

THE NETHERLANDS AND ITS MUSLIMS

CONTEXTUALIZING DUTCH ISLAMOPHOBIA

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INTRODUCTION

The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, a controlling body of the Council of Europe, has warned The Netherlands against growing tendencies towards Islamophobia, due to which it argues that Dutch Muslims are increasingly discriminated (Willems 2008). The refusal of certain Dutch high schools to admit students wearing *niqabs*, Islamic veils (Visser 2011), the current Dutch government's initiative to render Islamic butchery illegal (Van Den Dool 2011), and, most recently, its ban of the wearing of the *burqa* in public (Trouw 2012), constitute evidence of this phenomenon. They pinpoint the increasingly more populist rhetoric stigmatizing Dutch Muslims, and add to the increasingly-pervasive air of legitimacy to crude prejudices and open xenophobia.

Despite the intensification of opposition against Muslims in The Netherlands, statistics reveal that Islam has become part of the Dutch everyday experience. Firstly, an estimated 946.000 Muslims live in The Netherlands today, representing thereby 5.7% of the overall Dutch population. Secondly, The Netherlands occupies the eighth position in the list of European countries with the largest number of Muslims (PEW 2009:22). Finally, the majority of Muslims in The Netherlands have, by birthright, obtained Dutch citizenship (Hammarberg 2010).

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This paper contextualizes Dutch Islamophobia by underlining and analyzing the similarities between Dutch Muslims and non-Muslims in relation to the process of globalization. Globalization has been chosen to constitute the main recurring theme of this paper because it is often considered a mechanism that has the potential to foster and facilitate intercultural contact needed to counter societal antagonistic tendencies (Hopper 2007:159). As such, this paper's research question reads: *What is the influence of globalization on Dutch Muslims and non-Muslims, and what real-world responses to this situation can be empirically observed in Dutch contemporary public discourse?*

It is of utmost importance to establish a clear conceptual framework before advancing. Firstly, as a selection of controversies reveals, there is no all-encompassing definition of globalization. Authors often make reference to globalization in relation exclusively to their own disciplinary fields of expertise (Barber 1992; Ritzer 1993). Also, it remains disputed whether globalization is an essentially economic process, or whether it also involves cultural, ecological, or informational dimensions (Beck 2000:2). Finally, there is no consensus on whether globalization is recent or encompasses a lengthier historical period (Robertson 1992:6; Albrow 1997:4). Despite these ambiguities, the conceptualization worked with in this paper is Tomlinson's definition of globalization as "complex connectivity" (2006:2). Accordingly, globalization refers to the "rapidly and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern social life" (ibid).

Secondly, defining who is 'Muslim' and who is not is a potentially contentious affair: the statistics mentioned here are taken from surveys counting all individuals who self-identify as Muslim (PEW 2009:35). Conversely, non-Muslims are defined as those who choose not to self-identify as such. The paper acknowledges that Muslims as well as non-Muslims in The Netherlands comprise a variety of ethnicities and follow various branches of faith. Nevertheless, this paper consciously continues to employ the 'us-them' dichotomy between Muslims and non-Muslims, only to better highlight its invalidity.

This paper is divided into two parts. The first part analyzes in what ways globalization has an influence on Dutch Muslims and non-Muslims. Recognizing the unevenness inherent to this phenomenon's impact and the fact that some might be more noticeably influenced by the process than others (Smith 1997; Nederveen Pieterse 2000), it sketches a situation describing the circumstances caused by globalization that large facets of both groups are faced with. The second part of the paper constitutes an attempt at categorizing the reactions to this situation expressed by the two groups under scrutiny. Ultimately, similarity is placed forward as the keyword bridging the gap between two 'others'. Indeed, it is revealed not only that The Netherlands' Muslim and non-Muslim population is subject to the same processes of globalization, but also that both groups respond to these processes similarly.

GLOBALIZATION, ISLAM & THE NETHERLANDS

As mentioned above, this paper utilizes Tomlinson's concept of complex connectivity to define globalization. While clarifying his ideas, Tomlinson points out three specific effects caused by this phenomenon. The first of these concerns the changing "experience of place and of the self in relation to place" (2006:20). The second can be defined as the alteration in "shared understandings that have developed around locally situated life" (ibid). Finally, complex connectivity is claimed to affect "the people's sense of identity" (ibid).

This section embarks upon an analysis that is based on these three elements. It is important to make explicit that each of the three facets this analysis is composed of starts with a part on the effect of globalization in a community not necessarily Muslim. This is followed by an extension onto the Dutch Muslim community. Ultimately, therefore, the analysis reveals how globalization has a similar influence on both groups.

Starting with the first effect, one must inquire into how globalization affects one's experience of place and one's relation to place. In a not-necessarily Muslim context, Tomlinson answers this question by adopting García Canclini's definition of the concept of 'deterritorialization'. Accordingly, globalization sets in

motion a development characterized by “the loss of the ‘natural’ relation of culture to geographical and social territories” (García Canclini in Tomlinson 2006:107). The concept is closely related to Giddens’ thesis on the “disembedding” or “lifting out of social relations from local contexts of interaction” (1990:21). Effectively, these conceptualizations can be commonly defined as the growing variety of social activities that take place without the constraints of territorial boundaries or face-to-face interactions (Tomlinson 2006:107). Indeed, innovations in telecommunications, ICT, and social media have permitted most in The Netherlands to uphold contacts with distanced friends or attend meetings with business partners and university colleagues without having to be present in the same location. Admittedly, many examples – such as farming, hairdressing, and dining – reveal how there forever will be social activities tied to geographical location. However, these cases do not undermine the fact that to an increasing extent, our everyday social experiences are dislodged from their traditional physical environment (29).

Islam in the Netherlands is experienced as a global faith rather than a religion characterized by regional differences

Although the above-outlined examples of deterritorialization are not limited to Dutch non-Muslim communities alone, for the analytical purposes of this essay, it is important to extend this point and illustrate how this effect similarly impacts Dutch Muslims. Indeed, its Muslims are faced with an Islam that “is less and less ascribed to a specific territory and civilizational area” (Roy 2004:18). Although Islam has traditionally aimed at being transnational and universal, its believers have always connected their religion to the cultural circumstances characteristic of specific geographical locations. This explains why the Sunni Yemenite community does not at all resemble its Shi’a-dominated counterpart in Iran (Fouad Allam 2008:243-245). Because of a contextual change in which Muslims have gone from inhabiting areas with Muslim majorities to constituting part of the minority in a secular environment, Islam is experienced and lived as a global faith rather than a religion characterized by regional differences. More specifically, while universal Islamic practices – such as praying in the direction of Mecca – continue to be adhered to, others inherent

to specific regions or bounded by state territory are of decreasing importance (Roy 2004:18). As such, deterritorialization does not necessarily have anything to do with Dutch Muslims or non-Muslims alone. Both are faced with a development that essentially disconnects traditions from place and both are engaged in social activities now transcending specific territorial boundaries.ⁱ

When embarking upon an analysis of complex connectivity's second effect, the ways in which complex connectivity has altered shared understandings that have developed around locally situated life, another such similarity between The Netherlands' Muslim and non-Muslim population can be noticed. Indeed, just as Giddens introduced the concept of "reflexivity of modern social life", defined as the re-examination and reformation of social practices in light of the proliferation of different views on those practices (1990:38), so Eikelman and Piscatori coined the term of "objectification of Islam", referred to as the re-definition of Islam in light of its position in society alongside other cultures and social practices (1996:38). The parallel between these two concepts can be drawn when reference is made to Max Weber's discussion on rationalization.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber explains that two features of the Calvinist variety of Protestantism have aided the rationalization of society. Firstly, Calvin's version of calling changed work from being a necessary evil to representing "God's commandment to the individual to work for the divine glory" (Weber 1991:160). It provided the ethical justification for the modern division of labour (163). Secondly, Calvinism's focus on predestination, according to which only a select group is chosen to be saved, caused the believer to try to tailor his life to God's wishes in every way possible (Collins 1986:50-51), seeking signs of God's approval and confirmation of pertaining to the selected few (Weber 1991:165). It triggered the production of hard work instead of sinful leisure and the accumulation of capital through the ascetic compulsion to save (171-173). As such, Weber reveals how rational conduct prevalent in modern societies grew out of religious considerations. Paradoxically, Weber contends how this religious basis came under excessive pressure from the temptations of wealth, due to which it eventually died (174-175). Therefore, an

ⁱ This discussion of deterritorialization does not dismiss the importance or relevance of ideas of 'glocalization' (Robertson 1997), according to which universalizing tendencies are always matched by particularizing ones (26). However, and in conformity with the analytical purposes of this chapter, this paper recognizes how, at one of the most famous globalized commercial institutions – McDonalds – one can regularly detect elements of differentiation tailored to regional cultures. Similarly, despite the penetration of 'Western' fashion into the cultures of Muslims living in the Netherlands, it acknowledges the intertwining of

such style with more traditionally Muslim dress codes. Due to this essay's focus on the three effects of globalization outlined by Tomlinson, an additional in-depth analysis on the experience of globalization in the Netherlands is left for further research.

important consequence of this rationalization process is the “disenchantment of the world”: the emergence of a society no longer based upon mystery, myth, or even God, but purely upon rational calculation (Weber 1948:155).

Reflexivity and objectification can be regarded as an additional logical step in Weber’s description of the process of rationalization of society. As he predicted, traditions are increasingly objects of discourse and debate as they enter into open dialogues with alternatives. In The Netherlands, the debate amongst Muslims on the Islamic method of animal slaughter, within which the possibility of the extension of anaesthesia onto animals is discussed (Marcouch 2011; Groen 2011), or the ongoing question on whether or not the yearly celebration of *Sinterklaas* and *Zwarte Piet* perpetuates racism (Van Dijk 2011), constitute examples of this phenomenon. As such, although conceptualized by two different terms, The Dutch Muslim and non-Muslim population are both once again similarly confronted with an effect of globalization.

The final effect attributed by Tomlinson to complex connectivity is that of the alteration of people’s sense of identity. In a not-necessarily Muslim context, Hall, Held, and McGrew (1992) argue that since the late-twentieth century, a recasting of identity has been taking place, due to which formerly well-defined senses of self are increasingly becoming de-centred (274-275). They explain how the past three centuries in Western Europe have witnessed three concepts of identity. The first two, named ‘Enlightenment subject’ and ‘sociological subject’, had a core self, which is an inner essence initially entirely individualist yet increasingly shaped in relation to the nation-state (275-276). The third concept, labelled the ‘post-modern subject’, is decreasingly unified under a coherent self, and instead ever more often assumes “different identities at different times” (277). As such, according to Tomlinson, complex connectivity generates a proliferation of identities that endangers the nation-state’s long-term monopoly over cultural attachment (2003:271).

Muslim identity appears to undergo a similar recasting to that described above. Indeed, although self-evident whilst still belonging to an inherited cultural legacy, it is now “no longer linked to

any given culture” (Roy 2004:23). Complex connectivity has shifted Muslim identity from religion into religiosity, a move towards the expression of a personally constructed relationship to faith, deity and knowledge that is inherently decentred and subject to transformations in relation to society (28). In Kastoryano’s terms, it refers to a process in which a reinterpreted Muslim community appears to have lost its religious content in the traditional sense, defining itself now as a single cultural nation rather than along the lines of ideological state nationalism (2007:170).

As revealed above, this final effect of complex connectivity finds its expression in communities that are not necessarily Muslim, as well as in those that are. In The Netherlands, one can observe how non-Muslims as well as Muslims decreasingly define themselves in accordance to their national background only. Instead, as a study conducted by the Dutch Scientific Council for Government Policy as well as a set of interviews with a selection of Dutch Muslims have revealed, added to such self-perceptions today is an array of identities based around specific differentiations, such as gender, sexuality, class, religion, and ethnicity (Grever and Ribbens 2007:87-91; Van Der Wal et al. 2006:46-55).

The objective of this section of the paper has been to reveal how globalization affects Dutch Muslims and non-Muslims. As has been shown, both groups are simultaneously and similarly subject to the processes of deterritorialization, rationalization and recasting of identity. By laying out and analyzing these concepts, this part of the paper has essentially sketched the situation within which Dutch Muslims and non-Muslims find themselves today. In the next section, this situation is departed from in order to categorize the responses of Dutch Muslims and non-Muslims to this scenario.

Complex connectivity generates a proliferation of identities that endangers the nation-state’s monopoly over cultural attachment

RESPONSES IN DUTCH PUBLIC DISCOURSE

While discussing the contemporary public debate on culture in The Netherlands, Sjaak Koenis asserts interesting ideas concerning the attitudes groups of people adopt in response to living in a rapidly globalizing society. He argues public discourse in The Netherlands has become dominated by two general tendencies. On the one hand, one can observe the “politicization of cultural differences” (Koenis 2008:195), which reflects groups of people persistent in wanting to identify themselves with ‘their culture’ (198). Parallel to this attitude, Koenis introduces the “contextualization of culture” (195). This attitude can be characterized as the realization that the cultural group one belongs to is increasingly and in multiple ways being blurred and blended due to its coexistence with others (198). According to Koenis, both tendencies are encapsulated by the “disenchantment of culture”, which refers to the societal process within which the cultural sources that have inspired groups of people lose their monumental character (273). In this section, Koenis’s approach is adopted and utilized to categorize Dutch non-Muslims’ and Muslims’ responses to the situation sketched in this paper’s previous chapter. Before doing so, a brief methodological note is in order.

Koenis’s contentions are highly dichotomous: he elaborates upon two tendencies dominating Dutch public discourse, and does not allow for mid-range positions to be taken up. It is intuitively plausible to assume that actual Dutch public discourse is

The cultural sources that have inspired groups of people lose their monumental character

composed of a richer set of variations to these two tendencies. Indeed, the author of this paper holds that as opposed to presenting such a polarized version of Dutch public discourse, the two tendencies would more adequately reflect reality by being placed onto a continuum, upon which different degrees of these tendencies would be reflected. Although it is important to qualify in such manner Koenis’s model for future research, size constraints impede this paper from delving into the myriad of alternative voices in Dutch public discourse. As such, adhering to Koenis’s dichotomous model, the

following highlights a specific set of actors in Dutch society that are reputed for their outspoken opinions on Islam in The Netherlands. These actors have not been randomly chosen and do not stand for the above-mentioned moderate middle, but constitute representatives of the outermost opposite sides of Koenis's dichotomous model.

In line with Koenis's two tendencies, the effects of globalization have triggered two types of responses within Dutch public discourse. These responses can be categorized as 'monoculturalist' and 'multiculturalist'. The monocultural reaction of non-Muslims in the Netherlands can be illustrated by the proliferation in recent years of anti-Islamic politicians and political parties. The anti-Islamic *Partij voor de Vrijheid*, in which politicians such as Geert Wilders and Hero Brinkman collaborate in striving to impose strict laws curtailing the growth of Islam in The Netherlands, is probably the most visible example of this group (PVV n.d.). Although popularly referred to as right-wing, these politicians are more correctly described as "cultural fundamentalis[ts]". They play on cultural difference as a justification for ethnic separation, emphasize the negative implications of having 'them' – the Muslims – in 'our' – Dutch – midst, and argue that Islamic cultural practices dilute and undermine sacred Dutch traditions and ethno-national integrity (Amin 2004:12).

Dutch Muslims also adopt monocultural responses. Dutch public figures that can be considered representative of this group are Okay Pala, chairman of the Islamist political organization *Hizb ut-Tahrir* in The Netherlands (*Hizb ut-Tahrir* n.d.), and Mohammed Bouyeri, Islamist and alleged leader of the of terrorist activities suspected *Hofstadgroep*, and assassin of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh (Multicultural Netherlands 2010). They can broadly be subsumed under the heading of neo-fundamentalism. Not exclusively, but usually encountered amongst second- and third-generation migrants in The Netherlands, neo-fundamentalists are agents of non-acculturation, rejecting integration into Western society, refusing identification with any nation-state in particular,

Cultural fundamentalists emphasize the negative implications of having 'them' – the Muslims – in 'our' – Dutch – midst

and engaging in efforts to (re)construct a universal Muslim community, the so-called *Ummah* (Roy 2004:2; 25).

Importantly, both types of monoculturalists fall within Koenis's 'politicization of cultural differences'. They do so because of two shared characteristics. Firstly, within Muslim and non-Muslim Dutch communities, similar types of rhetoric are used to criticize each other's culture in a manner that complicates fruitful intercultural dialogue. Of illustrative value is Geert Wilders, who is known for verbally attacking some of Islam's constitutional elements. He has not shied away from asserting the Qur'an is the Islamic version of Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (Wilders 2007) and has called the Islamic prophet Mohammed a "barbarian, mass murderer and pedophile" (Fox and Kuebler 2010). On a similar note, Okay Pala has openly undermined values that The Netherlands holds to be universal. He has stated to be formally opposed to freedom of speech, arguing the absolute truth lies unequivocally with the word of God, and has advocated the "dismiss[al] of democracy" (De Haas 2008).

Secondly, monoculturalists circumvent and do not substantially deal with criticism. Instead, sources of dispute are excluded and eliminated from public discourse. Illustrating this is the occasion in which Mohammed Bouyeri proved unwilling to engage in a critical debate by assassinating Theo van Gogh after the latter had made a film depicting the discriminatory and violent aspects of Islam (Eyerman 2008:2-3). In a non-violent, yet similarly invasive manner, the *Partij voor de Vrijheid* attempted to prohibit a member of the Dutch police from continuing his work because he uttered objections to the possible introduction of the *burqa* ban in The Netherlands (Parool 2011).

Alongside the monoculturalist tendency, one can observe a multiculturalist response to the circumstances globalization has brought to The Netherlands. The multiculturalist attitude in non-Muslim Dutch society is represented by scholars such as Joris Luyendijk and Maurits Berger. Specialized in the fields of Islamic studies and anthropology, they actively attempt to bridge the gap between Muslims and non-Muslims in The Netherlands, arguing that Islam should be listened to more often and defending its

moral values (Luyendijk n.d.; Clingendael 2010). Multiculturalists are also present within the Dutch Muslim population. Of most interest here are Ahmed Marcouch, Member of Parliament with Moroccan origins (Van Kemenade 2010), and Kader Abdolah, Iranian-Dutch writer and columnist of critical acclaim (Abdolah n.d.). Both represent groups of people that, successfully, live on the borderline between two cultures. As such, they emphasize the compatibility of traditional Islamic values and Western society.

Just as the two types of monoculturalists fall within the first of Koenis' categories, so the above-mentioned multiculturalists share the attitude coined 'contextualization of culture'. Similarly, just as the monoculturalists have two important aspects in common, so the multiculturalists can be attributed two analogous features. Firstly, there is the informative feature. Both non-Muslim and Muslim multiculturalists are engaged in practices of explanation, clarification and indeed, information. Presupposing no previously acquired knowledge, Joris Luyendijk wrote a booklet with the intention to teach non-Muslims "the most important concepts of Islam as well as commonly-known interpretations [of these concepts] amongst Muslims" (Luyendijk 2007a:9). Similarly, Kader Abdolah has dedicated one of his books entirely to the explanation and the clarification to a mainstream Dutch audience of the life of the Islamic prophet Mohammed (Abdolah 2008).

The second feature Muslim and non-Muslim multiculturalists share is the overall ability to critically review elements of one's own and another's culture. Ahmed Marcouch is at the forefront of recognizing the limitations of living a religiously orthodox lifestyle, yet retains that the introduction of Islamic religious studies in Dutch elementary schools is essential to proper functioning within the culturally heterogeneous society of the Netherlands (Marcouch 2010). Additionally, Joris Luyendijk has received international attention by simultaneously criticizing, on the one hand, the Western media's tendency to reveal only a filtered, manipulated, and deformed interpretation of Islam, and, on the other hand, Muslim extremists for interpreting the Qur'an literally and only extracting elements from it useful to their political agendas (Luyendijk 2007b).

As summarized in the table below, this part of the paper has categorized the similar monoculturalist and multiculturalist attitudes observable in today's globalizing Dutch society. Cultural and neo-fundamentalists share certain elements that allow one to categorize them as monoculturalists. Similarly, also Joris Luyendijk and Kader Adbolah converge in terms of their similar attitudes towards handling the confrontation of non-Muslims and Muslims in Dutch society.

	Dutch Muslims	Dutch Non-Muslims
<p>Monoculturalists</p> <p><i>1. Rhetoric impeding inter-cultural dialogue.</i></p> <p><i>2. Circumvention of criticism.</i></p>	<p>Okay Pala</p> <p>Mohammed Bouyeri</p>	<p>Geert Wilders</p> <p>Hero Brinkman</p>
<p>Multiculturalists</p> <p><i>1. Practices of explanation, clarification and information.</i></p> <p><i>2. Critically review one's own and another's culture.</i></p>	<p>Kader Abdolah</p> <p>Ahmed Mar-couch</p>	<p>Joris Luyendijk</p> <p>Maurits Berger</p>

Table 1

CONCLUSION

This paper has focused upon The Netherlands and Islam. Its specific aim has been twofold. First, it has analyzed how globalization influences Dutch Muslim and non-Muslim communities. Hereafter, it has looked into the responses this new situation has generated. Its claim has argued that globalization is a phenomenon producing effects that are similar for both communities, and that therefore also the responses to this situation observable in The Netherlands are highly comparable.

Embarking upon the first analysis, the paper has made use of Tomlinson's work on complex connectivity to define globalization

as well as to extract a framework for the elaboration on some of its effects. As such, deterritorialization, rationalization, and the de-centring of identity have been analyzed. Importantly, and in line with the first facet of this paper's claim, all three effects have shown to have an impact on Dutch Muslims and non-Muslims. The second part of this paper has constituted a categorization of Dutch public responses to this situation. With the help of Koenis's concepts of politicization of cultural differences and contextualization of culture, public discourse in The Netherlands has been divided into mono- and multiculturalist. Whereas the former focus on their own 'authentic' traditions only and refuse to include other cultural influences, the latter focus on self-criticism and the need to remain informed on the variety of cultures contemporary Dutch society consists of. Once again in congruence with this paper's claim, these types have been revealed to occur simultaneously amongst Dutch Muslims and non-Muslims.

Although the analyses of this paper have positively confirmed the validity of its claim, it remains of utmost importance to underline some of the limitations this paper has been forced to reckon with. The weaknesses of Koenis's model have been rendered explicit in the appropriate section. In addition, one of the major obstacles to this academic work has been its size. It has impeded the above-mentioned in-depth analysis on 'glocalization' as well as on the concept of globalization generally, after which the choice for Tomlinson's definition specifically might have appeared more justified. Although a conscious choice from the outset, it has also hindered the entrance into a discussion concerning the internal diversity of Dutch Muslim and non-Muslims. Phrased in this manner, one might obtain the wrong idea that these constitute homogeneous groups. As this is hardly the case, more space should have been available to correctly qualify these terms. All shortcomings need adjustment by further research.

Despite of these limitations, there are some overall conclusions that can be drawn from this paper. The Islamophobic tendency

Globalization is a phenomenon producing effects that are similar for Muslim and non-Muslim communities

recognized in The Netherlands by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, elaborated upon in the introduction, has been contextualized. In opposition to such rhetoric, this paper has shown that 'similarity' constitutes the appropriate keyword to understanding Islam in The Netherlands.

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