



## ***Muslim Responses to Integration Demands in the Netherlands since 9/11***

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**Abstract:** This paper takes a closer look at the debate over the value and meaning of Islam for Dutch society and politics in the aftermath of 9/11. It presents a case of how global events since September 11, and particularly the violence perpetrated by Muslims, accelerated the call for integration of Muslims in the country. The relationship between Islam and violence in particular, and Islam and anti-social values in general, had moved to the centre stage of the political debate. Furthermore, there was intense argument between those who felt that Islam in general was inimical to Dutch and Western values, and those who argued that Islam could be a conduit for such values. In this new context, integration increasingly came to be seen by the government as an antidote to radicalization. Ordinary Muslims not directly linked with radical groups and movements found themselves trapped among the calls for integration/assimilation, anti-Muslim rhetoric and radical recruitment. A limited but telling number of interviews with some Muslims who were not directly involved in any form of radical politics illustrate the impact of such a debate. The responses in these interviews present the extent to which Muslims were creatively engaging with the whole spectrum of the integration debate in the Netherlands. But more significantly, they exposed the assumptions of the broader Dutch public debate about Islam as a distinctive culture and value system.

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In April 2006, the Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy, better known by its acronym WRR<sup>1</sup>, issued four studies on various aspects of Islamism. A fifth report summarized these findings for policy purposes. The WRR has been advising the Dutch government on a multitude of social and political issues since its official

inception in 1976. These recent studies dealt with the possibilities within modern Islamic revivalism. They argue that the future of Islamic activism need not necessarily lead to a dramatic clash with the West. The first of these studies by Nasr Abu Zayd, "Reformation of Islamic Thought: A Critical Historical Analysis," clearly shows that this was not simply a window-dressing of Islam for Dutch society. Abu Zayd

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<sup>1</sup> Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeeringsbeleid.

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presented a realistic picture of the possibility and context for a progressive approach to Islam in the light of recent polarization. He was somewhat pessimistic about the future of progressive and liberal Islam in the light of the Iraq war, and a generally conservative Islamization.

The second publication was an edited book of studies that reviewed shariah in the national legal systems of 12 different countries (Otto et al., 2006). The third was a study by Otto entitled "Sharia en nationaal recht: rechtsystemen in Moslimlanden tussen traditie, politiek en rechtstaat." It was a critical presentation and review of the history and meaning of Shariah from its inception, and its particular significance in the legal contexts of different countries (Otto, 2006). Berger's study "Klassieke Sharia en Vernieuwing" also dealt with a comprehensive review of the Sharia as a corpus of rulings in theory, and its application in practice. It also included an extensive section on areas where prevailing interpretations of the Shariah contradicted human rights norms in a number of aspects (Berger, 2006).

The WRR review report, "Dynamism in Islamic Activism: Connection Points for Democracy and Human Rights" ("Dynamiek in islamitisch activisme: aanknopingspunten voor democratisering en mensenrechten"), considered the implications of these studies for the foreign policies pursued by the European Union and the Netherlands in their relationship with Muslim countries and the further development of democracies. The authors argued that democratization trends were not the monopoly of secular movements as the current EU policy presumed. Changes in Islamist practices and movements presented opportunities to engage constructively with its representatives ("Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het Regeringsbeleid," 2006). As the title indicates, the report represented an argument that European and Dutch society should actively exploit the diversity

within Muslim debate over Shariah, the Qur'an and democratic values, and should look out for possible areas of constructive engagement:

An atmosphere of confrontation and sloganised thinking does not create durable conditions for security, democratization and increasing respect for human rights. The only reasonable alternative is to focus on the common points of democracy and human rights in Islamic activism itself. This report presents an analysis that illustrates that there are such common points.<sup>2</sup>

Not surprisingly, the reports provoked angry protests from a vociferous sector of the Dutch public and political establishment. It did not take long for the critics of Islam to heap scorn on the overall report and its apparently positive evaluation of the future of Islam and Islamic politics. This is not surprising, as the reports directly challenged statements and perceptions of Islam in Dutch public debate in the last decade and a half. In one of the studies, Otto himself cited as example the kind of statements from populist politician, Geert Wilders, that has dominated the sensationalist press: "Negenennegentig procent van alle problemen in de wereld hebben op de een of andere manier met de islam te maken. Dat is de realiteit. Ja, ook in Nederland" (from the newspaper *Trouw*, 16 oktober 2004) (Otto et al., 2006). Such a statement reflected the irrational fear about Islam in Dutch public discussions and debates.

Like many places in Europe, public debate about the threat of Islam can be traced to the death threat issued against Salman Rushdie by Ayatollah Khomeini, and soon

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<sup>2</sup> Een klimaat van confrontatie en sjabloon-denken scheidt geen bestendige voorwaarden voor veiligheid, democratisering en toenemend respect voor mensenrechten. Het enig wenselijke alternatief is in te spelen op aanknopingspunten voor democratie en mensenrechten in het islamitisch activisme zelf. De in dit rapport gepresenteerde analyses laten zien dat die aanknopingspunten er wel degelijk zijn (Brusse and Schoonenboom, 2006).

thereafter the first Gulf War (Shadid and van Koningsveld, 1992). A consistent line of opinion pieces in the newspapers can be traced from this time that included a dubious author called Muhammad Rasoel (1989), Frits Bolkenstein (1991), Pim Fortuyn (1996-2002), Paul Scheffer (2000), Ayaan Hirsi Ali (2003) and Theo van Gogh (2004). To these may also be added equally important academic voices like the Arabist Hans Jansen, legal philosophers Paul Cliteur and Afshin Elian, and University professor at Utrecht University, Herman Philipse. The critics may be regarded as the main architects of Islamophobia in the Netherlands. All public debate about immigration, integration and Islam turned around their clear and unnuanced opinions and positions. They do not all agree with each other on everything, but they have contributed to an emergence of a very clear argument that multiculturalism has failed in the Netherlands, and that the full assimilation of particularly Muslims remains the only answer for the future. Islam plays a more or less central argument in the positions of the Islamophobes. It stands for immigrant culture, groups in the 'slums' of Dutch cities refusing integration, anti-social values and everything that cannot be reconciled with Dutch cultures, values and norms. What is distinctive about these critics is that they hardly refer to any distinctions, trends and conflicting positions among Muslims. Islam poses a threat to the West in general and thus to the Netherlands (Hermansen), and is ready to take the place of the Soviet Union (Bolkenstein). The very foundations of Islam are inimical to democratic values and human rights (Scheffer and Hirsi Ali). Islam has played a major role in the failure of the Dutch immigration policy (Scheffer).

The recent WRR reports are a clear reaction to this dominant Islamophobic trend within Dutch public debate. The extensive studies reveal to what extent think tanks and government agencies responsible for

security and integration have grappled with the relationship between Islam, Islamic trends and anti-social values. It reveals a less stringent and even less critical voice in a public debate that has generally been extremely negative of Muslim practices and gestures. The reports do not wish the Dutch government or the European union to support Islamic activist movements. They rather argue that there is intense debate among Muslims on the significance of democracy and liberal values. In a sense, Islamic debates may even lead to an appreciation and perhaps even adoption of such liberal values among Muslims. Other government reports may also be regarded as a reaction to the acrimonious, and usually very sensationalist, opinions that Dutch Islamophobic critics present to the public. In the first part of the essay, an attempt will be made to trace some of the prominent lines of arguments in such reports.

The WRR report and studies represent a resilience of the Dutch establishment against the Islamophobic critics, and a resilience of the conviction that religion can be a source of emancipation. In this regard, the arguments of these reports can be located within the 20<sup>th</sup> century history of religion in the Netherlands. The modern history of the Netherlands is characterized by a pillarization (*verzuiling*) of society around confessional religious groups. This meant that the modern social institutions (schools, political parties, hospitals and even newspapers) were founded around a particular confessional group. Such institutions played a central role in the further development of the society and of its individuals. They assisted the group and the individuals to achieve their rights and take their responsible positions in society. The pillarization of the society has broken down since the 1960s, but their remnants and symbols remain (Moberg, 1961; Bryant, 1981; Bakvis, 1984). The debate about a Muslim pillar (*zuil*) has been raised during the past two decades, but this has never become a

real option. The broader society has considered this an outmoded approach to modern development, whilst the Muslims have been intensely divided among themselves to form one pillar.

And yet, I want to show in this article that the idea remains part of the Dutch context, and reveals itself in some of the new policies and recommendations on Muslims. An illustration of its meaning can be gleaned from two reports issued by the Dutch Information and Security Service of the Minister of Interior (Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst (AIVD)) in 1998 and 2000. The 1998 report was one of the earliest issued on the possible threat posed by political Islam ("De Politieke Islam in Nederland (Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken," 1998). In this report, pillarization is specifically considered and rejected. Mosques and schools were suspected to be the principal sites of the organization and recruitment of political Islam. Political Islam, the report argued, promoted the isolation of Muslims from the broader society by stressing the difference between Islam and the Netherlands on women, sexuality and individual freedom. But the report also noted the improbability of Islam becoming a pillar (zuil) in Dutch society due to the extensive competition and rivalry among Muslims, mostly spurred by foreign governments ("Ministerie van Binnenlandse Zaken," 1998, 8-12.). The report revealed a subtle ambiguity between individualist freedoms that were an essential part of contemporary Dutch society, and the historic role of religion in Dutch society to promote integration and emancipation through the religious pillar. But the development of such a Muslim pillar was highly improbable.

The same ministry published another report two years later (2000) with a message that favoured a clearly multicultural model, again evoking the Dutch pillar model of the development of religion in modern society. It expressed a political con-

sensus about integration and cultural uniqueness:

... it is good to point out that there is political consensus that each ethnic minority should be able to develop its own cultural values and norms on the one hand, but on the other hand such identities should be limited by the Dutch constitution.<sup>3</sup>

This report did not restrict itself to cultural issues, but raised and linked the success of integration with economic opportunities. It acknowledged that minorities had not benefited as much from the Dutch economic growth of the last few years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but such a possibility itself was sufficient reason to be more optimistic about a plural Dutch society in the future (2000).

The two security reports (1998 and 2000) clearly summarize the government's approach towards integration at the end of the twentieth century. The prospects of economic growth lent an air of optimism to the future of integration. But more significantly with respect to the place of Islam, there was some consideration given to how a culture may promote integration. There was clearly a concern that political Islam might not promote integration as earlier Dutch religions had done in the beginning of the twentieth century. The earlier pillarization of Dutch society was part of the background of these reports.

After September 11, however, a different mood seems to have set in with respect to Islam and integration in the security reports. Pillarization was shelved in favour of

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<sup>3</sup> Wat dat aangaat is het goed er op te wijzen dat er politieke consensus bestaat over het feit dat elke etnische minderheidsgroep enerzijds de eigen culturele waarden en normen dient te kunnen ontplooiën, maar dat deze identiteitsbeleving anderzijds wordt begrensd door de Nederlandse Grondwet (2000).

integration and even assimilation. A closer reading of these new reports reveals this change. An AIVD report of December 2002 warns that everything should be done to prevent a polarization of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims (moslims en niet-moslims) ("Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst," 2002). Recruitment of Muslims for terror attacks was identified as a new trend, and could no longer be considered isolated incidents. The report highlighted the profile of these young recruits, with a high percentage of Moroccan youth of second-generation immigrants. The causes of radicalization were multifaceted, but included social marginalization, previous criminality and conflict of cultures. The elaboration of the latter, a conflict of cultures, informed the integration debate after the incidents of September 11. The report made a case for radical Muslims' unwillingness to take a liberal and passive role with respects to the demands of Dutch society:

Where other foreign youth chose a liberal profession (literally confession—belijdenis) of their Islamic belief and attach great value to their social development in Dutch society and others who end up in a criminal ring, these youth find solace in an extreme Islamic-radical religious approach. ... The second generation immigrants who find themselves in the recruitment process, often come in conflict with their parents, even if they might be thought of as part of very orthodox circles. They accuse their parents for not facing up to the consequences of their contexts. In their view, their parents respond too passively, as do other foreign nationals, in the conflict between political and cultural norms and values of Islam and the Netherlands...<sup>4</sup>

The key issue seems to be unwillingness on the part of these youth to make concessions to Dutch society. The demands of Islam were regarded in a fairly homogeneous and monolithic fashion, and seemed to echo the presentation of both the radical youth and the Islamic critics in the Dutch public debate. In his letter introducing the AIVD report, the Minister of Interior, J. W. Remkes, focused on the link between integration and radicalization: "... the phenomenon also has deep roots in our own society, because stagnating integration and insufficient acceptance of Muslims seems to have created a feeder for radicalization."<sup>5</sup> What is striking about the report is the acknowledgement that the problem existed within the Netherlands. In contrast with the 1998 report, there is recognition of the fact that radicalization is not only a function of foreign interference and mosque politics. The reports acknowledged the problems experienced by Muslims in the society. But the option of integration seems to grant little to those Muslims who did not choose radicalism. Muslim radicals appar-

<sup>4</sup> Waar andere allochtone jongeren kiezen voor een liberale belijdenis van hun islamitische geloof en veel waarde hechten aan hun maatschappelijke ontwikkeling in de Nederlandse samenleving en weer anderen in een crimineel milieu terecht komen, vinden deze jongeren houvast in een zeer radicaal-islamitische geloofsblijdenis....De tweede generatie immigranten die zich in een rekruteringsproces bevinden, komen soms in conflict met hun ouders, ook indien die reeds tot het zeer orthodoxe deel van de moslimgemeenschap kunnen worden gerekend. Zij verwijten hun ouders als moslims niet de juiste consequentie te trekken uit de omstandigheden waarin zij zich bevinden. Naar hun overtuiging reageren hun ouders, net als zoveel andere allochtonen in Nederland, ten onrechte zeer passief op het feit dat zij in Nederland geconfronteerd worden met politiek-culturele normen en waarden die strijdig zijn met de islam ... (AIVD), 2002, #32988@13}.

<sup>5</sup> "... het verschijnsel heeft, ook in ons land, nadrukkelijk wortels binnen de eigen samenleving, doordat stagnerende integratie en ontoereikende acceptatie van moslims een voedingsbodem blijken te zijn voor radicalisering" (Remkes, 2002).



ently chose Islam over criminality and liberalism. But the analysis left very little room for living a Muslim life without being confronted by the choice between Islam, criminality and liberalism. Post 9/11, the demand for integration made no mention of pillarization.

The subtle conclusion that I am drawing is not only restricted to the AIVD analysis of radical profiles. Earlier in 2002, the security service also issued a report on Islamic schools which investigated the fear that political Islamic trends at some schools prevented integration. The report assured the Dutch public that there was not much to be concerned about at the overwhelming majority of these schools. But there was reason to be concerned about at some schools. The report referred to an apparently minor symbolic difference that has since provoked a lot of public debate. It cited as an example of tension between Islamic and Dutch values an incident in Almere in 1996 where the school directors refused to shake hands with a female politician (2002). The report did not itself take a view on this issue, but it is significant that it was mentioned as an example of conflict between cultures. The issue of members of the opposite sex shaking hands with each other has since been raised in a number of other occasions. It has become a particularly significant symbol of integration as demanded of Muslims by at least one leading politician. The symbolic gestures of such integration go beyond Dutch law, and beyond the threat of radical terrorism. It indicates the extent to which integration demands have changed. They no longer include references to the religious pillars in a society. Integration implies a complete overcoming of Islamic culture. Shaking hands, or not, was regarded as a symbolic gesture of being part of the society.

Apart from the reference in the schools report, this symbolic gesture may be placed in relation to another equally significant report of the WRR in 2003. Entitled "Norms

and values and the burden of behaviour," it was commissioned by the Prime Minister Balkenende in November 2002 ("Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het regeeringsbeleid," 2003). During the elections of May 2002, two parties, the Christian Democratic Alliance and the Pim Fortuyn List, both presented Norms and Values as central aspects of their election platform. The concern for norms and values was another way of dealing with the problem of integration. It argued that a set of public norms could unite citizens from different cultural backgrounds.<sup>6</sup> By separating norms and values, the report argued that values represent the more permanent goods of a culture while norms may change according to the new conditions and challenges that groups and individuals face (Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het regeeringsbeleid, 2003, 9-10.). Shaking hands with members of the opposite sex, then, would be regarded as a norm that might change in a new context. The report did not confine itself to the problems of a multicultural society. It also raised the more general challenge of forming both values and norms in a society that faced relentless individualization and professionalization ("Wetenschappelijke Raad voor het regeeringsbeleid," 2003, 26,208.). But this more fundamental challenge to Dutch society as a whole was lost in the midst of a public debate dealing with the conflicts between host and immigrant cultures. Its broader identification of the challenges facing Dutch society was overshadowed by its implications for immigrant cultures. These other challenges, more difficult to deal with, were buried under the presumably easier targets of immigrant cultures that had to integrate. In general, immigrant cultures in general and Muslims in particular were regarded as the main cause of social dysfunction. Their failure to integrate, and

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<sup>6</sup> The search in the Netherlands seemed to be a search for what Etzioni has called a public culture for all (Etzioni, 2006).

accept both the norms and values of the host society, seemed the abiding concerns.

This short selection of reports reveals the response of the Dutch government and policy research centres on how Islam may or may not be integrated into Dutch society. Against the blanket vilification of Islam and Islamic movements from some Dutch politicians and public intellectuals, they have tried to find clearly formulated ways of thinking of Islam and cultures that would not inhibit the development of an integrated society. It seems that before 9/11, the imagined relation between religion and modern societies was mediated by pillarization. Afterwards, there seems to be greater emphasis on full integration and even assimilation. The public image of hand-shaking seemed to capture the demands made of Muslim communities. And even though government think-tanks tried to be more nuanced, the public demands veered towards integration as assimilation.

My analysis of some of the government reports, and their prevarication, can be further illustrated by the attitude of the two government ministers at the time directly concerned with integration. The two ministers represented the distinctive positions of the liberal and Christian democratic positions in the then ruling alliance. Rita Verdonk became Minister of Foreigners' Affairs and Integration (Vreemdelingszaken en Integratie) in May 2003. She was a member of the liberal People's Party for Democracy (VVD)<sup>7</sup>, which fostered a clearly anti-immigration policy in the Netherlands. Verdonk worked closely with the foreign nationals and their institutions. The main objective as far as Muslims were concerned was to enlist the support of representatives to assist the government against radicalization, and promote the integration of Muslims. Like other ministers before her, she first had to facilitate the formation of an umbrella rep-

<sup>7</sup> VVD in Dutch for Volkspartij Voor Democratie.

representative group of Muslim to act as a representative body with government. In January 2005, failing to persuade Muslims to form one body, her ministry recognized two separate organizations.<sup>8</sup> The minister has had to tread carefully between the right of religious belief, and the demands of integration. In many of her speeches she clearly declared her commitment to both, but the demands of integration in a symbolic form has become her public image.

Rita Verdonk made shaking hands with Muslim men a clear part of her public profile. In a speech given on the reception of a book on religion and social cohesion, she did not give up the temptation to include hand shaking as part of integration:

How men practice their religion is their own concern. The only conditions being that they must abide by the law, and not injure others in the practice of their freedom. That is why I take a position on genital mutilation, honour killing, and unjustified discrimination against sexual choice or gender. An example of the last mentioned? I simply think that a man should shake a woman's hand.<sup>9</sup>

This remark could easily be dismissed

<sup>8</sup> Early in 2004, the Contactorgaan Moslims en Overheid (CMO) eventually presented itself to Verdonk as Muslim representative. Since this group only consisted of Sunni Muslims, another group Contact Groep Islam (CMI) was formed, and that included the marginal groups of Sunnis, Alawis and Ahmedis. By January 2005, both were recognized by the Minister. The main tasks of these organizations was to ensure that integration issues were directly addressed within Muslim communities and organizations.

<sup>9</sup> "Hoe mensen hun godsdienst beleven, dat is aan hen. Als ze zich maar aan de wet houden en anderen niet belemmeren in hun vrijheid. Daarom neem ik stelling tegen genitale vermindering, tegen eerwraak, tegen ongerechtvaardigd onderscheid naar seksuele voorkeur of naar geslacht. Een voorbeeld van dat laatste? Ik vind dat een man een vrouw gewoon een hand moet geven" (Verdonk, 2005).

as an impulsive statement from which no conclusion may be drawn. However, the report on Islamic schools had mentioned this, and the gesture has become a symbol of the integration debate in general. In March 2006, one of the leading national dailies devoted an opinion column on the ramification of such gestures between groups. This time, a local pastor in a small town dissuaded his pupils from visiting a mosque since they would be required to take off their shoes, and thereby honour a God whom they did not believe. And the author of the opinion piece related this gesture to Verdonk's insistence on shaking hands with all men. He argued that Verdonk clearly wanted to make a media statement by insisting on shaking the hands of Muslim males (Plasterk, 2006). In response, some Muslims have also shown that they too can take an opposing stand on this issue. A month later, on 26 April, Verdonk issued certificates to twenty imams who followed a course on Netherlands and Islam. The course was supposed to introduce Imams to the rights and responsibilities of living in the Netherlands. At the award presentation of the certificates, some of the Imams refused to shake hands with her. In addition to the fight against terrorism and radicalization, then, shaking hands has become a common norm in society. It is a norm by which the level and extent of integration has been judged. With Verdonk and her obsession of shaking hands with male Muslim religious leaders, the idea of a pillarized society has been replaced by assimilation. Of course, this does not mean that the historical vision has completely disappeared, even with Verdonk. Verdonk is not consistent in her provocation of Muslims. She has been one of the few leading politicians who clearly stated that the method chosen by Ayaan Hirsi Ali for bringing attention to the lack of rights enjoyed by women in Islam was inappropriate. She herself took a non-compromising attitude towards the law, but would not have chosen the film that Hirsi

Ali did (Moerland and Santing, 2004).

A brief comparison with her counterpart, the Minister of Justice, Piet Hein Donner, reveals the inherent contradictions in Dutch officialdom between pillarization and assimilation/integration. Donner appears to be more accommodating to religion and Islam. Upon closer scrutiny, however, his approach also seemed to offer little hope for a real contribution of religion in society. Donner belonged to the CDA (Christian Democratic Alliance) who is supposed to have a more positive approach to religion. In the context of the public debate on norms and values promoted by his party, Donner presented a lecture entitled "The Soul of Society" ("De ziel van de samenleving") in which he argued for a more positive influence of religion in contemporary individualist and secular world (Donner, 2003). He first presented this speech at a Utrecht meeting in 2002 where he called upon the churches to take a more active role in the society. However, Donner was quick to point out that the Church's message was much too idealistic, and could not, for example, really deal with the challenges of immigration. The Church had to accommodate immigrants in spite of the limitations in the country. And yet, according to Donner, democratic politics provided a space for the Church to add substance and content to the values of a society. The values of freedom were basically negative values that provided an opportunity for religions to fill with positive content. Minister Donner did not make a distinction between norms and values to show the lines where religious norms and state norms crossed. But he seems to think that both needed each other to pursue a valued and realistic politics. But he hardly presented a concrete example of how religion could make a contribution in political society. On another occasion, Donner further elaborated these ideas at a Muslim ceremony. At the opening of the Amsterdam Milli Gurus mosque in February 2006, Donner spelt out his inter-



change and interaction:

It [religion] is one of the strongest forces in society, together with love, parenting and maybe also hope. The society is held together by such forces, because a society needs more than interests, a market and a government. Religion is stronger than these, because we do pay more heed to the gods than to men.<sup>10</sup>

He acknowledged the struggle of the trustees for obtaining permission to build the mosque, but ascribed it to the Dutch model of negotiation and discussion (polderen). Again, like the thorny issue of integration, he swept away any suggestion of discrimination. His approach to the role of religion, even of Islam, reinforced the positive role that he believed it could play in the society. In practice, though, religions were not expected to probe the contradictions of the political parties. Like Christianity, Islam was hardly invited to make a difference in the contentious issues of the day. Immigration and the public presence of Islam in Amsterdam were beyond the reach of Christians and Muslim respectively.

The debate about Islam has produced some conflicting positions when one looks individually at particular reports and political speeches. It is clear, however, that the debate has highlighted some key propositions. An anti-Islamic rhetoric puts the blame for the problems of Dutch society in particular, and the world in general, entirely at the feet of Muslims. Against this clearly anti-Islamic rhetoric that is repeated by

<sup>10</sup> "Daarom is het ook een van de sterkste krachten binnen de samenleving, samen met liefde, ouderschap en misschien ook hoop. De samenleving wordt mede bijeen gehouden door dat soort krachten, want voor samenleven is meer nodig dan belangen, een markt en een overheid. Religie is zelfs sterker dan deze, want men moet Gode meer gehoorzaam zijn dan mensen."

many commentators around the world, the Dutch debate is nuanced by other voices as well. Most Dutch politicians and opinion makers believe in a self-image where the relation between religion and modernization is not inevitably conflict-ridden. The history of pillarization leaves open a space for Muslims to create their own pillar (zuil). Before the tragic events of September 11 in the United States and the subsequent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, such pillarization was improbable but possible. After that, full integration and assimilation seemed to be the only solution. A careful scrutiny of political positions of the key ministers involved in the issue reveals that religion manages to lurk in the background as a possible avenue of positive social contribution. But the possibilities are quite small. The only options for Muslims in the light of these conceptual frameworks is to fully integrate and assimilate, the distinction being merely academic if one considers the debate on shaking hands. The debate on norms and values places the burden on Muslims to change their bodily and ritual comportment.

## MUSLIM RESPONSES

The second part of this article turns attention to some Muslim responses to this Dutch debate, and the many reports and studies that have dominated public debate over the last few years. This analysis does not pay attention to the radical individuals and groups who seem to have found fertile ground in a small number of Dutch cities. Taking a small number of interviewees in the city of Nijmegen, I would like to examine how young Muslims from diverse backgrounds have responded to the public debate. I first contacted a local Islamic organization and asked them to interview young people on their attitude to the recent public debate. I then approached a student organization at the Radboud University for inter-

viewees. The latter did not yield any responses. I then approached students directly and, by word of mouth and a snowball effect, managed to interview a more diverse group of students of Muslim background. The following responses represent the views of some young Muslims involved with Islam on both an institutional and non-institutional levels.

The interviews were rich in detail and nuances, and demand fuller discussion. For the purpose of this article, I would like to draw on their particular responses to the question of integration, the adaptation of Islam to the Netherlands, and some of their remarks on the radicalization of Islam in the last few years. My main purpose is to illustrate the very familiar patterns and values of integration that present themselves across the responses. But I will also push the limits of the integration debate as revealed in the contradictions that emerged after 9/11. I believe that the interviews reveal a profound problem of thinking about Islam in the Netherlands as a distinctive culture that stands for Muslims living in the country. Such an abstraction only addresses the organized religious institutions of Muslim people.

I begin with the views of a school principal of a primary school in Nijmegen. Mehmet (not his real name) was born in an Arabic-speaking part of Turkey, and arrived in the Netherlands when he was five. After completing his high school, he followed a number of Islamic educational programmes in Syria and Turkey. He finally returned to the Netherlands, and enrolled and completed a Masters programme at the University of Nijmegen. At the University, he was involved in the foundation of one of the first Muslim student organizations, *Studente Unie Nederland*. He continued his social engagement later by founding a primary school in Arnhem. He played a leading role in a pedagogical institute for Islamic education, and more recently took part in the *Contactorgaan Moslems en Overheid*

recognized by Verdonk. I want to mention in an aside that, as I was waiting for him to see me, a parent came to see him, and extended her hand to greet him. He politely refused and extended his apology for not responding. The woman who extended her hand was wearing a head covering. I did not want to pursue the issue with him, for fear that it might dominate the conversation. But it was clear that the gesture of shaking hands has reached into the Muslim discourse. And yet, it was clear to me that Mehmet saw the integration of Islam in the Netherlands through education. And he was fully aware of the role of the religious schools in providing a good background in religious upbringing, and puts this in the context of pillarization:

Whether people send their children to Islamic schools or not, they have begun to think about the education of their children! Which school? Why? Previously it was more unconscious. But the entry of Muslims into the teaching colleges meant that they were entering the education field and addressing related problems. We have now the opportunity to talk about education, even at ministerial level, to discuss education, to express our ideas, (Mehmet, 2006)

In the light of this remark, one can clearly see how Mehmet saw the important role of Islamic institutions for the full engagement of Muslim teachers and parents in their children's education. Mehmet continuously drew comparisons between Islamic schools and other existing religious schools in the Netherlands. He contended that contrary to popular perception, these schools were imparting basic Christian doctrines and values. Islamic schools were doing nothing more. Moreover, he argued that these schools promoted integration into the Dutch society with full commitment

and responsibility. The concept of the pillar may be regarded as inappropriate for the Netherlands in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and for the Muslim community as a whole, but the idea of a religious institution contributing to integration—meaning full engagement in society—is taken up by Mehmet. This is a good example of how some Islamic schools have adopted the structure and patterns of pillarization in Dutch society. And yet, Mehmet did not accept shaking hands of a head-covered Muslim woman.

Akif was another of my interviewees with a religious background, but who reflected a different dimension of integration into Dutch society. Born in the Netherlands 25 years ago, Akif became a tax consultant for people wishing to take up home loans. He played an active role in a Turkish social and religious institute in Nijmegen that provided support and care for mainly Turkish youth at school. The institute was designed to improve the chances of these youngsters by providing them with an environment where they could develop their educational potential. The institute has a social function—with a strong Islamic basis, and thus plays a role similar to the Islamic school. Apart from his work, Akif has almost exclusive contact with the members of this institute. When I asked him about how Islam may be adapted to the country, he was quick in pointing out that not much change is permitted in Islam since the Qur'an is the word of God, and many of these rules are written in it. He contrasted this position with the Christian Bible: "In Islam, this (adaptation) is impossible. In Islam, we have rules. Christian can re-write their holy books, but we cannot do so with the Qur'an. The Qur'an is not changeable."

After much prompting, it was clear that Akif was firm in this conviction, and that he had not been exposed to the debate about the varied interpretations on Islam. When I asked Mehmet about this same issue, he had told me that one of the striking things that he had learnt at Nijmegen University

and found applicable in his position, was that one does not have ready-made ("kant en klaar") answers for many of the new issues arising in society. Akif presented a stronger conviction in the clear and eternal verses of the Qur'an. But this conviction, even rigidity, was placed within a typically Dutch framework that left a lasting impression on me. He told me that he did not feel that he should be expected to agree with all people who disagreed with him. He did not even have to respect their views, nor did he expect any respect from them: "The Dutch do not have to respect my view, because it may mean acceptance, and this is not necessary. But tolerance is important." All Akif expected was tolerance, and nothing more. And he presented this view of Islam in the Netherlands in comparison with Islam in Germany. Germany, according to Akif, was more nationalistic, and therefore demanded too much of its Turkish Muslims. The Netherlands simply had rules that everybody should obey. And in his view, this should not be a problem for Muslims, because they even have more rules to follow than was expected by the Dutch government (Akif, 2006). Akif would be considered a conservative Muslim, but he too has relied on a well-known value of Dutch society. Like Mehmet, he thrived in the tolerance of Dutch society and was willing to follow the rules (regels) set up for all citizens. Even though he did not present himself as a person committed to Dutch nationalism, he contrasted the favourable position of Muslims with the demands made on Muslims in Germany. In this regard, he was like many a Dutch person. And even though Dutch public debate may be ready to throw out tolerance and replace it with assimilation, Akif was holding on to this value and this pattern. It had become very much part of his conservative approach to Islam

The two person interviewed were approaching the question of integration through the familiar themes and patterns

well-known to Dutch public debate. Respect, tolerance and religious organizations were familiar in how, at one time or another, people in the Netherlands would think about relating to diversity in the public sphere. The demand for assimilation, which was recognized by these individuals as the major theme in recent public debate, was explicitly rejected. But the alternative was not to turn to one's own culture, but an adoption of alternative themes and older approaches in the host culture. What these interviewees explicitly avoided was an engagement with violence, misogyny and abuse carried out in the name of Islam. The terms of critical religious debate were simply absent. They were not forthcoming from within the religious discourse adopted, but they were equally absent in the Dutch themes of tolerance, respect and religious organization. The demands of integration were met, and yet many questions with regard to religion and anti-social values were avoided.

Let me turn to some other Muslims who did address some of these critical issues, but again not always in the way expected in public debate.

The students who were not involved in any Islamic institution approached the question of Islam and integration from a greater distance. They varied considerably from each other, from the first who stopped calling himself a Muslim since his twelfth birthday, a second who stopped practicing Islam since entering tertiary education, and a third who grew up as both a Catholic and a Muslim (but who identified herself as a cultural Muslim in the positive sense of the term). One would have to analyse their responses differently from the first three because they were not closely associated with any religious institutions that had become a matter of concern in Dutch public debate. In their case, however, they too doubted the value of a search for common norms, and even of integration. They themselves did not see integration as the major challenge

facing Muslims.

The first of these interviewees was Huda, who came to the Netherlands when she was thirteen. She completed her school and university education in the Netherlands, and at the time of the interview worked for an institute that provided healthcare assistance to foreign nationals. Her work placed her in close relationship with multiculturalism, but the examples she provided were quite unexpected in relation to the public debate in the Netherlands. She mentioned that diet was an important consideration for Muslims, but I was surprised to hear that it had nothing to do with the provision of halal food:

...the older man is already in the 70s, his time is up—he is Muslim—(for him) death has to come, but here in Netherlands, we want to keep people alive and healthy, and that clashes in a man who thinks that he does not need a diet. (He thinks) I don't mind—I have had a good life, I would rather die. For the nurse, she does not know that he thinks like this. One has then a communication problem... We (her company) come in here and say this has to do with religion, that the person is content, and that he believes in the hereafter. For him, there is something better than normal life. (Huda, 2006)

This example highlights the fact that multiculturalism was not restricted to identity issues of boundaries and conflicts. The different orientation towards life and death was an important topic, and need not be regarded as a clash of cultures. The question of belief and non-belief had nothing specifically Islamic about it. Huda herself lived in two worlds. The first she described as the warm culture of her Dutch Arab friends and her mother, and the other the exact professional culture of the Dutch.

But Huda's own views about integration and the adaptation of Islam to the Netherlands and to Europe were also interesting. She considered herself drawn to the Catholic mystical background given by her mother, but which she also eminently recognized in the Qur'an. The latter she regarded as a mysterious puzzle waiting to be resolved. She herself has not devoted all her time to its resolution to date. Her approach seemed like a clear rejection of the clarity with which Islamic activists and radicals approached the text. In contrast with this puzzling and mystical quality, she had a clear sense of what Islam was, and the opportunities and possibilities presented by Europe. And yet, she was not enamoured of the concept of European Islam because she found it difficult to imagine how such a concept would be accepted by those who did not live in Europe. Islam remained trans-national for her, with a strong base in Arab culture.<sup>11</sup> But European Islam?

European Islam—this is difficult but I would find it great that Muslims living in Europe will remain true and based on the Qur'an. But that it gets a new cover (jasje) that will work without rejecting the foundations of the religion? I find it difficult because most Muslim live outside Europe and how do you want to present it to them—people who do not know the experiences of Muslims in Europe?

On the other hand, there are already two forms of European Islam:

I think that there is already a European Islam—more tolerant but it depends on the people—that Islam here is less tolerant than it really

<sup>11</sup> It is for this reason that she cannot understand Ayaan Hirsi Ali who expresses a vision of Muslim women which is so different from her own Tunisian experiences.

is—

I know both—both are European Islam—one group draws only on the advantages of living in Europe and others only the disadvantages.

For Huda, there was a European Islam that drew on the positive teachings of the Qur'an. But there was also a European political Islam which focussed only on reaction and politics. I think this is sufficient to show Huda's engagement with many cultural sources and values. She may be regarded as fully integrated and perhaps also too assimilated from the point of view of Akif, but she has deep roots in too many registers that can be captured in the integration demands made of her.

Fatima was another student who seemed to have embarked on a long search for the spiritual essence of Islam. Until she arrived at University, she was devoted to fulfilling the fundamental pillars of Islam. But her questions about the essence and reason for prayer and fasting went unanswered. She found it difficult to say if she was still a Muslim, but yet continued to be fascinated by trends and developments in Muslim discourse.

I also stopped fasting because, that is something I had thought about, I thought it nonsense to fast in the condition I found myself in. I get it that fasting can be good for me, but for me, I could not see the point. I simply was hungry, lost my sleep, and simply wanted to eat. I simply started to eat. I never thought of the spiritual element. (Fatima, 2006)

And yet, for Fatima, the concept of a European Islam or a reinterpretation of the Qur'an made very little sense or was highly idealistic:



I do not think that a European Islam exists, I would not know what it means. I simply believe that Muslims should be critical towards themselves, and towards contradictory messages in the religion which are there. I think it is difficult because you would not know where to start. What steps do you take!? And what decision do you then take? That is simply extremely difficult.

She could not understand how one could continue to be a Muslim and jettison some fundamental aspects of the Qur'an. One could not fashion something else of an existing religion:

There is no new Quran with new rules where the old rules have been eliminated or replaced with the European laws—as a Muslim, you believe in the Qur'an and you cannot believe in such a new book

In a sense, these views echo that of Akif above. She clearly saw a desperate need for critical thinking, but the present options on offer were not capturing her imagination. As far as the public debate itself was concerned, Fatima felt that hardly any Muslims were representing Islam therein. She hoped that Muslims would participate since they had the necessary knowledge and insight. Recent debate on Islam was merely conducted by those who had very little knowledge about Islam, in her view.

The third person interviewed was Masoud from a Kurdish background. His grandfather was the religious leader of the family, but he himself had drifted from Islam over the years. He was the only one of the interviewees who no longer considered himself a Muslim. And yet, he too felt frustrated with the course of debate on Islam in the country. Two comments stood out in his interview. In the first instance, he believed

the debate about Islam needed to consider the political context more thoroughly than was currently the case in the Netherlands. The involvement of Western powers in the support of the Afghans before 9/11, according to Masoud, has been forgotten in the debate over cultural differences. And secondly, he believed that the debate in the Netherlands was driven by people like Hirsi Ali and Afshin Elian who promoted a different politics in the country:

... such people come from these areas, they brought their own politics from these countries to the Netherlands. This is unfortunate, because the Netherlands has a polder model, talking and not extreme not to push people in the corner, but this politics comes into the Netherlands. As a Kurd, I know how it is done in the Middle East. Like in Iran, minorities are considered less worthy. People with whom you cannot talk, only fight (instigate) and are not really even people. Also in the Netherlands, Muslims are regarded as backward, as people who do not love their children, they do not look after them. They are being imaged as non-persons. And then you get a situation where there is no discussion possible.

Masoud seems to yearn for a Dutch politics just like some of the interviewees involved in the Muslim institutes. He also seems to sense a new politics that Peter vd Veer has identified since the emergence of more flamboyant politicians like Fortuyn (veer, 2006). More clearly, even for someone cut off from all religious ties, the public debate on Islamic issues is not very productive.

## CONCLUSION

In this article, I have tried to present two major theses. In the first instance, I have argued that the public debate over Islam is torn between those who think Islam in principle has nothing to contribute to the integration of Muslims in society, and others who argued that some common ground can be found between Islamic trends and Dutch and Western social and political values. I have also argued the last-mentioned position has rested on a presumption of the historical role of religion in the modernization of Dutch society. Such a presumption implied that Islam as a culture, religion and civilization could very well be a path of modernization and liberal values. In addition, I have tried to show that the lived experience of Muslims at some points intersects with this assumption, but in a deeper sense it diverts significantly from it. The experiences of Muslims reflect in one or way or another some of the values and patterns of integration in this debate. Those engaged in religious institutes have adapted the pillar model of integration without necessarily seeing the need for fully adopting liberal values. And those who are not directly engaged in Muslim institutions reveal a more critical attitude to both Muslims and Islam on the one hand, and to Dutch public expectations on the other. In comparison with their counterparts, they are clearly more directly engaged with the critical values of culture, values, lifestyles and traditions that both their home and their Dutch friends present to them.

Roy (2003) has pointed to the wide phenomenon among European Muslims, particularly the radicals among them, to create a pastiche of Islam. Already isolated from their traditional Muslim cultures, they reinvent a tradition that never existed. And he places the radicals' options in this European, post-Christian context. With respect to this group, he suggests that we are dealing

with a deculturation process, akin to that taking place among other youth as well. This insight is useful but one has to go beyond the radicals to get a bigger picture. If one moves away from the minority of radicals, one also gets the impression that Muslims are quick at adopting the structural patterns of host cultures. Roy suspects this last mentioned aspect in his study as well. But he does not focus as much on the structural patterns that are replicated by Muslim institutions. One may thus emphasise the European nature of the debate on many different levels. In addition to the nihilism of radical Muslims that matches the youth culture of Europe, one also witnesses the institutional patterns of Islam following European models. In the present context, it seems that Muslims in the Netherlands yearn for a more traditional, and familiar, Dutch society.

The interviews also present a critical perspective on the recent reports that forecast a positive integration between Islamic trends and secular democracies. The 2006 reports from the WRR may be regarded as the leading exponents of such a view. They may be regarded as a culmination of Dutch government thinking on Muslims and integration since the last few years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when attention turned to Dutch Muslims rather than Muslim institutions. The interviews suggested that Muslim institutions are committed to the older models of integration, which they have adopted and within which they thrive. And from a perspective of political institutions, they seemed destined to continue as long as other religions also enjoy the benefits of religious institutions. Looking at the interviewees who are not directly engaged in these institutions, one gets a different impression. Whilst they too expect the traditional respect and tolerance of cultures in the ideal Dutch model, they also question some of the fundamental values of Muslim cultures. And yet, concepts like the re-interpretation of Islamic norms and texts, and

European Islam do not have any significant resonance for them. They see neither the need nor the possibility for changing interpretations of Islamic texts and values. Their sense of Islam as fixed and unchanging seemed more resilient than the WRR and other well-wishers seem to hope for. No doubt, all the interviewees wish that there were better representatives or spokespersons to speak for Islam. But it is clear that all who speak of a European Islam, or a more integrated sense of Islamic values and European norms have failed to capture the imagination of young Muslims. They stand thus squarely between the Islamic critics and those who see hope in the future of Islam.

If we turn attention to the lived reality of being Muslims in contemporary societies of the Netherlands, represented by the range of young, non-committed Muslims, and Muslims within the institutions, an important observation must be made. Islam should perhaps be regarded as less of an integrated whole than many recent studies and the positive reports in the Netherlands seem to imagine and hope for. A number of studies seem to pay considerable attention to the battle raging for the soul of Islam. Sometimes the cultural clash seemed to be between radicals and liberals, sometimes between Islamists and progressives. Everywhere, a liberal, progressive, human voice of Islam needs to be raised against the destructive and violent trail of radicalization (Kurzman, 1999; Filali-Ansari, 2003; Hoebink, 2005). It seems that both extremes occupy limited ground among Muslims. The institutions continue to draw and repel the increasing number of Muslims to turn to and away from religion. The radicals (militants, Islamists) and the liberals (progressives, secular) are the only ones who assume that Islam represents a distinctive culture that ought to radicalize or liberalise respectively. Those young Muslims who demand recognition of Muslim institutions alongside Christian and Jewish ones also

think of Islam as a distinct culture whose values must be preserved. And the young critical voices hope to have better Muslim counterparts in the public debate. But if we look at the spaces between these diverse voices, there is a clear absence of a distinct Muslim/Islamic culture that can be integrated with another distinct culture (European and/or Dutch). The young critics are fashioning a critical Muslim identity but yearn for a distinct voice. The Muslim institutions have adopted the (older) Dutch approach and jettisoned early theological notions of Islamic authority, superiority and inequality. What they want to preserve is cast in the image of modern Christian or Jewish cultures in Europe. And the friends of Islam hope to see the end of a long history of Islamic activism that would flow into universal political values. Islam as a distinct cultural system has dissolved in the sustained modern debates over the relationship between Islam and the West (westernization, modernization, and modernity) that began in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Integration is not an end-goal, but a process that has come a long way.

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