals tried to persuade other players to protest against the law. Their activists met with politicians of various stripes, from both opposition and government, as well as NGOs, to discuss the issue. The wide media coverage, which the MJÖ in particular enjoyed from the very beginning, made it easier for them to reach out to a wide range people. As a matter of fact, 101 statements—nearly two-thirds of the final total—appeared within the last week of the formal review process. Large churches such as the Protestant Church and many NGOs and individuals submitted statements critical of the draft law. The largest church in Austria, the Catholic Church, did not release an official statement. But the Catholic Social Academy published a statement together with two other denominational educational institutions.⁷³

The Islamic Council also invited other players for meetings to discuss the current state of affairs. What happened was that many activists—lawyers and legal scholars, students, and members of the NMZ and the MJÖ—joined the discussion uninvited. During the debate, pressure mounted to steer the debate on the law to a more fundamental critique. The Islamic Council’s president, Dr Fuat Sanaç, took his cue from this atmosphere and claimed that “he would take to the streets with ten thousand protesters if the draft law was not revised”.⁷⁴ According to activists from the MJÖ, they believed that “the pressure this movement had built in public as well as in Muslim organizations had led the Islamic Council to position itself against the law”.⁷⁵ The media presence and the mobilization of signatures for the citizen’s initiative on the streets and outside mosques had created an opportunity structure for this social movement to pressure the Islamic Council. Activists assumed that without a clear “no” from the Islamic Council, the draft law would be implemented.⁷⁶ And because its representative, Sanaç, had negotiated the draft law for more than three years without involving the Islamic Council boards, they knew that success was only possible with him. Within the ranks of the highest boards of the Islamic Council, the MJÖ was especially seen as a problem and was “criticized for getting out in the public too fast, for talking too harshly, for interfering in the affairs of the Islamic Council”.⁷⁷ The Islamic Council wanted to stay calm and diplomatic in its critique. But in public, it responded to the growing pressure. On 5 October, the Islamic Council held its press conference and its president declared that it was a “black day” for him and his community.⁷⁸ While activists from the MJÖ did not believe the Islamic Council president’s words were sincere, they regarded this initial result as a success.⁷⁹ As a second step, the movement demanded that the Islamic Council withdraw from the negotiation table and launch completely new negotiations for a brand-new draft of the law.⁸⁰

As the critique on the draft law spread, people were marshalled for the citizens’ initiative and the Internet gained particular importance. Many newspaper editorials were written, and debates and interviews were broadcast on TV and shared online. The

MJÖ and the NMZ produced videos, interviewing people, filming theatre sketches, giving tutorials on how to sign the citizen's initiative, and collecting statements critical of the draft law. Activists mobilized on the streets, in mosques, and at gatherings of all kinds. Throughout this period, the NMZ and the MJÖ overtly supported the Islamic Council as their spearhead for quashing the draft law. The NMZ referred to the Islamic Council as "the common house of all Muslims in Austria".⁸¹ In the same breath, the NMZ claimed "democratic and transparent procedures and an open communication". Slowly, the Islamic Council's status as *the* representative body came to be criticized more and more. This heightened especially after the NMZ had a meeting with Sanaç and realized the fundamental differences in their evaluation of the law and that he would indeed support the law.⁸²

On 12 December 2014, the NMZ organized a public hearing to discuss the draft law with representatives of both the Islamic Council and the government. Only one internal critic of the draft law appeared from the highest representative body of the Islamic Council alongside the former president of the Islamic Council, and the two ministers in charge sent two of their cabinet staff to discuss the draft law issue with a moderator from the "Platform of Christians and Muslims". Four hundred people attended the meeting.⁸³ During this meeting, Mihrican Topal from the NMZ gave the welcoming remarks, first criticizing that the council of ministers had passed the new Islam Act, and then stating: "At the same time we do not feel sufficiently informed and represented by our own representative body [the Islamic Council]. And we get irritated by divergent information."⁸⁴ During this meeting, the leadership was heavily criticized and the NMZ urged the Islamic Council to restart negotiations for a completely new text of the law. For the first time, a member of the audience demanded that the president step down.⁸⁵ This marked a shift in the general politics of the movement.

Questioning the Islamic Council and Mutiny Against the Leadership

While the audience's demand for the president to resign was only an individual opinion and the NMZ even published a press release affirming that it backed the Islamic Council,⁸⁶ a growing body of opinion emerged to call for him to step down. Two regional leaders of the Islamic Council, the one in Upper Austria followed by the one in Salzburg, called for the president to resign on 13 December. The MJÖ echoed this call.⁸⁷ One day later, the MJÖ organized a press conference with the hashtag #sanacmussweg (Sanaç has got to go), listing its reasons for calling the president to step down.⁸⁸

This strategic shift from challenging the government to questioning the Muslim leadership was due to a number of incidents. On 14 November 2014, the highest representative body of the Islamic Council met with the two ministers and their cabinet and discussed the draft law for five hours. After the meeting, the cabinet announced that "misunderstandings had been cleared up and clarification had been found".⁸⁹ But as some members of the Islamic Council reveal, this was not the case. As they urged the highest representative body to react to the government's press release and no reaction came, it grew obvious for many that the president could no longer be trusted as the Islamic Council's executive representative.⁹⁰ This manoeuvre culminated in a meeting of the Council of Ministers on 3 December, where it cleared the law to go to the next level, the constitutional affairs committee and then the national parliament.

By this point the Islamic Council itself had become the social movement's new target. The Islamic Council reacted by publishing another statement to reassert its criticism of the draft law.⁹¹ The largest mosques umbrella organizations also held a press conference

to voice their displeasure.⁹² This was especially important because in fact the great majority of Islamic Council officials belong to one of these organizations. But the demand of the MJÖ, the NMZ, another new group called Initiative of Austrian Converts and a number of high-ranking members of different boards of the Islamic Council as well as outside individuals—to stop negotiating and compromising and to withdraw from the negotiation table—was not met. The main fault line between the social movement against the draft of the Islam Act and the leading representatives of the Islamic Council and the mosque umbrella organizations was their diverging assessments of the conflict and therefore the strategic possibilities it afforded. According to a board member of the Islamic Council, its president viewed the organization as less powerful than the government: “We cannot do anything. If they [the government] want to have [the Islam Act], they can do it without us. We have no right to speak on our own behalf.”⁹³ While they believed the government would proceed this way, the social movement believed in the long-standing tradition of Austria legislating religion *for* and never *against* religious communities. But while the MJÖ and some officials called for the president to step down, the NMZ did not want to publicize an internal conflict. They believed that “the government was still the main player and thus should be held accountable first and foremost”.⁹⁴ According to them, a minority under attack should not squabble in public. Although many activists from NMZ would have liked the president to step down, the network, which operated under direct democracy, did not reach a majority in favour of demanding Sanaç’s resignation.⁹⁵

From October to December, the MJÖ and NMZ had tried to find allies in other mosque umbrella organizations and political parties. Representatives of the MJÖ and activists from the NMZ and the Initiative of Austrian Converts met with MPs from many parties, the Conservatives and Social Democrats (the ruling coalition), but also opposition parties such as the Greens and the New Austria and Liberal Forum (NEOS). The only parties the Muslim players did not approach were the far-right populist parties, such as the Freedom Party and Team Stronach. While all opposition parties voted against the Islam Act in parliament, NEOS was the only party to share the Muslim organizations’ concerns and to criticize the law as discriminatory and unconstitutional. By contrast, right-wing populists and some Greens partly demanded tougher regulations.⁹⁶ Representatives of the MJÖ revealed their experience when talking to the parties in government: “many shared our concerns but referred to the burgeoning threat of the far right and the alarmist atmosphere towards Muslims disseminated by the most popular tabloid, the *Kronen Zeitung*. The party representatives portrayed themselves as being trapped by populism”.⁹⁷ The NMZ met with leftist parties, Social Democrats, and the Greens because some activists from the leftist political camp had contacts with representatives of these parties.⁹⁸ On the other side, the MJÖ and the NMZ lost faith in the mosque umbrella organizations as possible allies when they realized that the majority of the members of the highest board generally agreed with the law aside from minor reservations.⁹⁹

Last Breaths

From that point on, the social movement and its two strongest actors—the MJÖ and the NMZ—gradually drifted apart. The MJÖ had ended its protest online, where it had mobilized for the citizens’ initiative, collecting 20,500 votes by 25 November 2014.¹⁰⁰ “We were more and more frustrated by the Islamic Council and saw no hope of persuading the leadership to stop the Islam Act from passing.”¹⁰¹ But the NMZ never called for the president to step down and continued to use the Islamic Council’s structures towards bringing about a change.

On 13 January and 12 February 2015, the parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee held a meeting to discuss the draft. Between this second meeting and the parliamentary session on 25 February, the NMZ organized a second press conference on 24 February,¹⁰² which was followed by a rally in front of the parliament building in which several hundred people participated.¹⁰³ There, the NMZ's criticism went into much further detail than that of the MJÖ. In their demands, the NMZ questioned the very existence of the Islamic Council: "Islam knows no unique interpretation of its sources. There is no church in Islam. Muslims don't want a church." The NMZ saw a problem in the draft's regulation of a "unitary Koran" as demanded by the government.¹⁰⁴ It called for an immediate reform of the Islamic Council to allow smaller networks to participate and have their criticisms heard.

At the same time, the NMZ activists were not clear about their approach to the Islamic Council. During the group interview a few months later, they expressed different stances towards the Islamic Council. But during the conflict, they clearly respected the existence of the institution. When a letter from the president of the Islamic Council to the two ministers and the Head of the Constitutional Affairs Committee was leaked to the public on 13 February 2015, it became obvious that the president of the Islamic Council had no sympathy for the demands of the protest movement. In the letter, he gave a "recommendation for an acceptance to approve to the law",¹⁰⁵ while the statement of the Islamic Council's elected boards was manipulated after the meeting of the Constitutional Affairs Committee.¹⁰⁶ After these irregularities became evident, the MJÖ gave up the protest. The NMZ still tried to work within the Islamic Council and called for the board of arbitrators to judge whether the Islamic Council's decision-making process was even consistent with its charter and, if so, to publish the text of the decision made at the meeting.¹⁰⁷

The Islamic Council reacted by not really answering the questions. Rather, they stated that the current law was indeed a compromise.¹⁰⁸ Meanwhile, as this was happening, the Austrian national parliament had already decided on the law on 25 February and the law was formally signed by the president on 30 March 2015. Minor changes were made. But most of the critiques were ignored. Only in regard to the Faculty of Islamic Theology, similar rights to the Protestants were granted.¹⁰⁹ In the end, the NMZ and the MJÖ along with a number of other mosque umbrella organizations had declared to go to the Constitutional Court to object the Islam Act.¹¹⁰

Conclusion

The analysis clearly shows that the role Muslims play in determining their own destinies within a minority context differs widely between players. This case especially reveals the frictions *within* the Muslim community. On one side, the official Islamic Council represents a more pliant institution. On the other side, the social protest movement against the Islam Act was composed of young people who were socialized in Austria or Europe (MJÖ, NMZ) as well as native Austrians (the Converts). In fact, in the case at hand, it can only be partly affirmed that greater distance from state institutions led to more radical protest by groups that are not connected to state authorities. For large sections of the Islamic Council, this can be affirmed, especially for its president. While on the other side, the MJÖ is also a partly state-funded organization that was a leading force in this movement against the Islam Act. Nevertheless, the NMZ, as a smaller group of people, sometimes presented the most radical stances towards state institutions, such as when questioning the Islamic Council itself as an institution. But it would be too short-sighted to explain this difference only in regard to questions of closeness versus distance from the state. As the analysis clearly reveals, there is a cultural gap between most of

the Islamic Council representatives and the young activists of the social movement. There is, as one activist calls it, a “different understanding of democracy and [...] what participation in a political system looks like”,¹¹¹ which marks two different generations, an immigrant leadership in the Islamic Council, on one side, and people of the second and third generation as well as Muslim converts, who were born and raised in a different political climate, on the other. As we saw, the first people to call for the Islamic Council’s president to step down were young people within the ranks of the IGGiÖ itself.

It is interesting to see that this social movement’s demands were very much based on the existing cultural and political framework. The social movement against the Islam Act Islamic law called for equal treatment with other churches and denominations, and demanded the same rights other religious groups enjoy, not more rights. This was argued on the basis of the Austrian constitution, human rights, and existing democratic standards. What was questioned was not the political system, the constitution, or the church–state relationship itself. Rather, the new Islam Act was challenged as being a violation of the current policy framework in its broadest sense: the legal system and political culture.

Here, it is interesting to see that the organizations, like the MJÖ, that are nearer to state institutions chose more routinized actions to influence the law-making process, such as mounting a citizens’ initiative in parliament. Referring to the structuralist school, one might say that agency is taken within the existing structures that clearly function as enabling mechanisms. On the other side, looser networks like the NMZ, which are not as established in the political landscape, chose to rally in front of the parliament, opting for what Della Porta and Diani call a more “non-routinized action”. Their limited access to policy-makers might explain why they chose to organize a rally outside the parliament building, while the MJÖ was more active in systematically meeting MP’s and representatives of political parties, many of whom they already knew prior to the debate on the Islam Act.

The agency taken by Muslim actors in this social protest movement reveals that Muslim agents saw themselves as citizens, not as members of a minority. Both their demands and the tools of the protest—from the citizens’ initiative to the rally in front of the parliament—reveal that Muslim agency was in fact Austrian agency. Their protest against the government also meant protesting against injustice done to a minority against the backdrop of existing Islamophobic discourse. This analysis did not consider the relationship between Muslim and non-Muslim actors within this social movement. Nor did it consider the agency of the government, single political parties, or the other religious denomination affected by the law, the “Islamic Alevi Council”. An examination of these actors and their impact in supporting or opposing the law, strengthening and weakening the impact of this social movement, would surely bring more interesting insights to a timely topic, which had to be excluded due to the limited space of this article.

NOTES

1. Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic: Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford Studies in Middle Eastern and Islamic Societies and Culture), Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2007.
2. Asef Bayat and Linda Herrera, *Being Young and Muslim: New Cultural Politics in the Global South and North*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2010, pp. 27–47.
3. Quintan Wiktorowicz, *The Management of Islamic Activism: Salafis, the Muslim Brotherhood, and State Power in Jordan*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000. Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism. A Social Movement Approach*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2004.
4. Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism in the West*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

5. Joseph S. Fetzter and Christopher J. Soper, *Muslims and the State in Britain, France and Germany*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
6. Helene R. Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement. A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam*, New York: Springer, 2010.
7. Christian Smith (ed.), *Disruptive Religion: The Force of Faith in Social Movement Activism*, London: Routledge, 1996.
8. John A. Hannigan, "Social Movement Theory and the Sociology of Religion: Toward a New Synthesis Sociology of Religion", *Sociology of Religion*, Vol. 52, No. 4, 1991, pp. 311–331.
9. Elizabeth D. Hutchison, "Spirituality, Religion, and Progressive Social Movements: Resources and Motivation for Social Change", *Journal of Religion & Spirituality in Social Work: Social Thought*, Vol. 31, Nos 1–2, 2012, pp. 105–127.
10. Donatella Della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 2nd ed., Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.
11. *Ibid.*, p. 168.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 167.
13. Jonas Gobert, *Verbände in staatsnahen Gremien. Die politische Soziologie der funktionalen Repräsentation*, [Associations Near to the State. The Political Sociology of Functional Representation], Berlin: Springer VS, 2014, p. 257.
14. Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture", in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, ed. C. Geertz, New York: Basic Books, 1973, pp. 3–30.
15. David Collier, "Understanding Process Tracing", *PS: Political Science & Politics*, Vol. 44, No. 4, 2011, pp. 823–830.
16. Farid Hafez, "Gedenken im 'islamischen Gedankenjahr'" [Commemorating the Muslim Commemoration Year], *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlands*, No. 104, 2014, pp. 63–84.
17. Farid Hafez, *Islamophober Populismus: Moschee- und Minarettbauverbote österreichischer Parlamentsparteien* [Islamophobic Populism. Debates on the Ban of Mosques and Minarets], Wiesbaden: VS, 2010.
18. Farid Hafez, "Debating the 2015 Islam Act in Austrian Parliament: Between Legal Recognition and Islamophobic Populism", *Discourse and Society*, Vol. 28, No. 4, 2017.
19. Werner Jisa, Interview by the author, 19 May 2015.
20. Howard J. Wiarda, *American Foreign Policy. Actors and Process*, New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1996, pp. 73–74.
21. IGGiÖ, Stellungnahme der Islamischen Glaubensgemeinschaft zum Entwurf zum Islamgesetz [Answer by the Islamic Council to the Draft of the Islam Act] (2014), 68/SN-69/ME XXV. GP, 5 November 2014 http://www.parliament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/SNME/SNME_02076/fname_371638.pdf (accessed 18 June 2015).
22. Farid Hafez, "One Representing the Many: Institutionalized Austrian Islam", in *Debating Islam. Negotiating Religion, Europe, and the Self*, eds. S. Behloul, S. Leuenberger and A. Tunger-Zanetti, Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2013.
23. Dudu Kücükgöl, *Das neue Islamgesetz. Modernisierung oder Sondergesetzgebung?*, in *Österreichisches Jahrbuch für Politik* [The New Islam Act. Modernization or Special Law?, In: Austrian Politics Yearbook] 2014, eds. A. Khol, G. Ofner, S. Karner and D. Halper, Wien: Böhlau, 2015, pp. 397–409.
24. Austrian Broadcasting Corporation ORF, "'Präsident Sanac muss weg': Aufstand der Muslime" ["President Sanac Must Go": Insurrection of the Muslims] 13 December 2014, <http://religion.orf.at/stories/2684214/> (accessed 24 April 2017).
25. Austrian Parliament, Israelitengesetz 1890, Änderung [Law on Jewish Community, Amendment] 2010, http://www.parliament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXIV/ME/ME_00199/index.shtml (accessed 18 June 2015).
26. Ariel Muzicant, Interview by the author, 30 June 2015.
27. Austrian Parliament, Islamgesetz [Islam Act] 1912, Änderung, 2014, http://www.parliament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/ME/ME_00069/index.shtml (accessed 18 June 2015).
28. Brigitte Schinkele and Richard Potz, Stellungnahme zum Entwurf eines Bundesgesetzes, mit dem das Gesetz betreffend die Anerkennung der Anhänger des Islam als Religionsgesellschaft geändert wird [Answer to draft of Islam Act] 102/SN-69/ME XXV. GP, 5 November 2014, http://www.parliament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/SNME/SNME_02154/iframe_372284.pdf (accessed 18 June 2015).
29. IGGiÖ, Stellungnahme des Schurates der IGGiÖ zum Bundesgesetz über die äußeren Rechtsverhältnisse Islamischer Religionsgesellschaften – Islamgesetz [Answer to draft of Islam Act] 2015, 16 February 2015, <http://derislam.at/?f=news&shownews=1960&kid=70> (accessed 18 June 2015).

30. Austrian Broadcasting Corporation ORF, IGGiÖ-Präsident Sanaç gibt sich versöhnt mit Islamgesetz, [President Sanac of the Islamic Council Presents Himself Reconciled with Islam Act] 26 July 2015, <http://religion.orf.at/stories/2723325/> (accessed 18 August 2015).
31. Michael Völker, "Islamgesetz: Grüne sehen, Generalverdacht gegen Muslime" [Islam Act: Greens Spot, General Suspicion Against Muslims], *Der Standard*, 13 February 2015.
32. Austrian Parliament, *Neues Islamgesetz: Verfassungsausschuss empfiehlt Beschlussfassung, Parlamentskorrespondenz Nr. 105* [New Islam Act: Constitutional Affairs Committee Recommends Taking of Decision, Parliamentary Correspondence No. 105], 12 February 2015, http://www.parliament.gv.at/PAKT/PR/JAHR_2015/PK0105/ (accessed 18 June 2015).
33. I was personally engaged in writing op-ed pieces and academic articles, and participated in discussion, debate, and analysis on television and radio. In February 2015, I was invited by the political party NEOS as an external expert for a statement on the Islam Act in a parliamentary chamber committee, where all political parties represented in national parliament had each invited an expert.
34. Hafez, "One Representing Many", *op. cit.*
35. The title of the track "Bitte kurz zuahean," literally "please listen up," has a double meaning. Implicitly it is an imperative directed at foreign minister Kurz, asking him to lend an ear. The track has nearly 10,000 YouTube views, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KKpC4rtKeSs> (accessed 24 April 2017).
36. AKS, AKS, SJ, VSSTÖ: *Islamgesetz untragbar und diskriminierend. Muslim_innen sind keine Bürger_innen zweiter Klasse* [Socialist Organizations: Islam Act Unbearable and Discriminatory. Muslims Are Not 2nd Class Citizens], 28 October 2014, www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20141028_OTS0174/aks-sj-vssto-eislamgesetz-untragbar-und-diskriminierend (accessed 24 April 2017).
37. Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005, p. 235.
38. Anton Pelinka, *Politische Herrschaftsiruale. Sozialpartnerschaft und politische Kultur in Österreich, in Demokratieritual: zur politischen Kultur der Informationsgesellschaft* [Rituals of Political Power. Conso-ciationism and political culture in Austria, in: Rituals of Democracy: On the political culture of information society], eds. F. Plasser, P. A. Ulram and M. Welan, Wien: Böhlau, 1985, pp. 171–182.
39. Farid Hafez, *Kleiner Verein oder Vertretung einer Mehrheit: Wer ist die Islamische Glaubengemeinschaft in Österreich?*, in *Der (Alb)traum vom Kalifat – Ursachen und Wirkung von Radikalisierung im politischen Islam*, [Small Association or Representative of a Majority? Who Is the Islamic Council in Austria?], In: Nightmare and Dream of the Caliphate: Causes and Effects of Radicalization in Political Islam], eds. J. Rupp and W. Feichtinger, Wien: Böhlau, 2016.
40. BKA, Josef Ostermayer: *Neues Islamgesetz soll Rechtssicherheit und Transparenz sicherstellen* [New Islam Law to Bring Legal Security and Transparency], 2 October 2014, <https://www.bka.gv.at/site/cob_57223/currentpage_0/6592/default.aspx> (accessed 14 August 2015).
41. ORF, *Weiter Kritik an Islamgesetz* [More Criticism Towards Islam Act], 9 October 2014, <http://oe1.orf.at/artikel/388538> (accessed 14 August 2015).
42. MJÖ, Group interview by the author, 27 July 2015; NMZ, Group interview by the author, 26 June 2015.
43. NMZ, *Selbstbild der Netzwerkes Muslimische Zivilgesellschaft* [Self-concept of Muslim Civil Society Network] 2014, <http://dieanderen.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/selbstbild.pdf> (accessed 18 June 2015).
44. NMZ, Group interview, 26 June 2015.
45. The webpage was taken offline during this research and thus could not be included.
46. IGGiÖ, *Gedanken zum Islamgesetz vor dem Hintergrund des Opferfestes* [Thoughts on the Islam Act at the Background of Eid al-Adha], 3 October 2014, <http://derislam.at/?f=news&shownews=1908&kid=70> (accessed 18 June 2015).
47. MJÖ, Group interview.
48. MJÖ, Pressestatement ('Press release'), 8 October 2014, www.mjoe.at/fileadmin/Dokumente/Pressestatement.pdf (accessed 18 June 2015).
49. NMZ, *Stellungnahme des Netzwerk Muslimische Zivilgesellschaft zum Entwurf des neuen Islamgesetzes* [Answer to the Draft Islam Act by Muslim Civil Society Network], 30 October 2014, 44/SN-69/ME XXV. GP, http://www.parliament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/SNME/SNME_01975/imfname_371210.pdf (accessed 18 June 2015).
50. ORF, *Glaubengemeinschaft will "Präzisierungen"* [Islamic Council Wants Specification], 2 October 2014, oe1.orf.at/artikel/387986 (accessed 18 August 2015).
51. MJÖ, Pressestatement ('Press release'), 8 October 2014, www.mjoe.at/fileadmin/Dokumente/Pressestatement.pdf (accessed 18 June 2015).
52. *Ibid.*

53. MJÖ, *Pressekonferenz zum Islamgesetz 2.0* [Press Conference on Islam Act 2.0], 14 October 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OEccSPWyHs0> (accessed 18 June 2015).
54. The Alevi Community supported the Islam Act without contestation.
55. *Ibid.*
56. Austrian Parliament, *Nein zum Entwurf des neuen Islamgesetzes – Für die Gleichheit aller BürgerInnen Österreichs* [No to Draft of the New Islam Act – For Equality of All Austrian Citizens], 20 October 2014, http://www.parliament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/BI/BI_00056/index.shtml#tab-Uebersicht (accessed 18 June 2015).
57. Austrian Parliament, *Parliamentsskorrespondenz Nr. 726* [Parliamentary Correspondence No. 726], 25 June 2015, http://www.parliament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/BI/BI_00056/index.shtml (accessed 18 August 2015).
58. These included the Islamische Föderation (IF), the Union Islamischer Kulturzentren (UIKZ), the Türkische Föderation (TF), the Verband der Bosniakisch-Islamischen Vereine in Österreich (IZBA), and the Türkisch Islamische Union (ATIB).
59. The real count is unclear, as the petition was never presented to anyone. Various numbers have been cited.
60. Dudu Küçüköğl, Interview with by the author, 29 February 2015.
61. *Ibid.*
62. *Ibid.*
63. Fuat Sanaç, Interview by the author, 19 May 2015.
64. MJÖ, Group interview, *op. cit.*
65. MJÖ, Press release, *op. cit.*
66. NMZ, Group interview, *op. cit.*
67. NMZ, Stellungnahme, *op. cit.*
68. NMZ, *Pressekonferenz* [Press Release], 30 October 2014 – Netzwerk Muslimische Zivilgesellschaft (Press conference 30 October 2014), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TTZnPyEKUvo> (accessed 18 June 2015).
69. Della Porta and Diani, *Social Movements*, pp. 20–29, *op. cit.*
70. Austrian Parliament, *Islamgesetz 1912, Änderung, 2014* [Islam Act 1912, Amendments 2014], http://www.parliament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/ME/ME_00069/index.shtml (accessed 18 June 2015).
71. MJÖ, Group interview, *op. cit.*
72. *Ibid.*
73. Cardinal Christoph Schönborn, the highest representative of the Catholic Church in Austria, revealed that various players – including the two government ministers – had approached him to express his stance on this law. The Cardinal said that as the Islam Act has no implications for the law on religion in general, the Church would not publish a statement, and also that the Church has no objections to the law (Katholische Kirche 2014). Austrian Parliament, 95/SN-69/ME XXV. GP – Stellungnahme zu Entwurf, 6 November 2014, www.parliament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXV/SNME/SNME_02145/imfname_372068.pdf (accessed 18 June 2015).
74. MJÖ, Group interview, *op. cit.*
75. *Ibid.*
76. *Ibid.*; NMZ, Group interview, *op. cit.*
77. Amani Abuzahra, interview by the author, 27 July 2015.
78. Die Presse, *Islamgesetz: “Heute ist für mich ein schwarzer Tag”* [Islam Act: “Today For Me It Is a Black Day”], 5 November 2014.
79. MJÖ, Group interview, *op. cit.*
80. *Ibid.*; NMZ, Group interview, *op. cit.*
81. NMZ, *Grundsätzliche Klarstellung Pressemitteilung* [Fundamental Clarification. Press release], 14 December 2014, <http://dieanderen.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/PM2.pdf> (accessed 18 June 2015).
82. NMZ, Group interview, *op. cit.*
83. NMZ, *Pressemitteilung zur Veranstaltung “Hearing zum Islamgesetz”* [Press Release to Hearing of Islam Act], 12 December 2014, <http://dieanderen.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/PM1.pdf> (accessed 12 December 2014).
84. NMZ, *Öffentliches Hearing zum Islamgesetz* [Public Hearing of Islam Act], 12 December 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VJrNU_2tGE (accessed 18 August 2015).
85. NMZ, *Pressemitteilung zur Veranstaltung “Hearing zum Islamgesetz”* [Press Release to Hearing of Islam Act], 12 December 2014, <http://dieanderen.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/PM1.pdf> (accessed 12 December 2014).

86. NMZ, *Grundsätzliche Klarstellung Pressemitteilung* [Fundamental Clarification. Press release], 14 December 2014, <http://dieanderen.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/PM2.pdf> (accessed 18 June 2015).
87. ORF, Präsident Sanaç muss weg, *op. cit.*
88. MJÖ, Press statement: “#SanacMussWeg”, 14 December 2014, http://www.mjoe.at/uploads/media/Pressekonferenz_IV_SanacMussWeg.pdf (accessed 18 June 2015).
89. Redaktion, “Heikle Mission beim Obersten Islamrat” [Sensitive Mission at Highest Islam Council], *Kurier*, 15 November 2014, www.kurier.at/politik/inland/islamgesetz-heikle-mission-beim-obersten-islamrat/97.148.306 (accessed 18 June 2015).
90. MJÖ, Group interview, *op. cit.* NMZ, Group interview, *op. cit.*
91. IGGiÖ, *Der Schurarat der IGGiÖ bekräftigt die Stellungnahme des Obersten Rates zum Islamgesetz an die Regierung* [Shura Council to Confirm Answer of the Highest Council Regarding Islam Act], 22 December 2014, <http://derislam.at?f=news&shownews=1935&kid=70> (accessed 18 June 2015).
92. Yakup Geçgel, *Stellungnahme der muslimischen Dachverbände, Moscheegemeinden und Fachverbände der IGGiÖ zur Regierungsvorlage des Islamgesetzes* [Opinion of the Muslim Umbrella Organizations, Mosque Communities and Trade Associations of the IGGiÖ on the Government of the Islam Act], 16 December 2014, http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20141216_OTS0170/stellungnahme-der-muslimischen-dachverbaende-moscheegemeinden-und-fachverbaende-der-iggioe-zur-regierungsvorlage-des-islamgesetzes (accessed 18 June 2015).
93. Abuzahra, Interview, *op. cit.*
94. NMZ, Group interview, *op. cit.*
95. *Ibid.*
96. Grüne, *Grüne: Modernes Islamgesetz mit klaren, einheitlichen Rechten und Pflichten notwendig* [Green: Modern Islam Act with Clear, Uniform Rights and Obligations Necessary], 2 October 2014, http://www.ots.at/presseaussendung/OTS_20141002_OTS0172/gruene-modernes-islamgesetz-mit-klaren-einheitlichen-rechten-und-pflichten-notwendig (accessed 18 June 2015).
97. MJÖ, Group interview, *op. cit.*
98. NMZ, Group interview, *op. cit.*
99. Bernhard Gaul, *Wirbel um Islamgesetz: Vorwurf der Täuschung*, *Kurier* [Fuss of the Islam Act: Allegation of the Deception – Kurier], 20 February 2015.
100. Redaktion, “20.000 unterschreiben Initiative gegen Islamgesetz” [20,000 Signed Initiative Against Islamgesetz] – *kurier.at* [Kurier], 25 November 2014.
101. MJÖ, Group interview, *op. cit.*
102. NMZ, *Ansuchen um Klarstellung!* [Request for Clarification!], 28 February 2015, <http://dieanderen.net/ansuchen-um-klarstellung/> (accessed 14 August 2015); NMZ, Group interview, *op. cit.*; NMZ, “Die Klarstellung” – *Das Schiedsgericht der IGGiÖ* [“Clarification” – The IGGiÖ Arbitration Court], 9 March 2015, <http://dieanderen.net/die-klarstellung-das-schiedsgericht-der-iggioe/> (accessed 25 April 2017).
103. NMZ, *Klarstellung*, *op. cit.*
104. NMZ, Group interview, *op. cit.*
105. Völker, *Islamgesetz*, *op. cit.*
106. Gaul, *Wirbel um Islamgesetz*, *op. cit.*
107. NMZ, *Ansuchen um Klarstellung*, *op. cit.*
108. *Ibid.*
109. Islamgesetz 2015, 39. Bundesgesetz: Islamgesetz 2015 (NR: GP XXV RV 446 AB 469 S.61. BR: 9324 AB 9326 S. 839.), 30 March 2015, https://www.ris.bka.gv.at/Dokumente/BgblAuth/BGBLA_2015_I_39/BGBLA_2015_I_39.pdf (accessed 19 April 2017).
110. ORF, *Islamgesetz: Muslime kündigen Verfassungsklage an* [Islam Act: Muslims Announce Constitutional Action], 25 February 2015, <http://religion.orf.at/stories/2696212/> (accessed 18 August 2015).
111. MJÖ, Group interview, *op. cit.*

ORCID

Farid Hafez  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6931-9712>