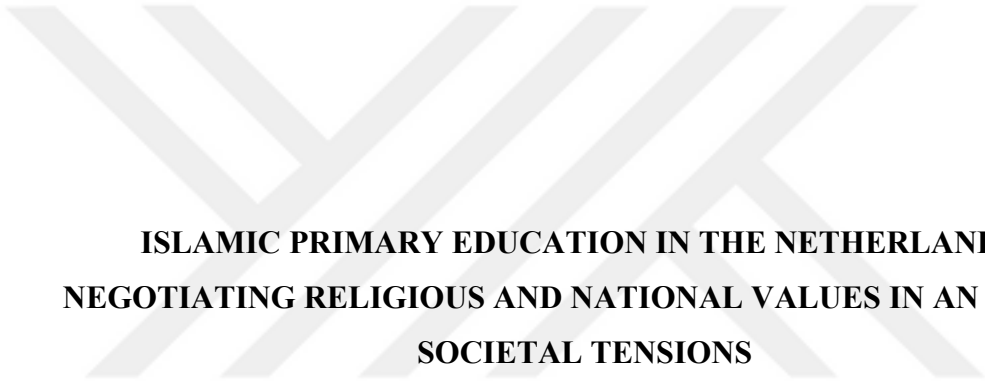IBN HALDUN UNIVERSITY

ALLIANCE OF CIVILIZATIONS INSTITUTE

DEPARTMENT OF CIVILIZATION STUDIES

MASTER'S THESIS

**ISLAMIC PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE NETHERLANDS:
NEGOTIATING RELIGIOUS AND NATIONAL VALUES IN AN ERA OF
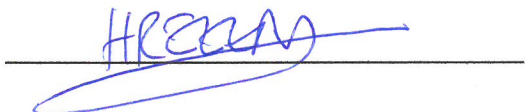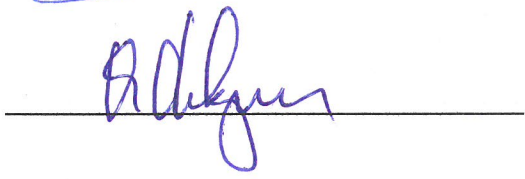SOCIETAL TENSIONS**

ZEHRA VLUG

JULY 2019

ONAY SAYFASI

Bu tez tarafımızca okunmuş olup kapsam ve nitelik açısından, Medeniyet Araştırmaları alanında Yüksek Lisans Derecesini alabilmek için yeterli olduğuna karar verilmiştir.

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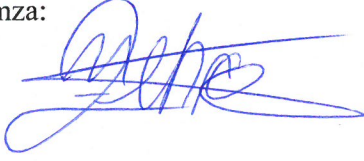Tarih   Mühür/İmza

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ABSTRACT

ISLAMIC PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE NETHERLANDS:
NEGOTIATING RELIGIOUS AND NATIONAL VALUES IN AN ERA OF
SOCIETAL TENSIONS

VLUG, ZEHRA

M.A. in Civilization Studies

Thesis Advisor: Dr. Heba Raouf Mouhammed Ezzat

June 2019, 105 pages

The large-scale movement of people across national borders in an increasingly globalized and transnational world represents one of the most significant challenges of our modern societies. Over the past decades, European countries, such as the Netherlands, have experienced a great influx of Muslim migrants. This has severely impacted both migrant communities and host societies. Muslim migrants have had to deal with the socio-psychological effects of migration, such as exclusion, marginalization and alienation, while host societies have witnessed a rise of xenophobia, Islamophobia and new rightist populism. In this era of societal tension, Muslim migrants have sometimes struggled to preserve their Islamic religious heritage in societies that are culturally dominated by secular-liberalism. This has initiated an inter-generational process in which Muslim migrants attempt to negotiate religious and national values that, at least at surface level, seem to be diametrically opposed.

One of the primary domains were this process of negotiation takes place is education. The Netherlands has a long history of institutionalized Islamic education through laws that support the right to religious freedom. These Islamic schools however operate in a largely secular liberal environment and are legally bound to national secular curricula. In the current social context, the schools are heavily monitored and more often than not accused of being sites for radicalization and anti-integration tendencies.

Scholarly research on Islamic education in the Netherlands, which is fairly meager, maintains several far-reaching claims such as lack of engagement and agency on behalf of Muslim parents and a prevalent rejection of Dutch cultural values and norms. It also tends to merely focus on quantitative studies of the educational achievements of first-generation Muslim migrants, which makes the current state-of-the art both limited and outdated.

This thesis aims to go beyond mere statistics on educational achievements and focuses instead on the lived experiences of Muslims and the complex process of value negotiation. Based on qualitative-empirical research amongst the newly emerging second-generation of Muslim migrants the author offers new insights into the case of Islamic education in the Netherlands. Contrary to earlier scholarly and popular representations, the Dutch second-generation migrant community emerges as vibrant, well-educated, informed, highly demanding and accommodating of Dutch national values. The Dutch Islamic school, rather than a site of radicalization and anti-integration tendencies, functions as an open and safe space where Muslim students, parents, teachers and school leadership negotiate questions of identity, religious values, and integration into the host society.

Keywords: Islamic education, religious and national values, process of negotiation, xenophobia, Islamophobia, integration, immigration

ÖZ

HOLLANDA'DA İSLAMİ İLKÖĞRETİM: TOPLUMSAL GERGİNLİK CAĞINDA DİNİ VE ULUSAL DEĞERLERİ MÜZAKERE ETMEK

VLUG, ZEHRA

Medeniyet Araştırmaları Yüksek Lisans Programı

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Gittikçe küreselleşen ve ulus ötesi bir dünyada insanların ulusal sınırlardan geniş çaplı göç hareketi, modern toplumlarımızın en önemli zorluklarından birini temsil ediyor. Geçtiğimiz yıllarda Batı toprakları göç yoluyla büyük bir Müslüman akını gördü. Bu hem göçmen toplulukları hem de ev sahibi toplulukları ciddi şekilde etkilemiştir. Müslüman göçmenler dışlanma, marjinalleşme ve yabancılaşma gibi göçün sosyo-psikolojik etkileriyle uğraşmak zorunda kalırken, ev sahibi toplumlar yabancı düşmanlığı, İslamofobi ve yeni sağcı popülizmin yükselişine tanık olmuşlardır. Toplumsal gerginlik çağında, Müslüman göçmenler bazen kültürel olarak seküler liberalizmin egemen olduğu toplumlarda İslami dini miraslarını korumakta zorlanıyorlardı. Bu, Müslüman göçmenlerin, en azından yüzeysel düzeyde, tamamen zıt gibi görünen dini ve ulusal değerleri müzakere etmeye çalıştıkları nesiller arası bir süreci başlattı.

Bu müzakere sürecinin gerçekleştiği öncelikli alanlardan biri de eğitimdi. Hollanda, dini özgürlük hakkını destekleyen yasalar yoluyla uzun bir kurumsallaşmış İslami eğitim geçmişine sahiptir. Bununla birlikte, bu İslami okullar büyük ölçüde seküler-liberal bir ortamda faaliyet göstermektedir ve yasal olarak ulusal seküler müfredata bağlıdır. Mevcut sosyal bağlamda, okullar yoğun bir şekilde izleniyor ve çoğu kez radikalleşme ve entegrasyon karşıtı eğilimler için bir yer olmakla suçlanıyor. Oldukça yetersiz olan Hollanda'daki İslami eğitim üzerine yapılan bilimsel araştırma, Müslüman ebeveynler adına katılım ve etkinlik eksikliği ve Hollanda'nın kültürel

değer ve normlarının yaygın olarak reddedilmesi gibi çok geniş kapsamlı iddiaları sürdürmektedir. Aynı zamanda, birinci nesil Müslüman göçmenlerin eğitimsel başarılarının nicel çalışmalarına odaklanma eğilimi mevcut çalışmaları hem sınırlı hem de geçersiz kılıyor.

Bu tez, eğitimsel başarılara ilişkin yalnızca istatistiklerin ötesine geçmeyi amaçlamakta ve bunun yerine Müslümanların yaşadığı deneyimlere ve karmaşık değer müzakere sürecine odaklanmaktadır. Yeni ortaya çıkan ikinci nesil Müslüman göçmenler arasındaki kalitatif-ampirik araştırmalara dayanarak, yazar Hollanda'daki İslami eğitim konusunda yeni görüşler sunmaktadır. Daha önceki bilimsel ve popüler temsillerin aksine, Hollandalı ikinci kuşak göçmen toplumu, canlı, iyi eğitimli, bilgili, çok talepkar ve Hollanda ulusal değerlerine uyum sağlayan olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır. Hollandalı İslam okulu, bir radikalleşme ve entegrasyon karşıtı eğilimler alanı yerine, Müslüman öğrencilerin, ebeveynlerin, öğretmenlerin ve okul liderliğinin kimlik, dini değerler ve ev sahibi topluma entegrasyon konularında müzakere ettiği açık ve güvenli bir alan olarak işlev görür.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslami eğitim, dini ve ulusal değerler, müzakere süreci, yabancı düşmanlığı, İslamofobi, entegrasyon, göç

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This master's thesis is the culmination of several years of study at the Alliance of Civilizations Institute (ACI) of Ibn Haldun University in Istanbul. These years have been formative for me, both intellectually and personally. I'm tremendously grateful for being able to have spent these years here, first at the beautiful historic Sufi lodge at the Yenikapı Mevlevihanesi Campus and later in the majestic environment of the Süleymaniye Külliyesi and Madrasa. One could not wish for a more splendid and spiritually enlightening environment to engage in graduate studies.

But these places would not be complete without the teachers and students I was honored to study with. I first and foremost thank my main supervisor Dr. Heba Raouf Ezzat. She has been an unrelenting source of support and inspiration and I am ever grateful to have been in her presence, inside *and* outside of the university. Secondly, I thank my second supervisor Prof. Dr. Alparslan Açıkgenç, who has been supportive throughout my studies and always willing to help when needed. He also allowed me to further enrich my academic experience by offering me a position as graduate student editor at the *International Journal of the Asian Philosophical Association* (IJAPA), for which I am very grateful. I also thank Dr. Ercüment Asıl who was willing to be part of the supervising committee on short notice and has been encouraging me to successfully finish my thesis, when I needed an extra push. I also record my gratitude here to all of the other teachers I was blessed to study with — Prof. dr. Recep Şentürk, Dr. Nagihan Haliloğlu and Dr. Önder Küçükural — all of whom I have benefitted from at various stages of my studies.

I have also been blessed with being part of the vibrant, international, and talented student community of the ACI. The students at ACI all have been companions on this road to knowledge and we have shared all the ups and downs of student life. I'm grateful to be able to call all of them my friends. I have made many friendships along the way that I'm sure will last a lifetime.

And last, but certainly not least, I thank my family — my husband and son, my parents and siblings — for their unending support, love and comfort. I want to give special thanks to my mother who visited Istanbul several times to support me.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. Introduction: Being Muslim in the Dutch Educational Landscape

In this thesis I delve into the development of Islamic education in the Netherlands and how the changing discourse on migration and Islam in the previous decades has affected the ways in which Dutch Muslims negotiate questions of identity, religious values, and integration into the Dutch educational landscape. Particular attention is given to the perceived notion of *value conflict* between Islam and the West, a notion that is predominant both in Dutch politics and the public discourse. It supposes the idea that Islamic religious values are diametrically opposed to Dutch culture, a society which is said to uphold the values of Western secular-liberal democracy. The notion problematizes the presence of Muslims in Dutch society and cultural diversity in general. As such, this presupposition challenges the imagined Dutch multicultural ideal of tolerance and peaceful coexistence.[1]

I argue that the current sentiments of extreme discontent with the Dutch "multicultural ideal", which dominated Dutch political and public debates over the past decades, have their roots in the mass migrations from the 1970s onward, and have intensified in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks and the subsequent rise of Dutch rightist populism, xenophobia and islamophobia. This has resulted in an intensification of societal tensions and the securitization of Muslim institutions in the Netherlands, including educational institutions.[2] These societal tensions, in turn, have a tremendous impact on the already complex "process of negotiation" that Dutch Muslims — and Muslims living in the West in general — undergo when trying to find their proper place in Dutch society, while also retaining their Muslim cultural and religious heritage.

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[1] For a critique of the stereotypical image of Dutch society as a preeminent example of tolerance, religious and cultural diversity and multiculturalism, see Maarten P. Vink, "Dutch 'Multiculturalism' Beyond the Pillarisation Myth", in *Political Studies Review*, Vol. 5, 2007, pp. 337-350.

[2] The securitization of Muslim schools in the Netherlands is apparent from the large amount of government monitoring reports that have been published in recent years. Some of these reports will be discussed in detail in the course of this chapter. Also see the excellent chapter on the securitization of Muslims in Europe in June Edmunds's *Human Rights, Islam and the Failure of Cosmopolitanism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2017), pp. 109-128. Edmunds speaks in this regard of the "Islamization" of securitization, p. 111.

Because current research on Islamic schools in the Netherlands tends to focus on government policies and the educational quality of Dutch Muslim schools, the actual experiences of Muslims are given very little attention in scholarly literature — if any at all.[3] In this thesis I'm interested in the lived experiences of Muslim communities that are involved in Islamic schools in the Netherlands and how they relate to the dominant negative image about Muslims as a religious community that is perceived as being at odds with Dutch secular-liberal values. Through empirical research I investigate Islamic schools as sites where Dutch Muslims participate in a "process of negotiation" in which they try to construct identities that are aligned with the national culture, without losing the values of their Islamic religious heritage. As a result of in-depth interviews at multiple Dutch Muslim schools, both in so-called "super-diverse" cities as in cities where Muslims are a distinct minority,[4] I argue that we can observe a stark difference between the political and public discourse on the alleged conflict between Islamic and national values and the lived reality of Muslim communities, who endeavor to obtain a place for themselves in the Dutch educational landscape and Dutch society at large. This thesis thus aims to shed light on the case of Islamic education in the Netherlands in the broader context of the discussion on Muslim communities negotiating religious values in Western societies that are predominantly secular-liberal.

In the remainder of this introductory chapter I will explore the current research on Islamic education in the Netherlands until the writing of this thesis, with particular focus on the perceived problem of *value conflict* explicated above. But before doing so, I will delve into the problem of the social impact and socio-psychological effects of migration in relation to the complex process of value negotiation. I will also highlight the additional complications of the effects of the rise of xenophobia and Islamophobia, such as exclusion, marginalization and securitization. Subsequently, I

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[3] This is also stressed in one recent study by Dutch researcher Marietje Beemsterboer, who is a welcome exception in this regard, see *Islamitisch basisonderwijs in Nederland* (Islamic Primary Education in the Netherlands) (Almere: Parthenon, 2018). A comprehensive literature review on current research regarding Islamic education in the Netherlands follows later in this chapter.
[4] For more on the concept of "super-diversity", see Peter Scholten et al. (eds.), *Coming to Terms with Superdiversity: The Case of Rotterdam* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2019).

will introduce the research questions that guide this study, as well as the research methodology used to arrive at answers for these questions. I will end this chapter with several remarks on the aim and relevance of this study and the structure and organization of this thesis.

1.1. The Socio-Psychological Effects of Migration: Value Conflict and the Process of Negotiation

Over the past decades Western European countries have seen a great influx of people into their societies through mass migration, many of whom come from Muslim majority countries.[5] Not without reason has the large-scale movement of people across national borders been called "one of the most vivid dramas of social reality in the contemporary world".[6] According to one United Nations report an astonishing 191 million people globally lived outside of their respective countries of birth in 2005.[7] A more recent report shows a rapid increase to 258 million in 2017, with 60 percent of all international migrants living in Asia (80 million) and Europe (78 million).[8] Part of the story of this "vivid drama" includes the dramatic social impact of migration. It includes the very personal tragedies of war, violence and economic poverty in the countries of origin and the psychological effects of leaving behind a familiar home, close family members and loved ones. But it also includes the tensions, anxieties and alienation produced by cultural difference in the country of arrival, both for migrants themselves as for the host society. Sociologists of migration Peter Kivisto and Thomas Faist speak in this regard of the "tears, fears, hopes, plans, aspirations, uncertainties, ambivalences, and the like that are part and parcel of the immigrant experience".[9] The immigrant experience that was so vividly captured in the memoirs of the late scholar

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[5] For a recent comprehensive statistical overview of migration to Western countries, see Peter Kivisto and Thomas Faist, *Beyond a Border: The Causes and Consequences of Contemporary Immigration* (California: Pine Forge Press, 2010), pp. 64-83.
[6] Kivisto and Faist, p. 1.
[7] As cited in Kivisto and Faist, p. 47.
[8] See the *International Migration Report 2017: Highlights* (New York: United Nations, 2017), accessible through the website of the United Nations: http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/publications/migrationreport/docs/MigrationReport2017_Highlights.pdf (last accessed March 5th, 2019).
[9] Kivisto and Faist, p. 3.

of literature Edward W. Said (1935 - 2003) — himself a migrant — as a feeling of being "out of place", of belonging neither here nor there.[10]

In a time of rising xenophobia and Islamophobia across Europe Muslim communities have sometimes struggled to find a proper place in their host societies.[11] The existing societal tensions complicate the already complex process of integrating into a new society. This process entails what Kivisto and Faist mention as "psychological, social, and cultural dislocations as one leaves the familiar and is forced to encounter that which is new, strange, sometimes enticing, and sometimes repugnant".[12] While the social disruptions of migration are not to be underestimated, the specifically psychological dimension should also not go unnoticed. In an article on the psychological impact of migration, researchers Ana M. Leon and Sophia F. Dziegielewski speak of the complex process of adjusting to a new culture as encompassing "an individual's ability to adapt to a new language, different values, new social institutions, and in some cases skills in coping with psychological problems stemming from the tension between the culture of origin and the new culture".[13] In other words, aside from the more practical challenges of learning a new language and getting familiar with the social institutions of the host country, migrants tend to struggle to accommodate the differences between cultural and religious values of both respective countries. This in turn initiates an often long and complex "process of negotiation". It is exactly *this* process that I am concerned with in this thesis.

In the process of negotiation migrants somehow have to mediate and navigate between different (and sometimes conflicting) value-systems and create or recreate their religious and cultural identity in order to resolve the tensions they experience upon

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[10] Edward W. Said, *Out of Place: A Memoir* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999).

[11] The use of the term "islamophobia" and how it relates to other forms of racism (or if it should even be considered as a subcategory of racism) remains somewhat controversial in academia. For a good overview of the current debate on islamophobia as a field of study, see Nazanin Massoumi et al. (eds.), *What is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State* (London: Pluto Press, 2017), pp. 3-32. Two other helpful works in this regard are Chris Allen's *Islamophobia* (Surrey, UK and Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2010) and the edited volume of Andrew Shryock, *Islamophobia / Islamophilia: Beyond the Politics of Enemy and Friend* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010).

[12] Kivisto and Faist, p. 89.

[13] Ana M. Leon and Sophia F. Dziegielewski, "The psychological impact of migration: practice considerations in working with Hispanic women", in *Journal of Social Work Practice*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1999, p. 69.

arrival in a new cultural context.[14] This process is generally inter-generational, which means it takes several generations of negotiation before the perceived tensions are somewhat satisfactorily "resolved", if one could even speak in such terms.[15] While immigration indeed in some ways means being prepared to be "transformed", it certainly does not entail a "complete repudiation — a forgetting — of the preimmigration past".[16] In some ways the immigrant past is never completely erased, but a continuing part of immigrants' historical narrative and biography. As one prominent assimilation theorist even admits (and I generally tend to not agree with assimilation theory), assimilation does not necessarily mean that "ethnic identities and affiliations would disappear or become irrelevant".[17] Instead, the process of negotiation entails an often painful process of "sifting and choosing of which aspects of one's cultural background to preserve and which social ties to maintain", which is an "inherently complex undertaking, made even more complex when immigrants must reckon with their ambivalent feelings about both their homeland and the land of settlement".[18] In the analytical part of this thesis (chapter 3) we will revisit the complex process of negotiation between conflicting value-systems as we survey many of the Muslim migrant stories and narratives I encountered during my empirical research among Muslim schools in the Netherlands.

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[14] The way I use the "process of negotiation" in this thesis is much akin to the literature on "the negotiation of identities". See for example Aneta Pavlenko and Adrian Blackledge (eds.), *Negotiation of Identities in Multilingual Contexts* (Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 2004).

[15] See Kivisto and Faist, p. 87.

[16] Ibid, p. 92.

[17] See Milton M. Gordon's *Assimilation in American Life: The Role of Race, Religion, and National Origin* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), as mentioned in Kivisto and Faist, p. 104. Assimilation theory has various expressions, but generally refers to the idea that migrants should fuse into the dominant host culture, or a "fusion of cultural heritages", see Gordon, p. 65. For a critical evaluation of assimilation theory, see Kivisto and Faist, pp. 105-125.

[18] Kivisto and Faist, p. 93.

1.2. Additional Complicating Factors: Islamophobia and the Dynamics of Exclusion, Marginalization and Securitization

Before we turn to a literature review of research on Islamic education in the Netherlands, I highlight several aspects of the rise of xenophobia and islamophobia and how they further complicate the already sophisticated process of negotiation described above. There is a lot of confusion and controversy about the meaning of the concept of Islamophobia.[19] Both xenophobia and Islamophobia are interrelated terms, albeit also distinct in the meanings they cover. Xenophobia is the broader term of aversion, hate and ungrounded or irrational fear for people and cultures that are alien to the host society, often related to a specifically *ethnic* xenophobia as a subset of racism.[20] Islamophobia is arguably the more recent term and a neologism for a specific type of phobia that is related to a similarly irrational fear for Muslims and Islam, regardless of their respective ethnicities. [21] It also entails the more general, but still very prevalent, prejudice that Islam is somehow "antithetical to democratic values" and other values commonly associated with Western secular liberalism, and hence that Muslim are inherently unable to become an integrated part of Western societies.[22] Another feature of Islamophobia relates to the social stigma and negative stereotypes of Islam and Muslims. Scholar Christopher Allen mentions eight of such common stereotypes, the most important six of which are: (1) seeing Islam as monolithic and static rather than diverse and dynamic; (2) seeing Islam as other and separate rather than similar and interdependent; (3) seeing Islam as inferior and not different; (4) seeing Islam as an enemy and not as a partner; (5) seeing Muslims as manipulative and not sincere; and (6) seeing anti-Muslim discourse as something natural rather than

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[19] Allen, pp. 4-5 and 16. Also see Shryock, pp. 4-8 and Arun Kundnani, "Islamophobia as Ideology of US Empire", in *What is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State*, eds. Massoumi et al. (London: Pluto Press, 2017), pp. 36-41.

[20] Ray Taras, *Europe Old and New: Transnationalism, Belonging, Xenophobia* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), 2009, p. 83. Taras mentions how xenophobia refers to people who harbor negative attitudes and fear towards foreigners and how perceived external threats increase group solidarity and ethnocentrism (of the host society) and promotes intolerance (towards foreigners) and close-mindedness, ibid. For an excellent overview of the psychological underpinnings of xenophobia, see Lene Auestad (ed.), *Nationalism and the Body Politic: Psychoanalysis and the Rise of Ethnocentrism and Xenophobia* (London: Karnac, 2014).

[21] Allen, p. 15 and 19. Also see p. 102.

[22] Shryock, p. 2.

problematic. [23] According to scholarship, it seems there has been a switch from a more ethnicity-focused phobia in which fear or hatred was expressed with regards to the Arab or Asian background of foreigners (xenophobia), while in recent times religion has come more into play, focusing on the Muslimness of migrants from Islamic countries, rather than their ethnicity or race (Islamophobia).[24] The term Islamophobia has been in use for some time, although increasingly so after the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington of 11 September 2001 and the subsequent emergence of anti-Muslim hatred and resistance.[25] A study by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia reported a stark increase in acts of hatred, Islamophobia and hostility towards Muslims in the immediate wake of the 9/11 events and the years after.[26] As a result of the rise of xenophobia and Islamophobia, Muslims living in the West have had to deal with many exclusionary practices leading to disadvantages, prejudices and discrimination against Muslims and Islam in social, economic, educational and political spheres, some examples of which will be mentioned later on in this chapter.[27] Scholars, such as Narzanin Massoumi and others, also speak of institutionalized Islamophobia and the role of the state in Islamophobic practices. [28] This has particularly manifested, in the case of the Netherlands, in extensive surveillance and monitoring of Dutch Islamic schools by government bodies, such as the Inspectorate of Education.

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[23] Allen, pp. 69-73.

[24] For example, see Tufyal Choudhury et al., *Perceptions of Discrimination and Islamophobia: Voices from members of Muslim communities in the European Union* (European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, 2006), p. 45. Also see Allen, pp. 7-11. This, however, certainly does not mean Islamophobia has replaced xenophobia. Xenophobia is still very much alive. But there does seem to be a noticeable and significant change in the European (and American) discourse with regards to Muslim migrants and migrants in general.

[25] While the term Islamophobia has recently been mostly associated with an increase of usage in an Anglophone context its first utilization is reported to have been in the French context as early as 1925, see Allen, p. 5. The 9/11 events have also caused a resurgence of scholarly research into the theme of Islamophobia, see Deepa Kumar, "Islamophobia and Empire: An Intermestic Approach to the Study of Anti-Muslim Racism", in *What is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State*, eds. Massoumi et al. (London: Pluto Press, 2017), p. 49.

[26] Choudhury et al., p. 7.

[27] Allen, pp. 160-163 and 189. Allen calls Islamophobia in this regard a "catalyst for social exclusion and discrimination", p. 164.

[28] Massoumi et al., pp. 8-17.

In the above described contested social context of Islamophobia and exclusion, Muslim communities in Western Europe have had to deal with the difficult and complex question of how to negotiate religious values and preserve the Islamic heritage in societies that are culturally dominated by secular liberalism.[29] According to several surveys the European public discourse and more than a fair amount of European political leaders hold that Islam is inherently "incompatible with Western and national values" and that Muslims "do not, cannot, or will not integrate".[30] However, despite this widely held view, Muslim communities living in Western countries historically have in fact consistently sought ways to accommodate the culture of the receiving host countries, while also attempting to retain the core values of their Islamic religious identity. Muslim communities have conducted this process of negotiation in various ways, not the least of which is in the domain of education and educational institution building.[31] As a matter of fact, Muslim communities in the West have been interested in establishing Islamic schools in their host countries from very early on in the migration process.[32]

In this observation I believe there is cause for some optimism. It appears that Muslim migrant communities have demonstrated active civic engagement from early on in the migration process, by establishing institutions (educational and otherwise) within the legal framework of the host society.[33] Sociologist Jan Rath and his colleagues affirm

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[29] For a reasonable overview of Muslim responses to liberal secularism, both negative and positive, and of the relationship between Islam and liberal democracy in general, see Nader Hashemi, *Islam, Secularism, and Liberal Democracy: Toward a Democratic Theory for Muslim Societies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[30] Jocelyne Cesari, *Why the West Fears Islam: An Exploration of Muslims in Liberal Democracies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1-20.

[31] For a comparative overview of the institutionalization of Islam and Muslim schools in several Western European countries, see Claire Dwyer and Astrid Meyer, "The institutionalisation of Islam in The Netherlands and in the UK: The case of Islamic schools", in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 21., No. 1, 1995, pp. 37-54. Also see Albrecht Fuess, "Islamic Religious Education in Western Europe: Models of Integration and the German Approach", in *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2007, pp. 215-239. I will extensively deal with the institutionalization of Islamic education in the Netherlands in the broader framework of the Dutch educational system in chapter 2 of this thesis.

[32] The first Islamic schools in the Netherlands for example were established relatively shortly after the first wave of migration in the 1980s, see Dwyer and Meyer, p. 40.

[33] For an excellent recent study on Muslim active civic engagement, see Mario Peucker's *Muslim Citizenship in Liberal Democracies: Civic and Political Participation in the West* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

that Islam seems to play an important mobilizing role for migrants living in Western European societies and that "from their first arrival Muslims have applied themselves to setting up institutions designed to guarantee the continuity of their faith".[34] With various degrees of success Islamic educational institutions have thus functioned as a vehicle for the complex process of negotiation. This process is to a large degree still ongoing today, as will become clear in various parts of the empirical research presented and analyzed later in this thesis.

The institutionalization of Islam in the West is a significant indicator, because Islamic institutions and organizations have had a tremendous role in Muslim identity formation and the accommodation of Muslims in a Western context.[35] Interestingly, this has even led some commentators to remark that the institutionalization of Islam in the west should be seen as "a significant force which contributes to the emergence of a Western Islam". In other words, according to these authors we seem to be witnessing the gradual birth of an Islam that strives to be genuinely true to the Islamic religious tradition, but is also literally "at home" in the cultural and linguistic context of the host society.[36] In addition, some scholars remark that "Muslims are increasingly eager to cultivate positive Islamic identities consistent with western citizenship", even though we live in an era of increased anti-Islam tendencies and securitization.[37]

While it may (or may not) be the case that we are on the verge of an emerging "Western Islam" — perhaps it is too early in time to say — there is also a downside to this rather positive note. Aside from the inherent socio-psychological complexity of the process of value negotiation described above, other additional factors further complicate this process, which therefore should be taken into consideration. As pointed out in a volume dedicated to this problem, scholars Samina Yasmeen and Nina Marković note the particular difficulty of "exclusion and inclusion" dynamics faced by Muslim

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[34] Jan Rath et al., "The recognition and institutionalisation of Islam in Belgium, Great Britain and the Netherlands", in *New Community*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1991, p. 102.
[35] Adis Duderija and Halim Rane, *Islam and Muslims in the West: Major Issues and Debates* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 99.
[36] Ibid, p. 233.
[37] See Michael S. Merry and Geert Driessen, "Islamic schools in three western countries: policy and procedure", in *Comparative Education*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 2005, p. 426.

citizens in Western liberal societies.[38] Kivisto and Faist also mention the central influence in this regard of "the dialectic between inclusion and exclusion".[39] Obviously, there are various levels and degrees of social exclusion, but Yasmeen and Marković cite an array of studies that report an increase of the "othering" of Muslims living in the West, particularly after the events of 9/11.[40] Among the exclusionary attitudes reported by the authors are an increase in Islamophobia and prejudice towards Muslims, which negatively influences them in the domains of employment, education and access to goods and services. But exclusionism is also expressed in the opposition to the construction of mosques, the establishment of Muslim schools, and physical damage to Muslim buildings. Even worse perhaps is the increasing animosity towards Muslims in the form of hate crimes and other violent attacks against Muslim individuals and groups.[41]

Muslim communities and institutions are also under increased scrutiny by European governments in the form of intensified surveillance, monitoring and investigation. At least part of the reason for this is the rise of the so-called "Islamization of securitization", which basically points to the observation that European governments increasingly perceive Muslim communities as a security threat due to alleged Muslim radicalization and terrorism.[42] As with hate crimes incited by Islamophobia, securitization similarly is a "response to *fear* of some individuals or groups in society that other individuals or groups might endanger their security".[43] The difference here, however, is that securitization in this regard specifically refers to the policies of the *state* towards Muslim minorities living in Western countries (and not per se civilians amongst themselves). Social scientist Ayhan Kaya frames the securitization of migration as "a form of governmentally", the term of the late French philosopher Michel Foucault (1926 - 1984), which refers to the "art of governing a people rather

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[38] Samina Yasmeen and Nina Marković (eds.), *Muslim Citizens in the west: Spaces and Agents of Inclusion and Exclusion* (Surrey, UK and Burlington, USA: Ashgate, 2014).
[39] Kivisto and Faist, p. 87.
[40] Yasmeen and Marković, pp. 1-11.
[41] Nathan C. Lean, "Mainstreaming Anti-Muslim Prejudice: The Rise of the Islamophobia Industry in American Politics", in *What is Islamophobia? Racism, Social Movements and the State*, eds. Narzanin Massoumi et al. (London: Pluto Press, 2017), p. 125.
[42] See Edmunds, pp. 109-114.
[43] Ibid., p. 110.

than a territory".[44] In other words, in this context it entails the policies, practices, and techniques the government uses to mold the Muslim community into its own secular-liberal image.[45]

The same dynamics of exclusion and securitization are also at work in the educational sphere, where Islamic schools have to operate in a largely secular environment and are legally bound to national secular curricula, not only in terms of regular school subjects, but also in terms of adhering to Western liberal-secular values and ideals of democratic citizenship.[46] The Netherlands particularly has experienced an increase in state interference in the educational policies of Dutch Muslim schools, such as demanding schools to implement certain types of value education, notions of Dutch national citizenship, and liberal values, including gender equality and tolerance towards homosexuality and same-sex relationships. Additionally, the Dutch government has commissioned several monitoring reports of Islamic schools in order to investigate the role of Muslim schools in radicalization processes and alleged anti-democratic and anti-integrationist attitudes.

An important example is the 2002 report of the Dutch General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) called *The Democratic Legal Order and Islamic Education: Foreign Interference and Anti-Integrationist Tendencies*. This report instigated an array of subsequent investigations by the Inspectorate of Education and similar institutions, some of which directly involve the schools I spoke with during my empirical research of Muslim schools in the Netherlands.[47] The AIVD concluded in

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[44] Ayhan Kaya, *Islam, Migration and Integration: The Age of Securitization* (Hampshire, UK and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 7-11.

[45] There are notable similarities between this way of thinking and how Muslim communities involved in Islamic education experience government interference and surveillance, as will become clear from the remarks of several of my informants throughout it in-depth interviews I held at Islamic schools. See chapters 3.2.1. and 3.2.2. of this thesis.

[46] Since 2004, for example, Muslim schools in the Netherlands are required by the Dutch Ministry of Education to "explain" how they plan to adhere to Dutch norms and values, see Merry and Driessen, (2005), p. 424. The authors go on to say that Dutch Islamic schools now "face unsurmountable challenges from the Ministry of Education", ibid.

[47] The original Dutch title of the report is *De democratische rechtsorde en islamitisch onderwijs: Buitenlandse inmenging en anti-integratieve tendensen*, published by what is now called the "AIVD" in 2002. The AIVD (Algemene Inlichtingen- en Veiligheidsdienst) is a Dutch secret service that operates under the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations. At the writing of the report in 2002 the AIVD was known under a different name, the Domestic Security Service (Binnenlandse Veiligheidsdienst, abbreviated as BVD). The

its 2002 report that while Muslim schools in general do not seem to hinder integration, the intelligence service was in the possession of "indications" for the alleged "radical-Islamic" and fierce anti-integration tendencies of several Muslim religious teachers and educational leaders active in Muslim schools.[48] Moreover, the report further stigmatizes this group of Muslim educationists by accusing them of having a "double agenda" and presenting a dishonest and distorted image of themselves in their contacts with Dutch local and national government officials.[49] In its final assessment the report argues that these alleged radical elements of Muslim educational institutions promote social isolation of the Muslim community from the rest of Dutch society.[50]

Following up on the AIVD investigation of 2002, the Inspectorate of Education produced several reports that monitor Dutch Muslim schools. One of the effects of the AIVD investigation was a change of subsequent government policy that entailed the transition of the Inspectorate of Education (a government organization operating under the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science) from an institution that merely monitored the quality of education to an assessment of the effects of Islamic education (or lack thereof) on the integration of Muslims into Dutch society.[51] This effectively meant a change of focus from educational quality to matters of security and integration, and in particular of anti-integrative tendencies at Dutch Muslim schools.[52]

In its first report under the new policies of 2002, the Inspectorate of Education was rather mild and still tended to focus more on educational quality, concluding that in general Islamic schools maintain and open attitude towards Dutch society and mostly played a positive role in integration. Negative aspects of Islamic schools, if any, where

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report is publicly accessible through the AIVD website: https://www.aivd.nl/documenten/publicaties/2002/02/20/de-democratische-rechtsorde-en-islamitisch-onderwijs-buitenlandse-inmenging-en-anti-integratieve-te (last visited 15th March 2019).

[48] Ibid., p. 22.

[49] Ibid.

[50] Ibid.

[51] Leo van der Meij, *Islamitisch basisonderwijs in Nederland; ontstaan, organisatie en integratie* (Islamic Primary Education in the Netherlands: Origin, Organisation and Integration), 2009, p. 19 (accessible through the ISBO website: https://www.deisbo.nl/wp-content/uploads/2010/03/islamitischonderwijsinnederland.pdf, last visited March 18th 2019).

[52] In an earlier report (1999) the Inspectorate of Education had explicitly stated that it was *not* part of the responsibilities of the institution to examine the role of Islamic schools in the integration of Muslim minorities in the Netherlands. This role was to vastly change over the following years.

not per se framed in terms of anti-integrative tendencies. The 2002 report however met with severe criticism and under pressure from Dutch politics the Inspectorate of Education produced another report in 2003.[53] This report, in contrast to the earlier one, *is* explicitly framed in terms of conflict with the Dutch "democratic legal order". Interestingly, the 2003 report more or less draws the same conclusion as the 2002 report, as it concludes that education in Dutch Muslim schools "is not in conflict with the basic values of the democratic legal order" and that the schools in various gradations "promote the conditions of integration" of Muslim pupils into Dutch society.[54]

That being said, the debate on the relationship between Muslim schools and the issue of integration into Dutch society keeps on recurring in Dutch politics.[55] And this is not to even mention the almost constant stream of articles and op-eds by media outlets that emphasize the alleged anti-integrative, or even radical-extremist, tendencies of Islamic schools, such as in one of the most recent examples of Islamic high school Cornelius Haga Lyceum in Amsterdam.[56] The discussion thus weighs heavily on Muslim communities who are involved in Islamic schools in the Netherlands (including parents, teachers and school leadership) who are constantly confronted the suggestive image of Muslim schools being anti-integrative and anti-democratic, or otherwise not compatible with the norms and values of Dutch culture.

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[53] Van der Meij, p. 20.

[54] The reports of the Inspectorate of Education mostly rely on the empirical research of Geert Driessen and his colleagues. Driessen's work will be discussed in the literature review later in this chapter. Reports by the Dutch security service AIVD (formerly called the BVD) have been accused of bias and methodological problems, since use was made of sources and instruments that were not made public and thus were not verifiable, see Geert Driessen and Micheal S. Merry, "Islamic Schools in the Netherlands: Expansion or Marginalization", in *Interchange*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2006, pp. 213-214.

[55] Van der Meij, p. 23.

[56] The Dutch mainstream newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* featured an article on the Islamic high school in Amsterdam (March 11, 2019) which accuses the school of not having respect for basic democratic values. In the article the school leadership is further said to have relations with terrorist groups. It also describes the pressure from local and national politicians, including Amsterdam Mayor Femke Halsema, to close the school (as was the case with the school's predecessor Islamitisch College Amsterdam in 2010). The *NRC* article is accessible through: https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2019/03/11/kwestie-haga-toont-onmacht-overheid-a3952886 (last accessed March 18, 2019).

To conclude this section, it may now be clear that the complicated process of negotiation — a process that is already complex due to the socio-psychological effects of migration — is further complicated by the dynamics of exclusion, marginalization and the ongoing process of the "Islamization of securitization". In the analytical chapter of this thesis (chapter 3), when we deal with my empirical study of several Muslim schools in the Netherlands, we deal directly with a multitude of individual Muslim narratives and how they deal with the complicated process of negotiating between two apparently conflicting values systems. In the course of this chapter I try to show how — and to what extent — the socio-psychological effects of migration and the further complicating factors of exclusion, marginalization and securitization play a significant role in the process of negotiation.

1.3. Current Research on Islamic Education in the Netherlands: Strengths and Weaknesses

Now that we have a firm insight into the necessary societal background of Muslim communities living in the West, and some of the tensions and challenges they are dealing with, I turn to the current research that has been undertaken on Islamic education in the Netherlands. The scholarly literature that is relevant to this master's thesis is basically of two kinds: research that is devoted specifically to Islamic education in the Netherlands and research where the Dutch case study is addressed in comparison with other European countries, such as Germany, Belgium or the United Kingdom. I will deal with these two types of literatures concurrently. A fair amount of research articles has been devoted to the study of Islamic education in the Netherlands, however the majority of these articles tend to focus on the question of educational quality, rather than issues related directly to cultural-religious value conflict and the process of negotiation. Hence, these articles are rather limited in scope. That, however, does not mean these articles do not provide us with valuable information about Islamic education in the Netherlands, such as basic statistics and demographical information about Islamic education and the student population of Muslim schools. That being said, some of these articles, while still valuable, have become somewhat outdated due to recent developments.

A well-known and often-cited researcher in the field of Dutch Islamic education is Geert Driessen.[57] The handful of articles published by Driessen and his colleagues between 1999 and 2006 seem to build on the same empirical data set of information and are overly repetitive in their conclusions. Driessen tends to focus on the quality of education in Dutch Muslim schools and the individual achievements and successes (or lack thereof) of Muslim pupils. In his 1999 article with colleague Jeff Bezemer, Driessen mentions the efforts of Muslim communities in various European countries to establish state-funded Islamic schools, an effort in which at that point in time only the Netherlands was successful in comparison to other European countries.[58] He concludes that in terms of educational achievements differences between Islamic schools and comparable non-Islamic schools are "only very small".[59] Driessen does hint at the question of value conflict, albeit not extensively. He mentions for example that opponents to the funding of Islamic schools fear they "will lead to isolation and segregation instead of integration, that no real justice is done to the Dutch norms and values".[60]

Driessen does make several important claims regarding the first generations of Muslim parents and their involvement (or lack thereof) with the establishment of the first

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[57] For his most important claims and conclusions about Islamic education in the Netherlands, see Geert W.J.M. Driessen and Jeff J. Bezemer, "Background and Achievement Levels of Islamic Schools in the Netherlands: are the reservations justified?", in *Race Ethnicity and Education*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1999, pp. 235-256; Geert Driessen and Pim Valkenberg, "Islamic Schools in the Netherlands: Compromising between Identity and Quality?", in *British Journal of Religious Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2000, pp. 15-26; Michael S. Merry and Geert Driessen, "Islamic schools in three western countries: policy and procedure", in *Comparative Education*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 2005, pp. 411-432; and Geert Driessen and Michael S. Merry, "Islamic Schools in the Netherlands: Expansion or Marginalization?", in *Interchange*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2006, pp. 201-223.

[58] Driessen (1999), p. 235. For some of the reasons why this was the case, see pp. 238-240. The two main reasons Driessen mentions are the favorable legal framework of the Dutch constitution and the specific needs of the Dutch Muslim community. The Dutch constitutional and legal basis for the freedom of religious education and state-funding are extensively dealt with in chapter 2 of this thesis.

[59] Ibid., p. 235. "Comparable schools" in this context refers to schools that have a similar socio-ethnic disadvantage. Compared to other "regular" Dutch schools in the 1990s Muslim schools score considerably lower. It must, however, be stated that these statistics are out of date. In the subsequent two decades Islamic schools have considerably improved in educational quality, such that several Muslim schools have earned the predicate "excellent". In one case, a Muslim school in the Southern provinces of the Netherlands scored higher than regular Dutch schools in the region.

[60] Ibid., p. 236.

Islamic schools in the late 1980s and early 1990s. He points to apparent poor parental participation and offers as a reason that "most of the parents have little or no education, very little command of the Dutch language, and not enough insight into how the Dutch school system works".[61] He also claims that Islamic education "has largely been a result of the efforts of a small number of religious or political leaders, agents and representatives, and it still remains to be seen just how involved the parents were in founding the schools and choosing the curriculum" and that "there is every reason to believe parents only play a marginal role in the day-to-day running of the schools and are overshadowed by their agents".[62] He furthermore claims — and this directly ties into the research topic of this thesis — that "families of children who attend the Islamic schools attach more importance to their own religion, language and culture" and that parents and children at Islamic schools do not view themselves as part of the Dutch cultural community.[63] Driessen rightly observes there is a lacuna in the scholarly literature on the role of Muslim parents in Islamic education.[64] This, however, does not seem to withhold him from making several rather far-reaching (and in my mind at least in part faulty) claims regarding Muslim parents and the Dutch Muslim community in general. I will try to engage Driessen's arguments and claims throughout the rest of this thesis and offer my own observations based on empirical research amongst Dutch Islamic schools.

Even though Driessen's articles where written well into the 2000s — when the Dutch debate on mass migration, multiculturalism and the place of Muslims in Dutch society was already fully raging — Driessen fails to comprehensively address the deeper societal concerns of the time. The 1999 article does make mention of several societal tensions and controversies, but these are based on secondary literature research, while the empirical part of the article solely focusses on educational outcomes and the background of Muslims pupils.[65] To be fair, Driessen rightly remarks that very little empirical research had been done on Islamic schools in the Netherlands so far, and hence the study is to be lauded for its contribution to the mapping of statistical

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[61] Ibid., p. 237.
[62] Ibid., pp. 238 and 240.
[63] Ibid., p. 246.
[64] "No matter how active the parents might be in Islamic education, they only play a minor role in what little literature there is on this subject", Ibid., p. 240.
[65] Ibid, pp. 240-242.

outcomes of Muslim educational initiatives.[66] His later articles, however, do not really further contribute to what was already concluded in his 1999 study. Driessen's 2005 article with Micheal S. Merry merely summarizes the same empirical findings, albeit compared now with the case studies of the United States and Belgium.[67] His 2006 article with the same colleague adds a summary of several empirical studies, including the government reports discussed earlier in this chapter, but in essence consists of a recap of the conclusions drawn in 1999.[68]

Aside from the studies of Geert Driessen (and his interlocutors), there are several articles that mainly provide historical overviews of the institutionalization of Islamic education in the Netherlands (either with or without comparisons to other European countries).[69] Wasif A. Shahid and Pieter S. van Koningsveld deal with the legal framework of Dutch education and the very unique (in comparison with other European countries) situation of state funding for religious schools, including Islamic schools.[70] Their article also includes statistical information about the educational achievements of migrant children.[71] More interesting, perhaps, is their evaluation of religious education (including Islamic education) in Dutch regular public schools and Christian confessional private schools.[72] The article by Jan Rath and others. is slightly outdated, but still contains valuable information about the early stages of the institutionalization of Islam in the Netherlands (albeit in comparison with Belgium and

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[66] Ibid, p. 240. In a later article (2006) Driessen reiterates the point that very little empirical research has been done on Dutch Muslim schools, and this is after 18 years (at that point in time) of Islamic education in the Netherlands. Currently, more than 30 years have passed since the establishment of the first Islamic schools, and still empirical research is very scarce, see Driessen and Merry (2006), p. 207.

[67] Merry and Driessen (2005), pp. 411-432.

[68] Driessen and Merry (2006), pp. 201-223.

[69] See Wasif A. Shadid and Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, "Islamic Religious Education in the Netherlands", in *European Education*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 2006, pp. 76-88; Claire Dwyer and Astrid Meyer, "The institutionalisation of Islam in The Netherlands and the UK: The case of Islamic schools", in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 1995, pp. 37-54; Jan Rath et al., "The recognition and institutionalisation of Islam in Belgium, Great Britain and the Netherlands", in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1991, pp. 101-114; and Marjoke Rietveld-van Wingerden et al., "Islam in Education in The Netherlands: History and Developments", in *Islam in Education in European Countries: Pedagogical Concepts and Empirical Findings*, eds. Aurora Alvarez Veinguer et al. (Münster, Germany: Waxmann Verlag GmbH, 2009), pp. 69-93.

[70] Shahid and Van Koningsveld, p. 76.

[71] Ibid., p. 77.

[72] Ibid., pp. 78-81.

Great Britain). In this article the authors compare how different legal contexts accommodate Islamic minorities in various national settings and also how Muslim communities are mobilized by religion towards institutionalization.[73] The study is also valuable because in offers a comparative perspective, which was lacking in research at the time.[74] One of the best historical overviews of the institutionalization of Islam in the Netherlands I found in the article by Claire Dwyer and Astrid Meyer. It is however fairly outdated because it only deals with the process until the mid-nineties.[75] The article particularly focusses on the establishment of state-funded Islamic schools, in comparison with the situation in the United Kingdom (where state-funding was opposed, at least until the writing of the article). A more recent overview is provided by Marjoke Rietveld-van Wingerden and others, in which the authors provide a historical sketch of Islamic education in the Netherlands until approximately 2010.[76] What is interesting about this article is that it also considers the relationship of the Netherlands with the Islamic world during the Middle Ages and the Dutch colonial era, which explains part of the contemporary negative attitudes of the Dutch people towards Islam and the Muslim presence in Dutch society.[77] However, because of the broader scope of the chapter, the actual historical overview of the institutionalization of Islamic education in the Netherlands remains rather limited.[78] Finally, only two full monographs — to my knowledge — have been devoted to the topic of Islamic education in the Netherlands (in Dutch), and both of them are relatively recent. Stella van de Wetering and Arslan Karagül argue in their book for the need of Islamic education based on empirical studies on Muslim communities the Netherlands and Belgium.[79] Their book also provides the legal framework, historical background and educational models of Islamic schools in these countries. Marietje Beemsterboer provides the most comprehensive empirical study on Islamic schools in the

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[73] Rath et al. p. 102. The authors speak in this regard about the "economic or socio-political significance of religion".
[74] Ibid., p. 101.
[75] Dwyer and Meyer, pp. 37-54.
[76] Marjoke Rietveld-van Wingerden et al., pp. 69-93.
[77] Ibid., pp. 70-75.
[78] Ibid., pp. 81-89.
[79] Stella van de Wetering and Arslan Karagül, "Zoek kennis van wieg tot graf: Islamitisch godsdienstonderwijs" ("Find knowledge from cradle to grave": Islamic religious education) (Antwerpen and Apeldoorn: Garant, 2013).

Netherlands to date.[80] Beemsterboer, however, merely focusses on teachers in Islamic schools and educational curricula and does not deal with the experiences of Muslim parents.

In conclusion of this section, we can observe that the literature on Islamic schools in the Netherlands in general is rather meager. The historical development of the institutionalization of Islamic education, from the establishment of the first Dutch Muslim schools in the late 1980s until recently, is fairly well-documented. This is also the case for the government policies regarding Muslim minorities and the legal requirements regarding Islamic schools, and how these have changed throughout the years. The statistical information and demographics of Islamic schools and its student population are similarly well-researched, albeit that some of the empirical data is by now outdated. New statistical research is thus called for.[81] Furthermore, there is a clear lacuna in this literature concerning the lived experiences of Muslim communities who are engaged in Islamic education, particularly with regards to the ways in which Muslims deal with the challenges of negotiating two contrasting value systems in the context of current societal tensions. Almost none of the articles discussed here deal directly with this issue, let alone comprehensively. The societal tensions that complicate the healthy and effective functioning of Islamic schools are mentioned mostly in passing, and references to the complex process of negotiating religious and national values, if any at all, go by without deeper investigation or analysis. As admitted by scholars like Driessen, almost no attention is given to the role of Muslim parents in Islamic education, while several scholars do make far-reaching claims about their supposedly inactive, unengaged and uncritical attitude.[82] This lacuna will at least partly be addressed in this thesis. After several decades of government monitoring reports and quantitative studies that focus on educational achievements, more qualitative research is necessary that incorporates the actual experiences of Muslim educators, teachers and especially of Muslim parents.

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[80] Marietje Beemsterboer, *Islamitisch basisonderwijs in Nederland* (Islamic Primary Education in the Netherlands) (Almere: Uitgeverij Parthenon, 2018). Beemsterboer's book is based on her dissertation at Leiden University.

[81] This master's thesis deals exclusively with empirical research that focusses on the lived experiences of Muslim communities through qualitative research methods. While pointing out the lack of up-to-date statistical data, this thesis is not directly concerned with the statistics and demographics or Dutch Muslim schools.

[82] See Driessen (1999), p. 240.

1.4. Research Questions and Methodology: An Empirical-Qualitative Study of Dutch Islamic Schools

As already mentioned at the beginning of this chapter this thesis is concerned with the development of Islamic education in the Netherlands and how the changing discourse on migration and Islam in the previous decades has affected the ways in which Dutch Muslims negotiate questions of identity, religious values, and integration into Dutch society and culture. Particular attention is given to the perceived notion of *value conflict* between Islam and the West that is continually reiterated in public, political and media discourses. Hence, the guiding question of this thesis is dual: firstly, "Do Muslims, indeed, perceive Islamic and Western values as being in conflict?" and secondly, "How exactly do Muslims negotiate Islamic religious and Dutch national values in the context of the Dutch educational landscape?"

As has become clear from the literature review above, it is apparent that current scholarship lags behind in terms of empirical studies on the lived experiences of Muslim communities involved in Islamic education. Qualitative research, in its broadest sense, examines the experiences of people in detail through qualitative research methods, such as the in-depth interview.[83] Central in this type of study is the perspective of the participants and understanding the meanings and interpretations *they* give to behaviors or events.[84] It means the researcher refers to "understanding the life of the people whom you study from their own perspective, in their own context and describing this using their own words and concepts.[85] This has also been called the "interpretive approach" in the social sciences.[86] Central in this scientific paradigm is to give a voice to those who are studied, rather than perceiving them as mere statistics or objects of study. Hence, giving a voice to Muslim educators, teachers and parents

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[83] Monique Hennink et al., *Qualitative Research Methods* (London and California: SAGE Publications, 2011), pp. 8-9.

[84] Ibid., p. 9.

[85] Ibid., p. 17.

[86] This approach has been made famous by sociologist Max Weber (and others), who uses the German term "verstehen", which literally means "to understand" (i.e. by using the perspective of the study population in interpreting research issues).

in the context of Islamic education seems more than fitting, in a scholarly environment that is saturated with statistical research on educational achievements and government policies.

The study was conducted at four different Islamic schools in three Dutch cities of various size. Despite the limited amount of Islamic schools in the Netherlands, I had no trouble finding and selecting schools and informants who were willing to participate in my study. In fact, the support for the research on behalf of the Dutch Muslim community was overwhelming. Hence, my selecting procedure was based on availability in the weeks I did my field research when visiting the Netherlands in the months of January and February of 2019. I undertook at these schools twelve semi-structured in-depth interviews of various length (generally an hour) with school directors, teachers and parents (and one regional educational manager), each representing different dimensions of Muslim experiences at Islamic schools. I explicitly choose the method of semi-structured in-depth interviews because this provided the more "conversational" tone I was looking for during my interviews, in the hope of building the prerequisite trust and personal connection needed for effectively researching a study population that is under increased stress and scrutiny by government institutions.[87] This method is also particularly helpful in gaining insight into the narratives of people's lives, the background characteristics of a person's story, and the context in which the interviewee lives.[88] Some in-depth interviews were held in smaller cities with a relatively small Muslim population, others were held in major "super-diverse" cities (or so-called "majority-minority" cities) which accommodate a large Muslim community.[89] As a result of these in-depth interviews I collected approximately twelve hours of audio material (recorded digitally) and more than 200 written pages of transcribed interviews, which have subsequently been coherently organized into categories and analyzed in line with the recurring themes of the

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[87] For more on the semi-structured in-depth interview see Hennink, p. 109 and Karen O'Reilly's *Ethnographic Methods* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 116-120.
[88] Hennink, p. 110.
[89] The term "superdiversity" is used by sociologists of migration and education to refer to the new social reality of central urban areas in which the majority of the population has a migrant background, which makes the indigenous population a minority. In the Netherlands these include major cities, such as Rotterdam and Amsterdam, see Peter Scholten et al. (eds.), *Coming to Terms with Superdiversity: The Case of Rotterdam* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2019).

interviews. These results are presented in chapter 3 of this thesis. For purposes of protecting the identities of the informants the names of the schools and cities have been withheld in this study, as are the names and identities of the informants themselves.[90]

Before concluding this methodological section, it seems proper to share a note on the issue of subjectivity and reflexivity, notions that have become increasingly important in social scientific research.[91] Contrary to the positivist approach, the interpretative approach acknowledges the subjectivity of the researcher. It acknowledges that the researcher's perspective also influences the study, particularly during data collection and interpretation.[92] In my case, I myself am a second-generation Muslim migrant descending from Turkish parents. While I was born and raised in the Netherlands, and enjoyed my primary, secondary and university education there, the cultural and religious heritage of Islam and Turkish culture are also part of my experience and identity. It is without a doubt that my personal background, at least to some degree, influences the way I both conduct and interpret my research. Acknowledging this brings to the fore the great importance of reflexivity in research. Reflexivity alludes to a "process that involves conscious self-reflection on the part of researchers to make explicit their potential influence on the research process."[93] In the case of this particular study however, I would argue, my particular background might also positively contribute to a deeper understanding of this research population. I have experienced an amount of trust and connection with my informants that otherwise might not have been achieved. I can easily identify with the very personal and touching stories many of the Muslim parents and teachers have told me. They have opened up to me in ways that might not have been the case with other researchers, to the point that on many occasions they shared with me their very personal beliefs, convictions, mourning and tears, some of which I have shared in chapter 3. This trusting openness

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[90] For purposes of protecting the identities of the informants their names have been fully anonymized, as is the required practice in qualitative social science studies, see Hennink et al., *Qualitative Research Methods* (London and California: SAGE Publications, 2011), p. 76. The names used in this chapter are thus fictitious. Their particular roles in the Islamic schools however (either director, teacher, parent etc.) *are* authentically identified as these are perceived as crucial to understanding and evaluating the comments made on the issues at hand in this chapter. A short profile of each of the interviewees can be found in Appendix II at the end of this thesis (page 87).

[91] See Hennink, pp. 19-23 and O'Reilly, pp. 205-228.

[92] Hennink, p. 19.

[93] Ibid.

seems rather unique in the current societal and political context of anti-Muslim government policies, monitoring and surveillance reports, xenophobia and Islamophobia. A context in which Muslims have often been studied as objects and statistics and misused to further political agendas of those who would rather see an end to the venture of Islamic schools in the Netherlands.

1.5. Aim and Relevance: Giving a Voice to the Lived Experiences of Muslims

This study aims to contribute to the already existing scholarly research on Islamic education in a Western context and the challenges it represents for Muslim communities living in the West (and in the Netherlands in particular). It engages the conclusions of scholars in the field of Dutch Islamic education, however thin-layered, about the question of value negotiation between different religious and cultural systems. It also hopes to contribute to the lacuna that exists in current scholarship on Dutch Muslim education with regards to the specific issue of religious values and how they are negotiated, by investigating and comparing the assumptions of the perceived conflict of values and how Muslim communities in the Netherlands actually engage this question. I hope that the close personal connection I experienced with my informants helps to increase our knowledge about the lived Muslim experiences of Muslim communities in the West and give a deeper understanding to what Muslims communities go through when trying to deal with the challenges of living in Western societies. By delving into the Dutch case, with all its social specificities, historical contingencies and legal structures, I hope this study represents a useful addition to similar studies that have been done in other European countries and an enrichment of the current pallet of scholarship of Muslim schools in the West. Also, this study hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the contemporary societal tensions in Dutch society with regards to the contested Muslim presence in the Netherlands and the rise of anti-Muslim sentiments, and perhaps even to contribute to a dialogue between actors who have been participating in this heated debate for the past years. And finally, while not the main purpose of this research, the conclusion towards the end will also include several policy recommendations that naturally follow from the reflections throughout

the thesis upon Dutch government policies regarding Islamic schools in the Netherlands and immigration and integration in general.

1.6. The Structure and Organization of the Thesis

Having set the stage of the research in this introductory chapter, the second chapter deals with the necessary background information on the Dutch educational system and its history and development. It also includes a section on the institutionalization of Islamic schools in the Netherlands in the context of the Dutch legal framework regarding the establishment of religious and denominational schools. This chapter is divided into three parts. The first part provides and overview of the historical developments and intellectual influences that gave shape to the Dutch educational system. The second part deals with the Dutch legal and constitutional framework and how it accommodates religious schools in terms of state funding. It also gives an overview of the institutionalization of Islamic schools and the transition of Muslim migrants from being guest workers to full citizens. The third part deals with societal change, the rise of anti-Muslim resistance and the fall of Dutch multiculturalism.

The third chapter of this thesis presents the results and analysis of field research conducted amongst the Dutch Muslim community and Islamic schools in various Dutch cities with regards to the question of values conflicts, as explained in the research methodology section above. This chapter showcases the empirical data obtained in in-depth interviews with Muslim community members (parents, teachers and school leadership) involved in Dutch Islamic schools. The empirical data is organized according to four inter-related themes regarding Islamic education and are subsequently analyzed and discussed in conversation with the scholarly literature presented in chapters one and two, focusing specifically on the research questions that concern this study. The first theme addresses the impact of current discourses on Islam and Muslims in Dutch society and politics. The second theme deals with the process of value negotiation and the question of value conflict. The third theme provides insights into the stark generational differences between the first and second generations of Muslim migrants with regards to the process of negotiation. The fourth

section, finally, addresses the implementation of religious values in Islamic schools, including the questions of intra-religious diversity and non-Muslim teachers.

This master's thesis is concluded with a fourth chapter which summarizes the conclusions drawn from its previous three chapters. It will revisit the research questions stated in this introductory chapter in light of the survey of current research literature and the findings of the empirical field work conducted for this study. This final chapter will also comment upon the ultimate benefits and limits of this study, as well as make suggestions for further research on the topic.

2. The Dutch Educational System and the Institutionalization of Islamic Schools in the Netherlands

The purpose of this chapter is to provide necessary background information concerning the Dutch educational system and the place of Islamic schools in it. In order to understand the contemporary context of education in the Netherlands we need to have some rudimentary knowledge about its history and background, both in terms of educational thought and institutional developments. Only once we have some preliminary idea about the makeup of Dutch education and how it was historically formed can we start to understand the place of Muslim schools in the modern Dutch educational landscape. Hence, I will first provide a short overview of the formation of the Dutch educational system and the intellectual trends that influenced its formation. Secondly, and very much part of the same picture of educational institutional formation, I provide a sketch of the legal and constitutional framework with regards to the foundation of religious schools, including the very important aspect of statement funding (the Dutch legal system is rather unique in this regard compared to other European countries).[94] This is important, because it is this very legal framework that provided the Muslim community in the Netherlands with the opportunity to establish state-funded Islamic schools in the first place. Subsequently, I will provide a historical survey of the institutionalization of Islamic education in the Netherlands, from the inception of the first Islamic schools in the late 1980s and early 1990s until our current times.[95] In the third and final part of this contextual background chapter I delve into the recent societal changes the Netherlands has undergone, the rise of anti-Muslim resistance and the fall of Dutch multiculturalism. These recent developments have severely impacted the Dutch Muslim community and in some ways have obstructed

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[94] In fact, the Netherlands was the only European country which had the specific legal framework that supported full state-funding of Muslim schools in the early stage of the institutionalization of Islam in Europe. In other countries, such as Germany and the United Kingdom, this initially was not the case, see Driessen and Valkenberg, "Islamic Schools in the Netherlands: Compromising between Identity and Quality?", in *British Journal of Religious Education*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2000, pp. 15-16.

[95] Many of my informants were directly involved with the established of the Netherlands's first Islamic schools, or children of parents who were involved. Hence, we will see interesting parallels with this chapter and the personal stories related by my informants in the analyses of chapter 3.

the proper and healthy functioning of Islamic schools. Providing the prerequisite background information about these three contextual dimensions (i.e. the Dutch school system, the legal framework and the institutionalization of Islamic education, and recent societal changes) will give us a firm grounding into the contemporary Dutch educational landscape and help us better understand the analyses of the lived experiences of the Dutch Muslim community based on the qualitative research presented in chapter 3.

2.1. Dutch Education: Historical Developments and Intellectual Influences

Periodization in the historical profession always retains a grain of arbitrariness.[96] However, in historiographies of Dutch education a basic tripartite periodization is adhered to that I think is reasonable, and I follow it here as well in this master's thesis.[97] The first period covers the transition from the medieval to the early modern period, the establishment of the early Dutch Republic and the predominant intellectual currents of the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation and the Enlightenment (1600-1800). The second period covers the modernization of the early Dutch nation-state and the rise of Romanticism as a counter-current to the Enlightenment (1800-1900). The third period, finally, engages the developments of the current age, including the rise of secularism and liberal democracies in the 20th century and beyond (1900-2000). These three periods have laid the intellectual and institutional groundwork of the modern Dutch educational system, and its underlying hierarchy of norms and values.

The first period is characterized by a revivification of classical culture during the Renaissance of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the rise of humanism and Protestant reforms in the seventeenth century and the Age of Enlightenment in the eighteenth century.[98] The early modern period marks a transition from the religion-

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[96] On the challenges of periodization and periodization as an "act of interpretation", see John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of History* (New York: Routledge), 2015 (6th edition), p. 9.

[97] For the basic historical periodization followed in this master's thesis, see Bakker et al., *Vijf eeuwen opvoeden in Nederland: Idee en praktijk 1500-2000* (Five Centuries of Educating in the Netherlands: Idea and Practice) (Assen: Van Gorcem, 2010).

[98] Bakker et al., p. 8.

centeredness of the Middle Ages to what would eventually develop into a form of secular humanism.[99] Although it was not a clear cut from the Middle Ages, and religion continued to play a major role in the centuries to come (especially during the Protestant Reformation in which Calvinism came to dominate Dutch cultural and politics), there was a general shift away from the divine towards an interest in human nature and the beauty of the natural world. Although the Renaissance started as an art movement in the young merchant city-states of Italy in the fifteenth century, it quickly spread throughout Europe and penetrated all dimensions of European culture, including literature, philosophy and politics.[100] The humanism of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was also part of this broad cultural and intellectual renewal movement. Humanism developed into the foundation of the modern cultural tradition in Europe, which focused on the ideas of human potential and humanity's capacity to know the world through science.[101] These ideas also played a central role in European thinking about education and upbringing. In the Netherlands the famous humanist and classicist Desiderius Erasmus (1469-1536) played a major role in educational thought.[102] Erasmus was critical of the dogmatism and traditionalism of medieval scholasticism and promoted instead the new humanist enthusiasm for learning and new ideas. He also wrote extensively on education and the upbringing of children, most famously in his *On Civility in Children* (*De civilitate forum puerilium*), which is perhaps one of the earliest educational treatises in Western Europe.[103] Erasmus's humanism, its disdain for scholastic rigidity and its admiration for knowledge and reason, would have a lasting effect on Dutch educational thought. This humanist stress on the freedom of thought, coupled with the new religious individualism of the Calvinist Reformation,

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[99] For the Renaissance humanists the term "secular" did not yet have the connotations of unbelief or atheism, which would only be ascribed to the word during the nineteenth century. In fact, the early humanists, while critical of some of the practices of the Catholic church, were still very much inspired by religion. Craig Calhoun et al. (eds.), *Rethinking Secularism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 8. Also see, Owen Chadwick, *The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

[100] See Christopher S. Celenza, *The Intellectual World of the Italian Renaissance: Language, Philosophy, and the Search for Meaning* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

[101] Bakker et al., p. 10.

[102] For an overview of Erasmus's life and thought, see James D. Tracy, *Erasmus of the Low Countries* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

[103] For more on Erasmus's educational philosophy, see William Harrison Woodward, *Desiderius Erasmus Concerning the Aim and Method of Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1904).

would characterize much of the Dutch educational landscape of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

In the eighteenth century Dutch educational thought was very much dominated by the values and principles of the Enlightenment, which was closely associated with the Scientific Revolution (hence it has also been called the Age of Reason).[104] Enlightenment thought has been characterized by two main qualities, namely rationalism and emancipationism, ideas that are also reflected in modern Dutch education.[105] As a natural extension of the type of humanism promoted by scholars such as Erasmus, the Enlightenment took human reason as the ultimate criteria for reaching truth, and maintained a great aversion against prejudice, superstition and faith in authority.[106] Enlightenment thinkers, however, did start to develop a different attitude towards religion than their humanist predecessors. Critical of religious authority, Enlightenment thinkers would submit even the most fundamental principles of religion to the judgment of human reason.[107] Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) stands out as the pivotal Enlightenment thinker in the field of educational thought, who is famous for his educational treatise *Emile, or On Education* (*Émile, ou De l'éducation*).[108] While it is probably an exaggeration to claim that Rousseau (and contemporary pedagogues and educationalists) "discovered" the child — as some have argued — it is reasonable to say that Rousseau's educational ideas represent a major shift in European educational thinking; away from the authority of teachers and institutions towards a more child-centered approach.[109] Rousseau's educational philosophy entailed a more "natural" education and upbringing of the child, focused on removing any potential obstacles or hindrances for the development of the child

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[104] Bakker et al., p. 34.

[105] See Louis Dupré, The Enlightenment & the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004), p. 7. The idea of emancipationism would be best exemplified by the famous statement of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), who encouraged people to free themselves from their "self-imposed tutelage" and "dare to think for yourself" (*sapere aude*), see Kant's famous essay *What is the Enlightenment?* (*Was ist Aufklärung?*), trans. H.B. Nisbet (UK: Penguin, 2009).

[106] Bakker et al., p. 34.

[107] See Dupré, pp. 229-268. The author speaks in this regard of "the religious crisis".

[108] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile or On Education*, translated from French by Allan Bloom (USA: Basic Books, 1979). Albeit that Rousseau already shows some early pre-Romantic reservations towards the Enlightenment stress on reason alone.

[109] Bakker et al., p 43.

rather than dictating, prohibiting or forcing anything upon the child.[110] The Enlightenment was not only an intellectual movement that merely spoke to the elite. It became a broad pedagogical movement that promoted the cultivation and intellectual elevation of the common people with the end goal of raising educated citizens of the state. This idealism represents the earliest forms of what would eventually become national and mass education and would form the intellectual backbone of the establishment of many of the educational institutions in the Dutch educational landscape.[111]

The second period was characterized by a continuation of Enlightenment ideas as well as a counter-reaction in the form of nineteenth century Romanticism. The Enlightenment's stress on rationality and almost naive belief in the human ability to use reason found a strong opponent in Romanticism, which called for a renewed appreciation for feeling, emotion and intuition.[112] Many of the so-called modern "reform pedagogues" of the twentieth century, such as Maria Montessori and Rudolf Steiner, derive their inspiration from late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century Romanticism.[113] Pedagogical reform schools where established in the Netherlands in the twentieth century, and they still are widespread today.[114] Rousseau's work already formed a bridge between both trends of thought, and in some ways, while he is still firmly rooted in the Enlightenment tradition, his work shows Romantic features such as an appreciation for intuition and feeling.[115] Romantic pedagogy and educational thought also stressed societal bonds and the historical roots of the individual and society.[116] Hence it is also strongly related to the rise of European nationalism and eventually European imperialism.[117] However, because of this stress on the solidarity with the nation and the togetherness of the nation's people, Romantic ideas also contributed to the further development of national education in the second half of the

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[110] Ibid., p 43.
[111] Ibid., p. 37.
[112] Ibid., p. 34.
[113] On reform pedagogies, see Bakker et al., pp. 42-83.
[114] Ibid., pp. 83-84.
[115] Ibid., p. 52.
[116] Ibid.
[117] See David Aram Kaiser, *Romanticism, Aesthetics, and Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), p.18. Also see Saree Makdisi, "Romanticism and Empire", in *A Concise Companion to the Romantic Age*, ed. Jon Klancher (United Kingdom: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), pp. 36-56.

nineteenth century, particularly at the hands of Romanticists such as German pedagogue Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841).[118] This development fits in well with the modernizing trend in Europe of formal schooling becoming less and less confined to elites, the informal spread of literacy and an increased mobility for the common population.[119]

The third period covers the twentieth century up until our contemporary times. While secularization and de-churching would only happen on a large scale in the 1970s, critiques and doubts about religion and the role of the church in politics and society began much earlier.[120] The first constitution of the Netherlands in 1789 was based on the principles of the French Revolution and thus included the idea of the separation of church and state.[121] Slowly, but steadily, the idea merged that not the church but the state should be responsible for education (which was also in line with the Enlightenment ideal of civic education for the whole populace). From 1813 the Netherlands had become a unified state, a monarchy, under the leadership of King Willem I. The liberal constitution of 1848 by the famous Dutch statesman J.R. Thorbecke would mean the end of autocratic monarchy and the firm establishment of the parliament (although voting rights and democracy would develop later on).[122] The second half of the nineteenth century was marked by rapid economic growth, a decrease of the mortality rate and stark improvements in public hygiene, as was the case in many other places in Europe. However, until deep into the nineteenth century poverty and child labor was still very common in the Netherlands and elsewhere.[123] Child labor would become prohibited in the Netherlands for children under twelve years old in 1874 due to the so-called "child's law" (*kinderwetje*) by legislator Van Houten (although it would only really come into effect by 1889) and in 1901 a law was passed for compulsory education for children of six years old onwards. This is important, because through these laws Dutch children actually attending school

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[118] Bakker et al., pp. 52 and 64-68. In this regard also see Andrew Franta, Romanticism and the rise of the Mass Public (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007).
[119] Allen Richardson, *Literature, Education, and Romanticism: Reading as Social Practice, 1780-1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 44.
[120] Bakker et al., p. 285.
[121] Ibid., p. 543.
[122] Ibid., p. 202.
[123] Ibid., p. 229.

increased to eighty percent.[124] These developments culminated in a general call for the establishment of a national system of education, established by the government, and available for people of all classes in Dutch society. It is this very system that is at the roots of the modern Dutch education system today.[125]

2.2. The Legal Accommodation of Religious Schools and the Institutionalization of Islamic Education in the Netherlands

The political climate in the early twentieth century in the Netherlands was dominated by a struggle between secularist and religious confessional political parties. Until the end of the eighteenth century there used to be a strong link in the Netherlands between the Reformed Church (based on an orthodox version of Calvinist Protestantism) and the Dutch state.[126] Under influence of the French Revolution this slowly changed as the bonds of state and church became more and more separate and Protestant, Catholic and Jewish citizens were given equal rights in education.[127] This eventually led to the principle of freedom of education and equal state funding.[128] The Dutch school system allows for both public and religious schools to be funded by the government, a system that is rather unique amongst countries in Europe. The Dutch legal system is thus characterized by legal plurality.[129] This arrangement has its historical roots in the so-called "school struggle" (*scholenstrijd*), which entails the quarrel between Catholic and orthodox Protestant groups who wanted schools for their children according to

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[124] See P.Th.F.M. Boekholt and E.P. de Booy, Geschiedenis van de school in Nederland, vanaf de Middeleeuwen to aan de huidige tijd (History of the School in the Netherlands, From the Middle Ages until Contemporary Times) (Assen/Maastricht: Van Gorcum, 1987), p. 170.

[125] This thesis concerns empirical research on Dutch primary schools, which concerns children between the ages of four and twelve. Primary schools in the Netherlands have eight grades (called "group" 1 to 8 respectively). For a schematic overview of the Dutch educational system, see Appendix I on page 86.

[126] Jan Rath et al., "The recognition and institutionalisation of Islam in Belgium, Great Britain and the Netherlands", in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1991, pp. 101-114.

[127] Ibid., p. 108-109.

[128] Wasif A. Shadid and Pieter Sjoerd van Koningsveld, "Islamic Religious Education in the Netherlands", in *European Education*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 2006, p. 76.

[129] Claire Dwyer and Astrid Meyer, "The institutionalisation of Islam in The Netherlands and in the UK: The case of Islamic schools", in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol. 21., No. 1, 1995, p. 39.

their own religious principles. The freedom of education — allowing for religious education — was already established in the liberal constitution of 1848. The famous article 23 of the constitution denotes the neutrality of Dutch public education and respect for all religions.[130] This however instigated great controversy and debate about which religious groups would be state-funded for their educational initiatives. This problem was eventually solved by a 1917 law which established equal funding for *all* religious confessions and denominations in the Netherlands.[131] In a sense, religious groups benefitted from the general political current of liberalism in Europe in the mid-nineteenth century, which promoted a neutral government and promoted private initiative.[132] The Constitution of the Netherlands was completely revised in 1983.[133] Renewed stress and emphasis were given to article 1 of the constitution, which ensured the principle of equality, and explicit equal protection was given to religion and non-religious convictions.[134]

The favorable conditions for establishing religious schools in the Netherlands might account for the relatively large amount of Islamic schools in the Netherlands, when compared to other countries in Europe.[135] In an early article on the so-called "new presence" of Muslims in European societies, Jan Rath and his colleagues stress the mobilizing role of Islam amongst migrants living in Western Europe and that "from their first arrival Muslims have applied themselves to setting up institutions designed to guarantee the continuity of their faith".[136] Muslims have been establishing a growing list of initiatives to provide for the needs of the Muslim community, such as places of worship, schools, *halal* butchers, broadcasting stations, political parties and

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[130] Shadid and Van Koningsveld, p. 76. Also see, Dwyer and Meyer, p. 39.
[131] Bekker et al., p. 568. Also see Rath et al., p. 109.
[132] Bekker et al., p. 569.
[133] For an English version of the Dutch Constitution, see Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, Constitutional Affairs and Legislation Division, *The Constitution of the Netherlands 2008*, Accessible through the website of the Dutch government: https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=17&ved=2ahUKEwia9cDO_J_hAhXL1qQKHfL9DZ8QFjAQegQIARAC&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.government.nl%2Fbinaries%2Fgovernment%2Fdocuments%2Fregulations%2F2012%2F10%2F18%2Fthe-constitution-of-the-kingdom-of-the-netherlands-2008%2Fthe-constitution-of-the-kingdom-of-the-netherlands-2008.pdf&usg=AOvVaw05LYA3bgB3dUJfy9apEko_ (last accessed March 26th, 2019).
[134] Rath et al., p. 109.
[135] Shadid and Van Koningsveld, p. 76.
[136] Rath et al., p. 102. Also see Dwyer and Meyer, p. 37

cemeteries.[137] During this process of establishing Islamic institutions and organization Muslims have been actively seeking recognition and legitimization from the Dutch state.[138] The institutionalization of Islam has been happening in all European countries where Muslim minorities settled, although there have been differences in the amount of support (publicly and through state funding) or resistance against Muslim presence.[139] The degree of acceptance, it has been argued, is based on both political decision-making (with regards to the respective countries' national legislation and regulations) and the ideological assumptions about the place of Muslims in society.[140]

Based on the legal principles of the Dutch constitution, such as article 1 discussed above, Muslim migrants had political and legal arguments to be included in the principles of equality.[141] This had far-reaching consequences, as the Dutch government would be obliged to give equal rights to the Muslim minority residing in the Netherlands as it would to Christian communities (or any other religious community for that matter). Hence in 1987 the Dutch parliament decided in favor of the Muslim community in their appeal for the right to make the call to prayer from mosques, as churches did with bells, based on the right of equal treatment before the law for Christian and non-Christian religious denominations.[142] On a similar note, the Dutch Minister of Home Affairs decided in 1989 that the criminal offense of blasphemy would equally apply to blaspheming the deity of Islam.[143] Hence, when Muslims started to settle in the Netherlands from the 1970s onwards and started to get more and more familiar with the Dutch legal system, they made a growing list of appeals to the Dutch government to respect their rights as a religious minority under the principles of the Dutch constitution.

Islamic education in the Netherlands basically took three forms; namely (1) Islamic religious education in regular Dutch public schools, (2) Islamic religious education in private Christian schools, and (3) Islamic religious education in separate state-funded

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[137] Ibid., p. 102.
[138] Dwyer and Meyer, p. 37.
[139] Rath et al., p. 102.
[140] Ibid., p. 103.
[141] Ibid., p. 109.
[142] Ibid.
[143] Ibid.

Islamic schools. In the first case, Muslims have legal rights to opt for Islamic confessional education in the public-school system. This is regulated in articles 46, 50 and 51 of the Law of Primary Education, which ensured the subsidization of such religious optional education (for all religious denominations) under certain conditions (such as the amount of pupils and parents who are in favor for additional extracurricular religious instruction).[144] However, while in the late 1990s nearly ninety percent of all public primary schools offered additional religious confessional education, this percentage has been in a stark decline in the last two decades.[145] The second option concerns Islamic education in private Christian schools. As children from Muslim migrants (mostly of Turkish and Moroccan origin) who settled in the Netherlands attend both public and private schools, significant portions of these children enrolled in private Christian schools, mostly because they were perceived as having a generally positive outlook on religion and were known for a certain amount of discipline.[146] While this type of education is legally an option, it has also led to a pushback from Christian communities who are concerned about protecting the Christian identity of the school.[147] Discussions about whether Muslim pupils at Christian schools should participate in bible readings or religious prayers and songs, and if Christian schools should (or should not) pay attentions to Islamic celebrations and the like, have further complicated this type of education.[148] In one case an organization for protestant Christian education argued that a high percentage of non-Christians in Christian schools would endanger the Christian identity of the schools and that hence it would be in the interest of Dutch Christian education to limit the amount of non-Christian pupils and install a quota for Muslim students (an idea which has almost never been implemented because it is against fundamental municipal and national laws).[149]

The third option of separate state-funded Islamic schools has been a viable solution in the mind of many Muslim parents who did not feel at home in private Christian schools

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[144] Shahid and Van Koningsveld, p. 78.
[145] Ibid. The authors indicate the reason for this is not per se ideologically or politically motivated, but rather might have to do with disagreements between the national government and local municipalities about where the responsibility to fund this type of education lies.
[146] Ibid.
[147] Ibid., p. 80.
[148] Ibid.
[149] Ibid.

or felt religion was not given proper space or attention in regular Dutch public schools. From the 1970s onward several early Islamic organizations endeavored to realize Islamic religious instruction at public state schools, but this by-and-large failed to materialize, mainly due to reluctance from local municipalities to support this type of education.[150] The failure to establish religious education at state schools was at least one instigator to establish separate Islamic schools.[151] In addition state public schools, because of their supposedly "neutral" stance towards religions, tended to ignore their students' religious backgrounds and needs.[152] Hence to create an environment that promoted Islamic values and strengthened the Islamic identity, and to create a safe space to practice their religion, establishing separate Islamic schools seemed to be an attractive and viable solution for many Muslim migrant parents from the first generation.

In the early 1980s a first (but unsuccessful) attempt was made to establish an Islamic school in the Dutch city of Eindhoven. It was not until 1988 that the first Islamic schools were founded in Rotterdam and Eindhoven. These first schools met with opposition from Dutch politics but did meet all the requirements of a state-funded denominational school and hence continued to exist. [153] While the pushback against the establishment of Islamic schools continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Islamic schools were established in increasingly large numbers in various cities in the Netherlands, as word spread amongst local Muslim communities about this possibility within the legal framework of the Dutch constitution. In 1994 there were 29 Islamic primary schools in existence. [154] In 2005 there were 41 Islamic primary and two secondary Islamic schools in the Netherlands. [155] Like all schools in the Netherlands — be they public or private — the educational curriculum is taught in Dutch and is

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[150] Dwyer and Meyer, p. 40.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Marjoke Rietveld-van Wingerden et al., "Islam in Education in the Netherlands", in *Islam in Education in European Countries: Pedagogical Concepts and Empirical Findings* (Münster, Germany: Waxmann Verlag GmbH, 2009), p. 76.
[153] Dwyer and Meyer, p. 40. Rietveld-van Wingerden et al. date the first Islamic school a year earlier in 1987, which was the Al Ghazali Islamic primary school in Rotterdam, p. 82.
[154] Dwyer and Meyer, p. 41.
[155] Shadid and Van Koningsveld, p. 81. As this thesis is concerned with Islamic primary education I will not delve into secondary education. For more information about Islamic secondary schools in the Netherlands, see Rietveld-van Wingerden et al., pp. 87-89.

subject to the rules and inspection of the national government. [156] But aside from that, Islamic schools are free to implement additional religious instruction and give shape to their Islamic identity and values through Islamic rules of behavior, prayers, religious celebrations, and so on. While classrooms in principle are not segregated, most Islamic schools do provide separate gymnastics and swimming classes for boys and girls. In 1990 the Dutch Islamic community also founded an umbrella organization for Islamic schools in the Netherlands called ISBO (Organization of Islamic School Boards), which advocates the interests of Islamic schools throughout the Netherlands and provides organizational advice and educational materials. [157]

2.3. Societal Change and Anti-Muslim Resistance: The Fall of Dutch Multiculturalism

As has become clear from the historical and legal survey above, the Netherlands has a long history of institutionalized Islamic education through laws that support the freedom of education and the right to religious freedom. These laws are deeply engraved in the Dutch constitution, one of the oldest continuously used constitutions in the world.[158] Faith communities belonging to different religious denominations — including Protestant, Catholic, Islamic, Jewish and Hindu — established private schools under these laws, as opposed to the "regular" secular public schools of the Dutch state. That same right however has come under pressure since the rise of a new rightist-populist discourse catered against immigration and Islam in general.[159] While once the Netherlands was known for being one of the most multicultural and tolerant countries of Europe, now Muslim communities and Islamic educational institutions

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[156] Shadid and Van Koningsveld, p. 81.
[157] Rietveld-van Wingerden et al., p. 82.
[158] For a reasonable overview of Dutch constitutional history see Arblaster's *A History of the Low Countries* (Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), particularly chapter 5, pp. 167-209.
[159] See Koopmans and Muis, "The rise of right-wing populist Pim Fortuyn in the Netherlands: A discursive opportunity approach", in *European Journal of Political Research*, Vol. 48, No. 5, 2009, pp. 642-664, and Bos and Brants, "Populist rhetoric in politics and media: A longitudinal study of the Netherlands", in *European Journal of Communication*, Vol. 29, No. 6, 2014, pp. 703-719, and finally, Vossen, "Populism in the Netherlands after Fortuyn: Rita Verdonk and Geert Wilders Compared", in *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, Vol. 11, No. 1, pp. 22-38.

are increasingly being targeted. Upon arrival government authorities and social researchers alike seemed to have paid little attention to the role of religion amongst Muslim migrants. Recently however, a greater significance has been attribute to Islam.[160] Some have come to see Islam as a danger that should be banned from society, or at the very least controlled to some extent.[161] Scholars Rath and his colleagues speak in this regard of "moral panics", and a feeling of fear, or even aversion, against Islam.[162] Opponents of Islamic schools have argued that these schools would hinder the integration of Muslims into Dutch society and thereby "diminish their chances of social deployment".[163] Thus, in recent times the presence of Muslims in Dutch society and the very existence of Islamic schools have been problematized in politics and the public debate, which has challenged the imagined notion of Dutch society as a multicultural ideal of tolerance and peaceful coexistence.[164] Some commenters have spoken in this regard of the "fall of Dutch multiculturalism."[165]

The idealized notion of tolerant Dutch multiculturalism was severely criticized by the leftist intellectual and publicist Paul Scheffer in his influential essay called *The Multicultural Drama*, published in the major Dutch newspaper *NRC Handelsblad* in 2000, which sparked a heated debate on integration, immigration and Dutch identity in the following years.[166] The essay was remarkable, because for the first time a leftist intellectual was a vocal critic of Dutch multiculturalism and the presence of large numbers of Muslim migrants in Dutch society, and the perceived challenges that it posed to the so-called dominant culture.[167] Scheffer, currently a professor of European Studies at Tilburg University and a prominent party ideologue of the Dutch social-democrat Labor Party (PvdA), claimed in his notorious essay that Islam plays an

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[160] Rath et al., p. 102.
[161] Ibid.
[162] Ibid.
[163] Shadid and Van Koningsveld, p. 84.
[164] See Maarten P. Vink, "Dutch 'Multiculturalism' Beyond the Pillarisation Myth", in *Political Studies Review*, Vol. 5, 2007, pp. 337-350.
[165] See Han Entzinger, "The Rise and Fall of Multiculturalism: The Case of the Netherlands", in *Towards Assimilation and Citizenship: Immigrants in Liberal Nation-States*, eds. Joppke and Morawska (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), pp. 59-86.
[166] For an excellent overview of this debate, see Entzinger, "Changing the Rules While the Game Is On: From Multiculturalism to Assimilation in the Netherlands", in *Migration, Citizenship, Ethnos*, eds. Bodeman and Yurdakul (New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 121-144.
[167] The Dutch left in the Netherlands was traditionally associated with sympathy towards cultural and ethnic diversity.

essential role in obstructing Muslim migrants from integrating into Dutch society. To support his argument, he points to the existence of ethnic and religious segregation in education and the formation of so-called "black and white schools". While citing the Dutch Arabist Jan Bruggeman, Scheffer poses that Islam is basically incapable of developing a "liberal tradition" that is in accordance with Dutch secular-liberal values, such as the separation of Church and state, basic human freedoms (including the freedom of religion and apostasy) or equal gender relations.[168] Later in the essay Scheffer blasts the "cosmopolitan illusion" of Dutch multiculturalism by observing that "under the surface of public life drifts a sea of stories about the clash of cultures". In other words, once again he points to the essential incompatibility of Dutch secular-liberal and Islamic values, as represented in Muslim migrant communities. What's more, he warns for an inevitable "clash" of these values, as a result of the neglect of the ruling elites towards the obvious downsides (in his opinion) of cultural diversity and multiculturalism.[169] Scheffer concludes his essay by posing that the "multicultural drama" represents the greatest threat to societal peace in Dutch society.[170]

While the latter statement admittedly sounds rather alarmist, it seems a sound representation of some of the most prevalent sentiments of the Dutch debate on Islam and the presence of Muslim migrants in Dutch society. Almost a decade into the debate on Dutch multiculturalism, in his later 2007 Dutch book *Het Land van Aankomst* (The Land of Arrival), Scheffer slightly nuanced his point of view after extensive debates and conversations with Muslim communities, but the work is still dominated by a general sentiment of discontent and unease about the presence of large groups of migrants that seem to conservatively hold on to values of a culture that is essentially alien to Dutch society, or so Scheffer would have it. [171] The following quotation taken

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[168] In this context Bruggeman mentions that modernist Islamic reform movements in Islam in essence "remained conservative" and that we cannot speak of any real or fundamental revisions of the "central doctrines of Islam, the Islamic law or the relationship between Islam and the state".

[169] Scheffer's remarks are reminiscent of one of the most famous proponents of the theory of the "clash of civilizations", political scientist Samuel P. Huntington. See his book, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

[170] Scheffer's essay (in Dutch) can be accessed through the website of Dutch newspaper NRC Handelsblad: http://retro.nrc.nl/W2/Lab/Multicultureel/scheffer.html (last accessed 4 June 2019).

[171] Paul Scheffer, *Het Land van Aankomst* (Amsterdam: De Bezige Bij, 2007). The book was translated into English in 2011 as *Immigrant Nations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

from the English translation of Scheffer's book, *Immigrant Nations* (2011), neatly captures the atmosphere of his take on the Dutch debate on migration: [172]

> If we retrace the routes taken by migrants back to their countries of origin, we discover an insecurity that has become our own. Immigrants from all over the world have changed the face of our cities. The original intentions, whatever they were, theirs and ours, ceased to matter a long time ago. The world has settled into our neighborhoods, and it's a confusing and shocking experience. Our markets, places of worship, schools, sports clubs - everything and everyone has been affected by the great migration that's under way and whose end is nowhere in sight.

Scheffer's essay symbolized a major switch in the Dutch debate on migration and multiculturalism. However, recent studies have showed that the early seeds of the current push-back against Muslims and the rise of anti-Muslim rhetoric started as early as the 1990s.[173] Most notably at the hands of rightist intellectual and long-time leader of the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) Frits Bolkestein (b. 1933), who for the first time severely critiqued Dutch multiculturalism and mass migration of Muslims to the Netherlands from the 1970s onwards.[174] Bolkestein sparked controversy in the Dutch debate on race and immigration by stating that de "values of Islam and the West are incompatible".[175] As a matter of fact, he went even further depicting Islamic values as inferior and antithetical to Western culture.[176] The tensions in the debate on Muslims in the Netherlands reached new heights with the emergence of the rightist-populist political leader Pim Fortuyn, who in 1997 published his Dutch book *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur* (Against the Islamization of the Our Culture) in which he not only argued that Islam was a backward culture, but also that it formed a threat to essential Dutch norms and values.[177] Since Pim Fortuyn (who was killed in 2002 by the extreme-leftist radical activist Volkert van der Graaf) critiques of Islam and Muslims have become a normalized constituent of Dutch politics. To date,

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[172] Paul Scheffer, *Immigrant Nations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011), p. 2.

[173] See Merijn Oudenampsen, *The Conservative Embrace of Progressive Values: On the Intellectual Origins of the Swing to the Right in Dutch Politics* (dissertation at Tilburg University, 2018). Oudenampsen describes and analyzes the broader framework of the rise of the 'New Right' in the Netherlands, of which anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant rhetoric is a part, although it has broader intellectual concerns as well, mostly related to neoliberal economics, neoconservative politics and national identity.

[174] Ibid., p. 9.

[175] Ibid., p. 38.

[176] Ibid., p. 147.

[177] Pim Fortuyn, *Tegen de islamisering van onze cultuur: Nederlandse identiteit als fundament* (Karakter Uitgevers B.V., 1997).

the Netherlands has come to know two explicitly anti-Islam political parties. The first is the Party for Freedom (PVV) under the political leadership of Islam-critic Geert Wilders, who has been dominating Dutch politics for the last decade. The second is the recently emerged Forum for Democracy (FvD), ruled by the flamboyant right-conservative Thierry Baudet, who is equally critical of Islam and migration, and who's party made several landslide victories in recent Dutch municipal and European Union elections.

2.4. Concluding remarks: Islamic Schools Embattled?

In the heat of this surge of anti-Muslim sentiment in the Netherlands, critics have increasingly turned to Islamic educational institutions as a site for contestation and opposition. This has gone as far as appeals for the abolishment of Article 23 from the Dutch constitution, the law that ensures freedom of religious education in the Netherlands and provides the legal foundation for Muslim communities to establish Islamic schools. In addition, political parties have repeatedly called for in-depth investigations into Islamic educational initiatives in the Netherlands and increased monitoring and securitization. One of the most prominent charges against Islamic schools in the Netherlands is that the norms and values of Islamic education are diametrically opposed to the Dutch values of liberal democracy, such as autonomy, freedom and individualism.[178] Supposedly, Islamic schools are a "seed-bed for fundamentalism" and provide an educational atmosphere that is adverse to integration into Dutch society.[179] On several occasions the limiting of founding Islamic schools has been discussed in the Dutch parliament under the assumption that they would enhance segregation and Muslim institutions (including mosques and schools) have become targets of arson and similar attacks.[180]

In the following chapter we will see how the Muslim community experiences and responds to these accusations and contestations. Do *they* actually believe the values of Islamic education are indeed diametrically opposed to the values of Dutch liberal

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[178] Bakker, p. 625.
[179] Ibid.
[180] Shadid and Van Koningsveld, pp. 86-87.

democracy, as is proposed by many of its critics? And if so, how do Muslim parents and teachers and school administrators at Islamic educational institutions negotiate the perceived tensions that arise as a result of this conflict of values? These questions are explored in the next chapter, which presents the results of my empirical research among Dutch Islamic schools in the Netherlands.

3. An Ethnography of Muslim Schools in the Netherlands: Negotiating Values in Times of Tensions

This chapter presents the results of twelve in-depth interviews I conducted with school directors, teachers and parents at four different Dutch Islamic primary schools in three cities in the Netherlands.[181] The data that resulted from this qualitative research I analyze here in conversation with the two preceding theoretical chapters that deal with the scholarly literature regarding Islamic education in the Netherlands and the way in which Muslim communities negotiate religious and national identities in a social context that is increasingly tense and polarized. I have tried to logically structure the data along the lines of recurring themes and patterns of argumentation that formed a common thread throughout the long conversations I had with the above-mentioned informants in Dutch Muslim schools.[182]

In the analysis I present here I tried to interweave the comments of all informants — that is, directors, teachers, as well as parents from all four schools — regarding a specific topic into one unified narrative, so as to throw light upon these complex issues and how Muslims deal with them from as many different angles and levels I could possible manage to identify.[183] The themes I have identified all revolve around the same question — which is ultimately the guiding question of this MA thesis — namely how do Muslims who play a role in Dutch Islamic education (be they director, teacher

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[181] For purposes of protecting the identities of the informants their names have been fully anonymized, as is the required practice in qualitative social science studies, see footnote 80. A short profile of each of the interviewees can be found in Appendix II at the end of this thesis (page 87).

[182] The organization and analysis of data collected from qualitative research is notoriously difficult and complex. For this master's thesis I ended up with approximately twelve hours of audio material and more then 200 written pages of transcribed interviews. I was however surprised by the unanimity of some of the comments and argumentation of my informants regarding the process of negotiation. This helped me to go from the proverbial "mass of data" to what I hope has become a coherent storyline that also does justice to the diversity of the lived experience of Muslim communities involved in Islamic education in the Netherlands. For some of the complexities of this analytical process, see O'Reilly, pp. 175-203.

[183] This strategy involved categorizing and conceptualizing the data in such a way as to arrive at the "bigger picture" or the central story of the research, which in my case involved the question of the process of negotiation. For more on this research strategy, see Hennink et al., pp. 245-248.

or parent) negotiate Islamic religious values in a national context that is culturally dominated by secular liberal values, such as is the case in the Netherlands. Hence the themes are strongly interrelated and sometimes overlapping. I have however tried to avoid repetitiveness, while not neglecting the strong interconnections between these various themes.

The themes that organize this chapter are: (1) the impact of current discourses on Islam and Muslims in Dutch society and politics; (2) negotiating Islamic values in Dutch society and culture; (3) generational differences in dealing with the process of negotiation; and (4) the various ways in which Islamic values are implemented in Islamic schools (especially in light of intra-religious diversity and dealing with non-Muslims in Islamic schools).

3.1 Three Overlapping Spheres That Influence the Process of Negotiation

Before moving on to the analysis of the data from the interviews, it might be helpful to mention something about which spheres or domains of influence seem to impact the process of negotiation.[184] Based on my observations I was able to differentiate three domains that influence the process of negotiation, namely: (1) politics and society, (2) personal belief, and (3) the school organization.

As for the first domain, when dealing with human beings we all have our own particular personal histories, upbringing, beliefs, ideas and world views (*weltanschauung*) that condition how we think about the world.[185] We never stand objectively in the world but always interpret the world around us through the lenses of

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[184] This approach to analyzing data is based on what Hennink et al. call "social domains", which may involve the various "overarching realms, spheres, arena's or contexts" and how they influence certain social processes. Identifying social domains can help us better understand how different aspects of the social world affect and influence the data and how these relate to one another. For more on social domains see Hennink et al., pp. 256-258.
[185] See Hendrik M. Vroom, *A Spectrum of Worldviews: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Religion in a Pluralistic World* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2006).

our particular world views.[186] This also is the case with regards to the informants of this study (i.e. Muslim parents, teachers and school directors). Muslim parents bring their personal experiences and beliefs about religious values and Islamic upbringing to the table. Muslim teachers and school directors that are involved in Islamic schools do as well. This not only includes the ways in which my informants think about the Islamic faith and how it should ideally be practiced or implemented in their lives or in Islamic schools, but also includes their broader world view and personal background stories (such as their migrant background and the fact that they grew up in a different cultural setting than a secular liberal society such as in the Netherlands).[187] Thus, the particular world views and personal beliefs of my informants naturally also impact the process of negotiating religious and national values. The second domain relates to what happens outside of the school in society and politics. It includes such things as the public debates on Islam and Muslims, relevant government policies that target the Muslim community, negative images about Islam from the media, government monitoring and surveillance of Islamic schools and so on and so forth. All of these societal factors play a direct (or indirect) role on the process of negotiation. As for the third and final domain, the school organization itself has its own dynamic that influences the negotiation process. These include school regulations, the educational curriculum, the intra-religious diversity of the Muslim parent and student population, the presence of non-Muslim teachers in the Islamic school, the role of Islamic instruction in the school's educational program, and so forth.

These three domains overlap and constantly inform one another, which makes the process of negotiation complex, complicated, multi-layered and very dynamic and changeable. The three domains of influence should not be taken as strictly separated.

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[186] See Vroom, p. 2. Vroom also mentioned that "our knowledge is unavoidably determined by our culture and worldview. Each judgement we make has a background in our culture and religion", p. 8.

[187] A world view here I interpret not as merely one's religious beliefs, but one's beliefs about life and the world in general. On a similar note, philosopher of religion H.M. Vroom defines a world view as follows: "a world view contains the ideals for life and the negative judgements on behavior and aims and so all norms and values a person holds. In all of this a vision of life is seen: how life is, how it is good, how it is bad. A view of life includes insights of being human, on one's own life and on living in community with others, insights on the world and nature, and insights on the great connection of all things. A world view is the sum of all a person's insights", p. 10.

In fact, they are fluid and overlap to some extent. The three overlapping spheres of influence have been visualized in the following illustration:

Three overlapping spheres of influence
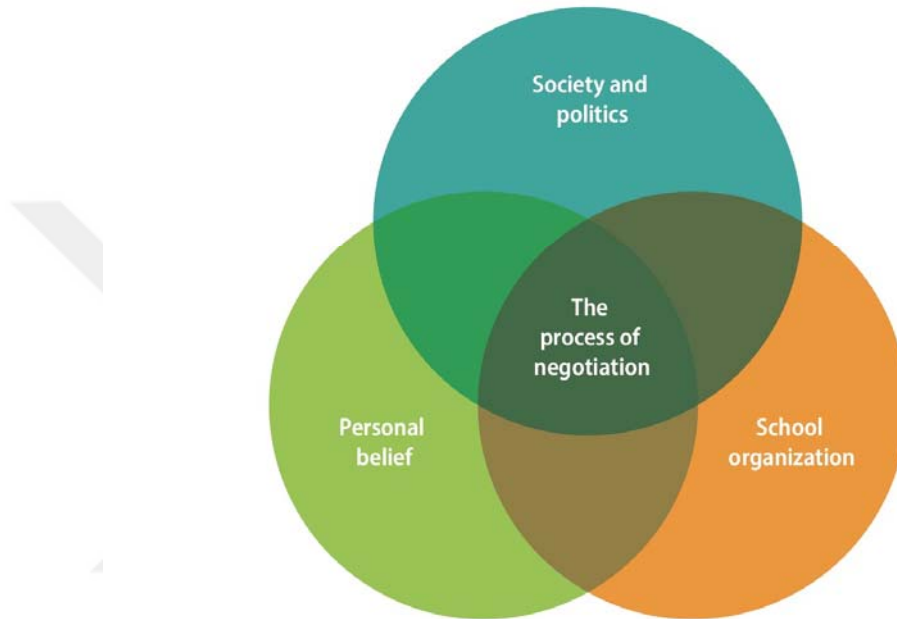
3.2. Giving a Voice to Muslims: Interviews with Parents, Teachers and Directors at Dutch Muslim Schools

Before delving into the interviews, I recommend the reader to first read the short biographical sketches of my informants to be found at in the appendix at the end of this thesis. A relatively large amount of time during the interviews was spend on deciphering the very personal stories of these people and how and why they ended up in the field of Islamic education. Reading these biographical profiles and sketches is vital to understanding the stories these people have to tell. In this section I will only

mention the (fictional) name and role of my informants. Additional background information can be found in the earlier mentioned appendix, which is organized in alphabetical order.[188]

3.2.1 Current Discourses on Islam and Muslims in Dutch Society and Politics

Both the scholarly literature (as presented in the first two chapters) and my personal observations during interviews led me to the conclusion that politics and societal pressures are a major influence on the way Muslims negotiate religious and national values in Dutch Islamic schools. As became clear during many of the interviews, Muslim schools struggle under government pressure and the public image of Islam. There has been a constant stream of negative reports about Islam in the Netherlands and the Inspectorate of Education (a government institution) is constantly pressuring Islamic schools with monitoring reports and surveillance. Many incidents have been reported of acts of hatred and xenophobia against Islamic schools and Islamic institutions in general and there is a steep increase in antagonism and opposition against the presence of Muslim migrants in the Dutch public opinion.[189] The change in government policies towards Muslim communities also signify far-reaching government interventions into Islamic schools, such as the 2004 ruling by the Dutch Ministry of Education that Islamic schools now have to actively and explicitly explain "how they plan to adhere to Dutch norms and values".[190] These kinds of changes in government policy that negatively impact the Dutch Muslim community has led educational researchers Merry and Driessen to conclude that this will "most certainly lead to an abrupt halt in the founding of new Islamic schools".[191] Hence, it is obvious that the way Muslims try to negotiate religious and national values in this societal context is tremendously influenced by government policies, negative media reports and the heated debate on Muslims in the public discourse.

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[188] See Appendix II on page 87.
[189] Michael S. Merry and Geert Driessen, "Islamic schools in three western countries: policy and procedure", in *Comparative Education*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 2005, p. 415.
[190] Ibid., p. 423.
[191] Ibid.

How these current discourses about Islam and Muslims in Dutch society and politics have impacted Dutch Muslims also became clear during my interviews at Islamic schools. This topic, in fact, became a main talking point throughout our conversations. At one point a school director named Betul questioned the intentions of the Inspectorate of Education (after a four-year investigation) if this really was about educational quality, or if the government was simply "harassing" Muslim schools. Betul, who at one point in her career was asked to become the director at the Islamic school she taught at, mentions:

> After a lot of thought […] I decided to work as a director [of a Muslim primary school]. Immediately I became involved in a trajectory of the Inspectorate [of Education]. Right away I had to work hard and, alhamdulillah [praise be to God], before the holidays we were assessed as "satisfactory". […] Now we are a bit more at ease. Four years long a lot has been demanded of us. It was not easy. We often also had moments that we thought like "okay, is this simply harassing an Islamic primary school?" […] So, the past four years we have also gone through a lot. […] Also, during our trajectory with the Inspectorate, the [local newspaper] only projected a negative image of us for four years, including nice texts [laughs sarcastically] about myself. These things also touch you personally, especially because we achieved the positive result of "satisfactory". Even the parents [of the school] reached out at the media at one point. They asked [the local newspaper] to write something nice about us. Until today this has not happened. Another [regular public] school also achieved to improve the status of being "weak" to "satisfactory". They were indeed mentioned in [the local newspaper]. So now the parents also start wondering "what is this all about?". These are the types of things we have to deal with.

Betul also mentioned that a significant part of her job as a director involves the image the school has for the outside world and which message she sends out to society. She mentioned how many people have certain prejudices about Islamic schools (and these prejudices were mentioned by other informants as well), such as that people often think an Islamic school is a "Qur'an school" which primarily focusses on religious instruction, were everything is taught in Arabic and that the school is very religiously strict and close-minded. Many people seem unaware that the school does not differ at all from Dutch regular schools in terms of its basic educational curriculum, that it teaches the same subjects (such as language and mathematics) and that the teaching language is exclusively Dutch. Betul keenly observed this and decided to act upon it:

> When I started here [as a director] I said that our doors will be open and that everyone is welcome to come in. They may see what Islamic education is and that there are no big differences with regular or Christian primary education. We have those three hours or so religious lessons and we pray at

the school, this perhaps is somewhat different, but except from that Islamic education is not a whole lot different than other schools. Children here have the freedom to wear a headscarf, this also might be different, but outside of that the lessons are the same.

To combat the school's negative image Betul also started cooperating with a vast amount of foundations and civil society organizations in the city. In addition, she developed many social projects to make the school and the children more visible for the local Dutch community. Despite many proactive initiatives to increase good will in society the school still received a lot of negative pushback:

> Through cooperation and projects with other organizations in the city we do try to make our voice heard more and more. […] Now at least they know about us. But we do encounter adversity. In November, for example, we held a benefit event [to collect money for a children's playing ground]. We contacted the media […] and absolutely no one responded. I observe that we try to let ourselves be known but that [the city] is not open to this. […] Last year *Pegida* [an ultra-right anti-Muslim movement] demonstrated in front of the school, and then everyone [of the media] came. Then finally the media was interested. […] So, then I think, alright, these are not just one or two negative things you experience from your social environment. So it does bother me. Okay, we try to do or best. I try to prepare my pupils for society. They also deserve to be mentioned nicely in the newspaper sometimes. These are some of the things I can become angry about.

Nadia, assistant director at the same school as Betul, thinks the negative discussions in society about Islamic schools are not a recent phenomenon and that they were controversial from the very beginning, when the first schools were established in the late 1980s. Not all of the discussions, however, are intentionally negative, she argues:

> I think there always has been some kind of curiosity [about Islamic schools]. That people wonder what is going on inside them. I even have had people coming up to me to ask what happens in Islamic schools, if lessons are taught in Arabic and what is taught exactly. I think Dutch people are not always aware that we simply provide regular education here in arithmetic, language and spelling, and that we teach all of those in the Dutch native language [not in Arabic], because we don't speak any other languages [in school]. Yes, we call Islamic schools as such, because Islam is a part of them, Islamic lessons are taught, as are Islamic values and norms. But those norms and values that we call "Islamic" and many Dutch values and norms are in fact the same. […] Islamic schools only call themselves as such because of the Islamic norms and values they promote [and Islamic practices, such as prayers and religious instruction]. In principle non-Islamic children could apply for an Islamic school. They would receive regular education as all other pupils, except there would have to be a special rule that they then don't have to pray.

The examples of Betul and Nadia show that what happens in society at large and in the local community of the school is of great significance. But while a lot of negative imagery and pressure can influence the school negatively, there are also people who show genuine interest but are simply oblivious as to what Islamic schools are all about. What is further remarkable in Nadia's quotation, as we will see recurring in interviews with other informants as well, is that she does not seem to perceive Islamic and national values as primarily conflictual.

The current negative discourse about Islam in Dutch politics and society also impacts Muslim parents who have children that attend Islamic schools. They sometimes feel a sense of regret and helplessness in light of the current situation. Parent Khadija for example mentions in this regard:

> Lately we hear a lot of negative stories, and I truly regret that. It is not necessary, really. Everyone lives their own live. […] We are not bothering anyone. We also simply do the standard [educational curriculum] in the school. We participate in society, everything a "normal" person also does actually. That's why I think all this fuss about Islamic schools is unnecessary. But what can we do about it? Nothing really. We simply let it wash over us, and simply pray that it will be alright. That's the only thing we can do.

Mehmet, who is a regional educational manager of several Islamic schools and has an extensive background in the history of Islamic schools in the Netherlands, seconds Nadia's intuition that Muslim school were controversial from their first establishment in the late 1980s:

> This is the period between 1990 and 2000. It was a very tumultuous time, because a lot of resistance developed against the increase of Islamic schools. It is true that a lot of things went wrong, because the first directors of the Islamic schools were basically mosque directors, they never had any experience whatsoever with education. The educational level was not optimal. […] They tried to run the schools as if they were mosques. So a lot of things went wrong in those days, and the media eagerly made use of this and published large headings in the newspapers; […] "mismanagement", "financial fraud", "irresponsible choices"… […] However the resistance was not per se based on that, it was based on the undesirability [of Islamic schools]. Because we had to "prove" why [Islamic schools] would be desirable and why we should have our own schools. Well, we had our own reasons, partly because of the aspect of identity and sensitivity towards Islamic peculiarities and partly because of educational quality. There was no room for this at public schools. No room for our cultural and religious habits or principles. […] Children with migrant backgrounds were also send to lower education and jobs and were treated with prejudice. […] So when

we learned about the possibility of establishing an Islamic school, we jumped at the opportunity. It was a great relief for us. We established these schools with the ideal of bringing more educational opportunities to Muslim children and more room for our Islamic identity. […] At first, we received tremendous resistance. Under article 23 of the Dutch constitution all [religious] denominations have a right to establish schools. […] The Netherlands already has Christian and Jewish schools, some of them much stricter than our Islamic schools. There were no critical questions about these schools. But when it came to Islamic schools there were huge problems. In that way a certain resistance build up in society and politics. In our discussions we constantly had to overcome these. Eventually we did win, and they could not stop the establishment of Islamic schools, because it's a constitutional right. But then, however, they found other ways of resistance, such as focusing on educational quality and extensive monitoring and surveillance from the Inspectorate of Education. […] It became an issue of national security and the focus moved to radicalization and integration.

Religious instructor Zahid also voices some concerns regarding the current anti-Islamic discourse in the Netherlands:

Especially from [Dutch] politics there are a lot of anti-Islam expressions. Muslims sometimes fear that the [Islamic] school will end up being closed. This would mean the Muslims would be limited to the mosque [for the religious education of their children]. But the Islamic faith should also be experienced outside of the mosque, and not only in the mosque.

School director Eyyub has a lot of hands-on experience with anti-Islamic tendencies in local politics, being director of an Islamic school that is situated in a large super-diverse Dutch city which contains one the largest Muslim minorities of the Netherlands. Societal tension and friction in this city have increased over the past decade, since the rise of a new anti-immigration discourse. He has also experienced direct resistance against his Islamic school from local Dutch politicians. He reflected upon some of these experiences:

I think a lot of people in politics, who speak on Islamic schools, have never seen an Islamic school from the inside. […] Some think we only read the Qur'an here, day and night, and sit on the ground. […] I think some of them simply want to win over votes. They think that if they say something about Islam, for example that it is a "vile" and "malicious" faith, they will win lots of votes. […] But they never consider to actually visit an Islamic school. […] There was a [local Dutch politician] who is against Islamic education and is now director of a project in the south of the city. In this role he was obliged to visit the city's schools. He also visited us once. During the visit he looked around and remarked: "Wow, this really *is* a school". Well, what do you think it is?! People who do not know Islam also never visit a mosque or an [Islamic] school. They form an image for themselves. The best solution for them is to get in touch with the people responsible for these schools.

Teacher Beyza, who works at the same school as Eyyub, mentions in this regard:

> There is a lot of social pressure on people of migrant backgrounds. […] You have to basically proof yourself towards people who continually look down upon you. […]. [During my studies] I also did internships at other schools, public and Christian schools. These were difficult internships, because I had to proof myself all the time. […] There is a lot of resistance [against Muslim migrants and Islamic schools]. […] The Dutch government forces us to spend a lot of time and activities on citizenship. And we should do so, I'm okay with that. But Islamic education is put under a magnifying glass [more so than, let's say, conservative Christian schools]. We feel we are constantly under pressure. This is felt by the school leadership and the management board, but it also reflects upon the teachers and staff. […] We can never make any mistakes. We have to do everything perfect in terms of citizenship.

Beyza alludes in this quotation to the fact that the Dutch government is increasingly intervening in Islamic schools and how they should spend time on teaching about Dutch citizenship and secular liberal values, such as gender equality and freedom of sexual orientation. Muslims involved in Islamic education seem to not mind extra attention to these questions in principle but do have a hard time accepting the extensive pressure the Dutch government puts on them.

When confronted with examples of values that do seem to oppose basic Islamic principles, such as the openness towards homosexuality, and how to deal with this tension, assistant school director Nadia mentions:

> Children [at this age] are really not concerned with these issues. Children are more concerned with their own development and those things that preoccupy them in their environment. They are not really aware of what adults see as "problems". And they should not have to worry about these things. Of course, the government has a certain role in these questions. And we do try to make certain themes [such as homosexuality] a topic of open discussion, for example by developing teaching material and pamphlets. But more than that should not be necessary in primary education. All of the extra pressure [by government and media] is a bit too much. Ultimately it will only have a reverse effect.

Muslim parent Khadija voiced a similar concern about educating contentious issues at such a young age, simply because the government wants it, while in fact schools should be focusing on other important aspects of the child's education:

> I would not burden a child of four years old with a difficult and controversial issue such as homosexuality. I think this is too early. There is a certain age at which you can sit down with your child and explain these things in your own way. Obviously, a child hears and sees everything. But as a parent I'd

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> rather take matters into my own hands and explain it in a way I see fit. […]
> I do not mind if the child is educated about these things when it is older and
> attending secondary school, but for primary school I think there should be
> some kind of limit.

Muslim parent Bushra also commented on this issue of how Dutch culture deals with homosexuality. Bushra, being a Muslim convert who understands Dutch culture well, argues that it would be misplaced to think Dutch culture is so free-thinking about homosexuality. She believes many parents, be they Muslim or non-Muslim would (at least initially) find it difficult if one of their children would come home with a partner of the same gender. That is to say, while there is so much focus from the Dutch government towards Islamic schools to teach liberal ideas about homosexuality and same-sex marriages, the Dutch people themselves seem to be a lot more culturally conservative than is usually assumed. That being said, Bushra does not have a problem that these more controversial issues are discussed in school, in fact it is important to discuss them. She, being a Dutch native, was raised in a rather open-minded culture and thus has no problem discussing difficult issues. But in migrant communities this often is not yet the case. So, addressing certain controversial issues in the lessons at school and inviting parents to the school to talk about them might be a good way to establish an open dialogue. Also, she says, there is a lot of misinformation out there about sexual education. She would rather have trustworthy and scientifically-based information available at the school. However, she does mind the extensive pressure from the government and society to pay attention to these kinds of contentious subjects:

> I do see a change has occurred in the last ten years, which also impact my
> family. [An issue such as homosexuality] is much more discussed and much
> more visible. […] I also think Islamic schools pay much more attention now
> to these topics. [Children] also watch youth television programs [at school].
> At some point we had something called "Purple Friday", which is sort of a
> "coming out" day for homosexuals. These kinds of things the government
> is trying to push on us. Should we be happy about that? I'm not sure about
> this enforcement. I think it is very good that certain topics are open to
> discussion and that our children learn how to deal with that, but I think it
> goes too far to enforce it and to make a special day for it.

Ibrahim, another Muslim parent, seems to have an accommodating view of the different ways people live in the Netherlands, as long as Muslims themselves can also live in a way they see fit:

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> In our faith everyone has his own choice and his own point of view. Islam is our religion and it says we should not force other people to become something or choose something. These are your own choices and you pay for your own choices. We have nothing to say really. You are not going to go the people and check everything they are doing or dictate what they should do. You have to start with yourself. You can also say something is not all right, but you should never judge. Only Allah can judge. You can give advice, but that's all.

Ibrahim also does not mind that these types of topics are discussed in the school. In fact, it might be better to discuss them in an Islamic environment that is safe and congruent with Islamic principles and sensitivities:

> This is normal [in this country]. Later on [these kids] will go to secondary school. I'd rather have that they hear about it here [at the Islamic primary school]. They can teach it as some kind of sexual education. […] I'm happy with it, because it is not a problem at all to have a conversation about it. They hear about it on television anyway. So why not make it a topic of discussion [at the school]? At least then you have done your duty.

School director Eyyub agrees that the Muslim community needs to realize that some things that might be unusual in Islam are part and parcel of Dutch society, such as homosexuality, but he also believes Muslims should have the right and freedom to take a different stance in accordance with the religious principles of their Islamic faith:

> We try to make clear to our children in what kind of society they live. In the future, they might have a teacher that is homosexual. […] If that is the case, they should respect them as a human being, and that he has been created by Allah. […] The prophet teaches us that all of Allah's creation, be they human beings, plants or animals, should be respected. His [or her] lifestyle is personal. This is even mentioned in [verses of the Qur'an]; "For you your faith and for my mine". And this is what [the children] also learn. They should greet that person as well, as you greet everyone. You should smile to that person as well, as you smile to everyone. But in our faith [homosexuality] is not allowed. Full stop. But that doesn't mean that because of that I'm allowed to despise or look down upon people. Respect is central [in this school]. […] We make our children conscious about in what kind of society they live. But in [religious instruction] we also clearly explain what Islam's position is on homosexuality, that we believe it is not allowed.

3.2.2. Negotiating Islamic Values in Dutch Society and Culture

From the literature review in the earlier chapters it may now be clear how Islam is by-and-large projected as being antithetical to Western norms and values.[192] When studying how Muslims actually deal with the question of negotiating values, what first of all stands out is the great diversity with which Muslims try to solve these issues. As opposed to the rather black-and-white representations of Islam as being antithetical to Western liberal secular and democratic values, we see a starkly different picture arising. One fact, however, that does seem to unify my informant's ideas on this topic is that Islam is *not* antithetical to the values and norms that are upheld in a secular-liberal democratic society such as the Netherlands (even if they differ in the exact ways of negotiating and coming to terms with Islamic and Dutch values).

Some of the informants seem to have a more no-nonsense approach to the matter. When asked about how to deal with critiques from Dutch politics and the assumption that Islamic and Dutch values would be diametrically opposed, assistant school director Nadia for example says:

> I really think that is complete nonsense. Norms and values are good in and of themselves, whether they come from the Islamic faith or from Dutch society and culture. It's about being a decent and good human being. I think there are more similarities than [differences]. I really do not understand where [the politicians] get the idea that [these values] would be diametrically opposed.

Rather than a perceived "clash of values", Nadia Argues, conflicts have more to do with mutual misunderstanding. She maintains that a lot of the contentious issues or perceived "conflicts" are mostly things that are "adult's concerns", while children do not really differentiate between people from different cultures when they play with other children, either Muslim or non-Muslim:

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[192] For example, see Geert Driessen and Michael S. Merry, "Islamic Schools in the Netherlands: Expansion or Marginalization?", in *Interchange*, Vol. 37, No. 3, 2006, p. 206 and Jocelyne Cesari, *Why the West Fears Islam: An Exploration of Muslims in Liberal Democracies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 1-20.

> [Children] learn [about cultural differences] from adults. Half of the time they do not even fully understand what [the adults] are saying. […] If there are things that really preoccupy children, they will definitely mention it themselves. Children simply play. They do not care [what the cultural background is of their playmates]. My children also have Dutch playmates. Never does the issue of being or not being a Muslim come up. […] In this school we try to prepare [children] to be their selves and that they are free to choose to be who they want to be.

School director Eyyub similarly thinks there is no apparent conflict between Islamic and Dutch cultural or religious values:

> I do not think Dutch norms and values are really antithetical to Islamic norms and values. If you look at pure Christianity, is there such a big difference with Islam? If it's about tolerance, about being able to show patience, dealing with your neighbors… […] The basic [aspects of religion] are simply the same. […] Although the interpretations of people might be different.

On a very similar note school teacher Rashid pointed during the interview to the universality of Islamic values, saying that "Islamic values at the same time are universal values". In other words, Islamic values, by-and-large, are universal in nature and thus basically the same fundamental values we encounter in all cultures and religions. School teacher Beyza remarks in this regard:

> What I do feel is that Western values are very individualistic. […] But *if* there are any incompatible values, I do not believe this should lead to us not being able to live together in society. In fact, differences can be beautiful and valuable. […] It should not be a hindrance to live together. In addition, when you look from a purely Islamic perspective, a lot of values [be they Islamic or Western] do not have to be conflicting or adverse to each other.

Muslim parent Bushra teaches her children that the Netherlands is a religiously and culturally plural society and that to be able to co-exist there should be a certain mutual respect:

> In the upbringing of my children I teach them that there are different religions and that we should respect them. And that there are even people who have no religion at all and that we also should socialize with them in a normal way. […] I was very pleased to see my daughter of 22 saying that all are equally human beings and that we should have respect for all of them, be they Jewish or Christian people. Ultimately, they are all People of the Book [*ahl al-kitab*]. Islam teaches us to deal respectfully with other people and to do good and act justly. […] In terms of values there is more overlap than difference.

Religious teacher Zahid mentions about Islamic and Dutch national values and how to combine them:

> Western and Islamic values are part of a certain culture. These two cultures do not have to be mutually exclusive; they can go together. […] When confronted with certain aspects of Dutch culture, such as certain cultural or religious celebrations, it is not about it being prohibited or allowed [*haram* or *halal*] Rather, it's about if it is fitting or not to be a part of it. [At this school], for example, we do not celebrate certain Dutch festivities. […] I try to teach them Islamic values and their importance as a counterbalance, and do not focus on prohibitions. […] We try to have a positive approach [towards the children].

Regional educational manager Mehmet also grappled with the question on how to negotiate values in his extensive career in Islamic education. After long deliberation, he has come to the following conclusions:

> There is not an actual clash [of values]. […] We [as an organization] have shown that there does not need to be a clash. Because the Dutch constitution offers enough opportunities to be yourself and to give shape to your religion as you see fit. Only, of course you should not look for excesses and boundaries, and you should not see it as a limitation. […] Of course, you should be able to negotiate a bit, and not be too strict with your boundaries. Sometimes you need to be able to compromise. […] As a school you're of course dealing with the [Dutch] constitution. But as Islamic schools you are also dealing with Islamic law, so you are confronted with the problem of two types of law. […] There will always be a marginal group who is in conflict with the Dutch legislation. Sometimes this comes under the category of radicalization, people who do not *want* to integrate, despite all of the efforts and opportunities. Who simply cannot do it because of their ideology. […] But this [marginal group] should not be associated with […] the Muslim community as a whole, and unfortunately this does happen, both by media and politics. […] As for our children at Islamic schools, they often live between two different world views and [the children] have to play a dual role. […] In that way the child experiences a crisis of identity. […] We want to help the children overcome this crisis of identity. […] A child had to learn, time and again, to switch between different identities. […] Over the years we realized our children were dealing with major problems and the Islamic school can help, at least slightly, to overcome this crisis of identity. But we need a certain amount of trust from [the parents]. We want to be a natural extension of the home. But [parents] should not judge us according to what we do wrong, but according to what we do right. […] When establishing an Islamic school do not expect that everything all of the sudden is a 100% Islamic. At this moment [before any Islamic school was established] you have nothing. You should make use of those [Islamic] schools you *do* have available. […] That's already a win situation. Parents who said I'm already grateful for this [even if it is not yet perfect], and the rest will follow later God-willing [inshallah], these are the parents we continued with.

While some participants of the study seem the have a more straightforward approach to the problem, many of them also struggle to find their way. School director Aliyah has a though time dealing with accusations about Islamic values being opposed to Dutch national norms and values. She also thinks its takes focus away from the school and the children, and more broadly the things education should be focusing on. Hence, she tends to shy away from public discussions:

> For as long as I can remember Islamic schools have been a topic of discussion in [Dutch] politics. […] Some things I purposefully keep at a distance. I just try to do my work. But there is a lot of talk. [Concerning a perceived "clash of values"], I would like to know which values they're aiming at exactly. Only then we could compare them and see if and how they differ. I really do not understand why they come up with these things. To be honest, these are not really things I try to pay attention to. There is so much negativity in the world. If I'm going to start and pay attention to all of these things, I'll end up being depressed.

Case Study: The Debate Battle of 2017

As a means of comparison, I have presented the same case study to all of my informants. It concerns an event that sparked great controversy in media and politics concerning the participation of Muslims in Dutch society. The affair, however, was not a single occurrence that happened in isolation. As a matter of fact, many comparable contested cases have recurred over the past two decades (especially in the context of post-9/11 debates on Muslim migration, multiculturalism and integration into Dutch society) and have become media headlines and talking points for political and public debate. This case is exemplary for the types of contestations Muslims have to negotiate on a fairly regular basis in Dutch society, and in particular in the sphere of Islamic schools.

This particular case concerns the organization of a "debate battle" in 2017 between various Dutch schools, including (at least one) Muslim school. The case sparked controversy because the Muslim students participated in the debate but opted to not attend other parts of the program that were deemed against Islamic religious values,

particularly a part that included a dance and music performances.[193] The case is a perfect example of a contested issue in which Islamic and national values seem to be in conflict and how Muslims deal with such frictions and tensions.

Reactions to the affair by the Dutch public and politicians were divided into two main camps. One camp argued that music and dance are part and parcel of Dutch culture and not participating would be a sign of segregation, close-mindedness and anti-integrationism on behalf of the Muslim school leadership. The other camp (among whom the organizers of the event itself) argued, on a contrary, that the Muslim school's participation precisely indicated an act of integration, because the Muslim pupils did participate, albeit on their own terms and accordance with what they perceived to be the values of their Islamic faith.

The informants I interviewed responded in a variety of ways when confronted with this case study, which shows the great diversity with which individual members of the Dutch Muslim community negotiate such contested issues. The following presentation of diverse reactions thus shows a complex picture of negotiating values, which flies in the face of all-too-simplistic dichotomies such as "liberal-conservative" and "open-closed" that we have observed in the works of for example Driessen and Beemsterboer.[194] In fact, there are a lot of grey areas.

School director Betul compares the case study with other Dutch national feasts and the problems and challenges she encounters there, such as a feast that is called "The King's Games", which is a day for the youth that involves a lot of sports-related games in honor of the Dutch royal family. An issue of discussion in the educational board was if certain aspects of the national celebration went against Islamic principles (according to some more stricter interpretations), such as dancing and using special make up. At

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[193] A newspaper article by journalist Michiel Couzy about the event called "Leerlingen islamitische school verlaten zaal bij dansoptreden" (Students of Islamic school leave the hall at dance performance) was published in the Dutch newspaper *Het Parool* on 15 April 2017, which can be accessed here: https://www.parool.nl/nieuws/leerlingen-islamitische-school-verlaten-zaal-bij-dansoptreden~b89135ab/ (last visited 4 June 2019).

[194] See Michael S. Merry and Geert Driessen, "Islamic schools in three western countries: policy and procedure", in *Comparative Education*, Vol. 41, No. 4, 2005, pp. 417-418; and Marietje Beemsterboer, *Islamitisch basisonderwijs in Nederland* (Almere: Parthenon, 2018), p. 153.

one point they agreed to attend part of the festivities (such as the traditional breakfast) but to not participate in more contentious issues, such as dance. Events like this, however, are an instigator of yearly recurring discussions among school leadership, teachers and parents. In this context Betul also shares her personal struggles in balancing different religious and national values:

> The year after this agreement we decided to skip the festivities of the whole first part of the day and only participate in the sports-related activities, because otherwise it also is confusing and disappointing for the children [if they abstain from certain activities and are only allowed to watch]. It is difficult, to be honest, because parents also have their own ideas. They send their children to an Islamic primary school with certain ideas in mind and then [I believe] you should also listen to the parents. From my own perspective I find this issue rather difficult because you are also dealing with a society in which you participate. [So the question arises] of how far you are willing to go along in things that are asked of you [from society] and the norms and values that might go against your own faith. The problem is that everyone does it in his [or her] own way, and some are stricter in [these matters] than others.

Assistant school director Nadia, while working at the same school as Betul, has a fairly different approach to the matter (which shows how even within school management teams there can be a lot of diversity and hence a lot of internal debate). Commenting on the case study of the 2017 Debate Battle she says:

> What people do or don't do; in the end the freedom of religion is held in very high regard. […] I think the discussion should be more about this. Do we or don't we all stand firmly behind the freedom of religion here in the Netherlands? […] Because if people make an issue out of a school not participating in certain activities, and [the school's] reasons behind [not participating] are religious, then people should question themselves. A choice with regards to the freedom of religion is not something to be taken lightly. […] The school was right in making her own choices to only partly participate, and to not participate in that part [of the event] that they do not find justifiably from an Islamic perspective. I'm already happy that they participated *at all*.

School director Aliyah agrees that Muslims should have the freedom of choice to participate or not participate in events according to the religious principles of their faith:

> I do believe we are living in the Netherlands, so we should also contribute to this society. I also think we are obliged to do so, from an Islamic perspective. […] But if something clashes with certain religious parameters, then you should be allowed to make a personal choice. After all, is [freedom of choice] not also a norm here in the Netherlands, right? You are allowed

to make your own choices. If someone wants to be a homosexual, you are free to do so. We [as Muslims] are also not allowed, in that case, to tell [people] what to do. Well, if I do not want to dance you can also not oblige me to dance. We should also be free-minded in this case.

Muslim parent and Dutch convert to Islam, Sophie, builds upon her own Christian upbringing and experience with a religiously strict Christian Calvinist culture. She compares how Islamic schools deal with cases such as the 2017 Debate Battle with how Christian conservative schools would deal in a similar situation:

I live in a village with a Dutch reformed primary school. I would have thought it would be great if they would participate, but they would also withdraw themselves. I rest my case. [Schools] may participate in those parts they find important, but if there are parts that do not fit you, you are not obliged to be present. […] In this case the event is about a debate battle, and not about a dance performance. This was more a side issue and you can choose not to participate. If you are served a plate of drinks with glasses of wine and orange juice, you are free to make a personal choice. […] I think it would be great if our [Islamic] schools participated in as many events as possible. By all means, *do* participate. But you may also do it in your own way.

Regional educational manager Mehmet mentions he would have dealt differently with the case study in comparison with the school in question, showing once more how Muslims deal differently with these issues:

I would have made the choice differently. If you are indeed this sensitive, I would have really carefully deliberated if I would participate [at all] or not. I would not have participated, only to leave the event halfway through. I think that is not-done and I think it's wrong. Because then you leave a totally different image. This is not something you can correct later on. That is not a form of integration, but indeed a form of segregation, it's a form of destructive integration. [As if you're saying]: "I integrate to a certain level, and then I let you let go." This is something you should have thought of beforehand. […] [In terms of Islamic values and principles] I think there is a lot of room for negotiation in the Netherlands.

School director Eyyub has a less pragmatic and more principled approach in this regard:

If these kinds of events [such as the 2017 Debate Battle] are organized and the school decided that certain aspects are not in line with our identity, this should be accepted. This is simply called respect. As I had respect when I was working at a non-Islamic school [in the past]. When during celebrations colleagues drank alcohol, I drank orange juice. Is there a written law that says I should attend a dance performance [as part of the event]? But that doesn't mean I don't respect it. Is this something you enjoy? Fine with me. But I don't. I will then withdraw. Simple as that.

With the examples of Mehmet and Eyyub here, again we see the immense diversity in contrasting approaches in the process of negotiation. This is not a matter of black-and-white. Stances regarding controversial matters in light of Islamic values are heavily discussed and negotiated, both amongst individual Muslims, as well as on the broader level of the school organization (or even, as in the case of regional educational manager Mehmet, amongst several school boards on the regional level).

3.2.3. Generational Differences in Dealing with the Process of Negotiation

Another dimension to the process of negotiation is how Muslims differ in their approach from generation to generation, as there are stark differences in educational levels, linguistic skills and the general cultural and religious outlook on life between the first and second generations of Dutch Muslim migrants.[195] The scholarly literature has a lot to comment upon the early Muslim communities' role and attitude in Islamic education but fails to really address the immense changes the community has gone though over the decades. Some of the conclusions of earlier research on Muslim parent engagement in Islamic education, especially around the time of the establishment of the first Islamic schools in the late 1980s and early 1990s, include the claim that there was a certain disinterest and lack of involvement of Muslim parents. Educational researchers Driessen and Bezemer for example argue that "there is every reason to believe parents only play a marginal role in the day-to-day running of the schools and are overshadowed by their agents". [196] They further claim that parents (and children for that matter) often do not view themselves as part of the Dutch cultural community.[197] Some of the reasons Driessen and Bezemer bring to the fore are that most Muslim parents of that generation had little or no education, had very little command of the Dutch language and did not have enough insight into how the Dutch school system works.[198] Now it may very well be the case that the earlier generations

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[195] See, Maurice Crul et al. (eds.), *The European Second Generation Compared: Does the Integration Context Matter?* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2012).
[196] Geert W.J.M. Driessen and Jeff J. Bezemer, "Background and Achievement Levels of Islamic Schools in the Netherlands: Are Reservations Justified?", in *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 1999, p. 240.
[197] Ibid., p. 246.
[198] Ibid., p. 237.

of Muslim migrant parents lacked the educational and linguistic skills to effectively play a role in Islamic schools. However, their conclusions about alleged disinterest on the part of Muslim parents seem overstated to say the least, as will become clear from some of the very personal stories of my informants, who were either directly involved or children of parents that were involved with the establishment of the very earliest Dutch Muslim schools.

In any case, no real attention in scholarship is given to the generational changes the Dutch Muslim community went through, while I encountered and observed many such changes in my interviews with Muslim actors in Islamic education. The fact of the matter is that the second generation of Muslim migrants have a completely different outlook on Islamic education and how Islam should be expressed in Western societies. Islamic primary school director Betul — herself a child of Muslim migrant parents and born, raised and educated in the Netherlands — exemplifies some of the generational differences between Muslim community members. We recall from earlier quotations that she was asked to become director of the school at which she worked at one point in her career:

> Islamic education was very new to me when I came to live [in this city]. […] I never really encountered Islamic education until I came as a substitute here. […] I thought "so *this* is Islamic education?" At that time there was a team with a lot of older teachers. […] And then you are dealing with a totally different type of education. The [former] director clung to her ideas and nothing was allowed to change. […] [It] was not purely the Islamic instruction per se, but the education itself that was conducted here. […] I would have done it very differently. […] I was of the opinion that Islam should be learned in a much more fun way. The gentleman [an older generation teacher] that gave [Islamic instruction] did it in the way of the very old times and angry. Very cliché things, such as "[beware] that Allah sees you". A very negative approach. […] Very strict. In my opinion this is not appropriate for our contemporary times and our Prophet also did not do it in this manner. The education had to be changed, but we simply could not get through to the [former] director. […] When she was finally gone, we changed a lot of things. Many people also got fired. Then we started fresh with a new, and much younger, team.

From this example it is obvious that the religious instruction, as such, is not perceived as the problem. Rather, it is the way in which Islam is taught that makes the difference. The newer generations of Dutch Muslims do not agree with the pedagogical approach of the "old days" that some of the older generations tended to use. The older ways are experienced as moralizing and authoritarian. Newer generations, in contrast, favor a

lighter touch and a more playful approach to teaching religion. This clearly brings to light a "generational gap" between different generations of Muslim migrants in the Netherlands.

Assistant director Nadia is a child of the first generation of Muslim migrants and her parents were involved with the establishment of the Islamic school she attended when she was a child. Sharing her ideas about this earlier generation of Muslim migrants she says:

> It's true that our first-generation parents came from their lands of origin with a certain way of thinking and cultural background. They were not yet ready to see that an issue such as homosexuality is simply an acceptable part of the culture in this country. While children that grown up now are regularly confronted with these issues and they are also exposed to it in Islamic lessons at school. It is something that is a topic of discussion while this was not the case with the first generation. That's a major shift and this shift will happen with time. […] I think that [the earlier generations] that came here from abroad already have made major leaps, that is also something that should receive more attention. […] Before [in Dutch culture] an issue such as homosexuality was also a difficult topic to discuss. Our people are sometimes not ready yet. We should allow them the time and space to also make this step.

From a parent's perspective, Bushra mentions that the current generation of children is much more critical and independent that earlier generations. She says:

> My children are much more articulate and assertive than I would have been. I would avoid ending up in a discussion and pretend I did not hear anything. They have the same rights and duties, but I think [the current generation] is better at claiming their rights. They have a greater confidence in being who they are, the idea that I can be who I can be. […] I also think it has something to do with the fact that this generation of parents often grew up here [in the Netherlands]. [These parents] know very well what their children learn in school. They are much more informed and hence their contact with their children is different than with their grandfather or grandmother. In that case [children] often get a "no", out of shame [when they want to discuss contentious topics], but with their parents they *can* discuss certain issues.

Bushra also finds that the new generation of children is much more independent and informed. A reason for this, she suggests, is the rise of the internet and social media:

> A lot of things they already know. They of course can look it up themselves. […] In our early days we had to go to the library to get a book. Then your books would get registered and scanned by the lady at the register and you would never consider getting a certain book [about a controversial topic]. Nowadays you can look up everything you want [anonymously]. […] There

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is really no one who would find out, because that is how smart they are nowadays. They can easily access information, even without their father or mother knowing about it.

These ideas are seconded by another Muslim parent, Ibrahim. He similarly sees how the current generation has changed and is much more informed now, when compared to the older generations. In the context of openly talking about a contentious subject which is widespread and accepted in Dutch society, such as homosexuality, Ibrahim says:

> For us, the older generation, these sort of were sensitive topics to talk about. With our own parents it simply could not be a topic of conversation. But it's different with [this new generation]. They are already exposed to everything, so we *have* to talk about everything. You cannot escape certain questions; you will have to deal with it [as a parent]. So you should also have an answer ready. Of course, it also depends on the parents. Not all parents are the same. […] I think our children are more social than we were. They also have friends now and they might be gay or lesbian. They simply encounter them at their schools. Teachers as well. In our faith we have to respect people. My daughter told me she has a history teacher who is gay. Alright, if you don't respect him you will not learn anything. Rather than looking at who he is, we should rather look at what he has to offer. For kids this is important. That's why I always say, if you don't respect your teacher there's no use in going to school. But in the past the older generation was much more closed and wanted nothing to do with the outside world really.

Regional educational manager Mehmet also observed the stark differences between older and newer generations of Muslims who are involved in Islamic education:

> Parents have become very critical and picky. […] The first-generation parents we had; they made their choices based on trust. Everything that was "Islamic" was good. […] No one asked critical questions, there wasn't a lot of grumbling, people did not produce problems. But now, before children are enrolled, you really have to have a good story to convince [parents]. At admission interviews they come with extensive lists of questions, such as what our pedagogical vision is, how we give shape to our identity. They want to know everything before they make their final choice. And this is justified. I think it is a good development. But this thus is the difference with the first generation and the current one. They are also generally highly educated and speak the language well, they know very well [what they want], because they have enjoyed education here [in the Netherlands].

School director Aliyah seconds this new type of active engagement of the new generation of Muslim parents:

> That's correct. [The parents] also want to be better informed… of [educational] results, how the child behaves [in class]. […] Earlier generations of course also wanted to know if their children were doing well

in school or not, but perhaps they were a little bit less critical. They engaged the question less deeply, because they did not have the knowledge about how [the Dutch school system] worked. So [earlier generations of parents] could not ask deeper probing questions, while parents nowadays of course *do* know more and are conscious of it. So they ask a lot more, and that's a good thing.

The significant changes between generations of Dutch Muslim communities are not merely reflected in the parents and children, these changes are also observable in Islamic school leadership and teachers, as explained by school director Eyyub:

A lot of things went wrong [in the beginning stages of Islamic education in the Netherlands]. But if you look at the last five or ten years… Nowadays there are capable school directors. School managers or board members now are lawyers, engineers, doctors… Highly educated people. Teachers and Islamic instructors come [from the Muslim community itself]. They studied for relevant degrees, such as the PABO [teacher training for primary education]. People now are more ambitious to work for an Islamic school. […] I do observe that ten to fifteen years ago Muslim people simply graduated from PABO or teacher education, but who had not consciously chosen this occupation. Now I feel they *do* make a conscious decision. That they really want to contribute to the formation of a child. […] There is some sense of responsibility. The younger generation is much more conscious.

3.2.4. The Implementation of Religious Values in Islamic Schools and the Question of Diversity

As explained in the previous chapter, Islamic schools are held to the national curriculum by Dutch law. In the Netherlands every primary school has a standard curriculum of basic subjects (such as mathematics and language) and a certain amount of weekly hours schools are obliged to allot to these subjects. However, outside of the main curriculum schools have a relatively large amount of freedom to incorporate other educational aspects, such as religious instruction. Islamic schools differ in the ways in which they try to implement Islamic values in their schools. The way schools deal with implementing Islamic values on a practical school organization level depends on various factors, such as religious school of thought (*madhhab*), intra-religious diversity (different *madhhabs* in one school), the presence and amount of non-Muslim teachers in the school, and the general underlying educational philosophy

of the school (schools may for example be inspired by a certain educational pedagogies, such as *Montessori*, *Waldorf*, Dalton or *Jenaplan*).

Religious teacher Zahid gives us some insight into how Islamic values are practically implemented in the school, for example in the classes on religious instruction:

> The children should be taught [religious instruction] in a language that is at their level of understanding, and sometimes than can be a challenge. […] We live in the twenty-first century. Children are very much confronted with Western life and values, including all kinds of cultural habits and celebrations, which does not have to be a bad thing. But it can become a hype or a trend, it is as if this is all that exists for some of these children. Aside from everything they encounter in Western society, I also want them to experience the Islamic values, to give them some balance. […] As an Islamic teacher I want to show Islam to the children as a culture, as something that's part of your day-to-day activities. When teaching I try to show them, rather than teach them outward knowledge. I try to be happy, exciting and lively. […] Religion should be very lively. […] In the Islamic lesson I teach here I try to focus on moral upbringing. I try to stay true to the principle that moral upbringing precedes the transmission of knowledge [*al-tarbiya qabla al-ta'lim*]. So, it's personality development before it is education.

Assistant director Nadia mentions how Islamic schools differ from regular schools. While Islamic schools and Dutch regular public schools are the same in many regards (such as the educational curriculum) they do, according to her, play a very significant role in the upbringing of Muslim children. Rather than the aspect of transmitting religious knowledge, it seems more important that the school is safe site for Muslim children to form their Islamic identity and negotiate religious and national values:

> [Islamic schools] offer safety, warmth and protection. Here, children are not bombarded with questions about their identity. Recently, I saw on television a child whose parents are of Moroccan descent who got the question why Muslims want to destroy everything. […] And that a small child from the fourth or second grade has to justify or apologize, while [he or she] is not even aware yet. […] Some parents have to change schools because they are dealing with discrimination by teachers who, for example, make remarks about their child's headscarf. And then the child has to justify and explain why she is wearing a headscarf or what its significance is. I mean, what kinds of questions are you asking these children? […] Why should they have to justify themselves? I mean, children are not preoccupied with these things yet, they are still developing their personalities, and at such a young age they are already confronted with tons of negativity. Before [they] even know who they are… This damages your self-confidence and self-image. […] [The Islamic school] offers a safe space in which we don't have to constantly consider safety and self-confidence. Instead, we can focus on how the child is doing cognitively or you can work on other social problems (outside of

religion) that the child may be dealing with, as you should be doing with all children.

School teacher Rashid formulated a similar way of thinking in the following manner:

> We [as teachers] try to create for the pupils that the play a "home match", to speak in football terminology. That they have the feeling that the teachers stand behind them, understand them. […] They are allowed the "be there". And at the same time, that there is a space, a physical space, where they are allowed to make mistakes. It is a practice area in which they are being prepared for the society which they will eventually enter.

The idea of the Islamic school as a place of recognition and warmth was voiced in many interviews. School director Betul thinks that Children feel they are heard more than in other schools. She mentioned: "We know the backgrounds of these children" and hence are better able to communicate with the children and parents in a manner that is familiar to them and takes into consideration the particular cultural and religious sensitivities they have. Assistant director Nadia, who had extensive experience with first generation Muslim parents who were involved with the establishment of the first Dutch Islamic schools, also mentions there was an explicit demand by Muslim parents for such an Islamic school environment.

The idea of the Islamic school as a safe haven or an extended family environment is seconded by school director Eyyub. He sees it as part of his overall educational philosophy:

> Children are pure. I always say, a child is born as a blank piece of paper. The parents draw something on it, the teachers draw something on it and the schools draw something on it. If it is in harmony the result is a beautiful picture. If it is not in harmony you do not recognize the picture anymore. That's how I see it. Islamic education is an extension of the home.

This line of thinking is also reiterated by some of the Muslim parents, such as Bushra and Ibrahim. Bushra mentions that she consciously chose an Islamic school:

> I want to put my kinds on an Islamic school. There at least they'll have something of their own identity. They don't have to constantly justify themselves. They don't have to explain why they are different. These are the kinds of questions I'm afraid of. [I want them] to be able to simply be who they are. Probably they would also [to some extent] be able to do so at other schools, but it is far from easy nowadays. […] Here they can pray and there are Islamic lessons in which a lot of things are discussed. Especially when they become slightly older. I think in this way they can be proud of who they are. I see this now with my fourteen-year-old daughter who is currently in

secondary education. There she has been addressed by a teacher that she had to adjust herself. And I was perplexed. She basically asked her: "who do you belong to, *us* or *them*?" […] This was very confusing for my daughter, who thought by herself, who am I then? I'm at school here so don't I belong to *us*? […] [At school] they sometimes get to hear these things. […] At an Islamic school, things are different. It is not about the two hours [of religious instruction] they get, it's about all the little things around it. That the distance between the school and home is not very far apart.

School director Aliyah, who is also a mother of children who attend an Islamic school, corroborates the idea of familiarity and familial warmth. She had worked at various Dutch Christian schools as well and had a pleasant experience there. But she did end up making a conscious decision to work for an Islamic school:

It was the feeling. For some sort of reason, you understand each other better and more easily, you share the same [cultural and religious] background. You have the same types of experiences. There is something that "clicks". […] This is also the case for my children [who also attend an Islamic school]. They previously went to a public school, but I had the feeling they were not seen or given attention there. I had some doubts at first about the quality of Islamic schools, but at one point I thought that the feeling of being seen and taken seriously was more important than the [educational] results.

Parent Ibrahim has a different, very personal (and tragic) story. His story does however corroborate they idea of familiarity and safety, a feeling of being at home, mentioned by other parents such as Bushra and Aliyah. Recently, Ibrahim had lost his wife. And his children their mother. Ibrahim and his wife had a total of four children at the Islamic school and had been passionately involved with the school for over fourteen years. Bringing their kids to an Islamic school was a very conscious and joint decision. Ibrahim and his family stem from a secular and westernized family from Casablanca in Morocco, a country that is highly influenced by its French colonial history. Ibrahim experienced a lot of pushback against this decision from his family, who looked down upon the idea of an Islamic school. In Morocco, he said, "we had a French education". Ibrahim had very little to do with Islam back in his home country. He only learned about what he perceives as "real Islam" upon arriving in the Netherlands. Ibrahim and his wife developed an appreciation for Islam and hence decided to bring their children to an Islamic school, despite strong resistance from their secularized family:

The only protection is our religious faith, that is what takes precedence for our children. […] [At the Islamic school] they receive the strength of the foundations of our faith. They develop themselves to be strong when they continue to secondary education. […] The first time my daughter came home and during diner made a prayer (*dua*), well, there is nothing more

beautiful you could wish for. We also didn't really have this back home [in Morocco]. I'm very pleased with this.

Ibrahim became very emotional when he spoke about the loss of his wife and how the school community has supported him and his children during this very difficult process of mourning:

> We are very involved at the Islamic school. It has been a conscious decision. We talked about this with my wife. She unfortunately passed away, several months ago. It has been a wonderful choice. We have not regretted it at all. On the contrary. We are very proud, about our culture, about our religion. […] It is currently a very difficult period, because of the great loss of my wife. But happily, we are Muslims and we believe they are not far away. She must be in a beautiful place. Better than where we are now. But it continues to be a loss. For everyone. We try to get ourselves together, but it is not easy. But praise be to God (*alhamdulillah*), [our faith] is a great support. And also [the school]. That's also what's special about this school. Because you are surrounded by family. […] We don't have any family here, but *this school* is family. We have been really lucky. […] Every morning I do not consider I'm going to school, but that I'm actually visiting family. […] I have been here for fourteen years.

Parent Khadija also shared her feelings and thoughts with regards to her conscious choice of choosing an Islamic school for her children:

> I always say this [school] is my second home. [I choose an Islamic school for my children] for the path of Allah [*sabilillah*]. Everything you do for *sabilillah*, the benefits of it will return to you later on. I hope the benefits will return to my children. That's why I try to help as much as I can. […] To simply work for the good. That's also what keeps me here. […] I made a conscious choice and at least my children now have a good basis [in Islam] God-willing [*inshallah*]. I hope they will continue on this path. […] And it's not simply about the lessons in Islamic religious instruction. It's about the whole environment. You simply feel Islam is present [in the school]. […] The feeling of coming here and feeling at home. They really understand you. We understand each other. […] I truly believe that if you do have an Islamic school nearby, as a parent, you have an obligation to enroll your children. […] Now I, at least, have done my utmost best and would no longer have to justify myself in front of Allah.

School director Eyyub has little understanding for Muslim parents who choose to entrust their children to regular Dutch public schools instead of Islamic schools:

> The percentage of children in [this city] who attend Islamic schools is about three percent. In one sense this could be explained, because Islamic education in the Netherlands is only 30 to 35 years old. It is only in its initial stage, in comparison with other types of education. On the other side, I cannot explain it and am very surprised… How can you entrust your four-

year-old child to a Christian school? This is the place where your child is brought up!

Intra-Religious Diversity in Islamic Schools

Another layer of complexity is added to the process of negotiation because of the sheer diversity of the Muslim community. A diversity that expresses itself in cultural background, ethnicity, language, country of origin, levels of education, socio-economic status and adherence to different schools and interpretations within the Islamic faith. School teacher Rashid remarked that while Islam is the unifying principle of Islamic schools the student population of the schools are actually quite diverse:

> The common denominator is Islam. That is the religious faith. But the group [of pupils] is as diverse as it could be. The last thing people should conclude is that it is an Islamic school, so all the children attending the school are the same. […] The classes are very diverse.

In the Netherlands the two largest groups of Muslim migrants are of Turkish and Moroccan descent, meaning they by-and-large adhere to the Hanafi and Maliki schools of religious thought, respectively. [199] Due to the diverse background of Muslim communities in Dutch cities, Islamic schools almost never end up having pupils from a single school of Islamic thought (madhhab). In fact, schools almost always somehow have to negotiate different interpretations of Islam, which also reflects upon how Muslims negotiation religious and national values in the school.

School director Betul underlines the problems that might emerge when dealing with intra-religious diversity in Islamic schools and how to manage this diversity:

> This is exactly what makes it so difficult if there are situations within the school [stemming from differences of religious interpretation]. I also try to listen to the parents. To see what they want and value. I also consult my religious instructor and if it is a particularly difficult issue, I also talk with my school governing board. It is a big problem that I encounter. I have my

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[199] With small minorities adhering to other schools, such as the *Salafi* interpretation of Islam or the *Shafi'i madhhab* (the latter is mainly restricted to refugees from Syria who have entered the Netherlands only recently due to the war).

own interpretations [of Islam], but within the school I try to really understand what is expected. What do the parents want?

Bushra, being one of those Muslim parents, does not seem to have extensive problems with the diversity of schools of thought and has a more pragmatic approach:

> Yes, there are different schools of thought. At the school we do not necessarily choose only one of them. For instance, with the prayers, I'm used to putting the feet as strictly against those next to you as possible, but that's not the same everywhere. […] So, is that allowed with the prayers? Look, if you want to place your feet in such a way, then stand next to someone who prays the same. But we cannot oblige you at school to do it in a certain way. And at home you can do as you please.

Muslim parent Ibrahim thinks that instead of focusing on the differences of various religious interpretations, Muslim parents should rather be thankful to have an Islamic school at all. Nothing is a given and the Muslim community in the Netherlands could also have ended without having any of these opportunities (especially in light of the recent political developments). In the end, it might be the very personal stories of Muslim parents at Islamic schools that weight heavier than the way Islam is practically implemented in the school:

> There are always people who are against making pictures, or the use of music, or celebrating birthdays, or the specific Islamic ways of clothing (such as the *hijab*). I always see this. You can never completely satisfy everyone. If you satisfy one group, you anger another. You always end up having a conflict. […] I always say, this is an Islamic school and you should simply always have unconditional love. You don't have to make some kind of barrier. Having an Islamic school in and of itself is a win for us. Imagine if the Islamic school would be closed. Then we would be without an Islamic school and our children would be the victim of this. You should simply be grateful for what you have. And really, there are also lots of things of beauty from [this school]. Both in terms of educational quality as in upbringing. If I look at my personal situation, everything I've went through. My wife was terminally ill for eight years... Throughout all these eight years I've received tremendous support of this school. It's unbelievable. I appreciate that. I will never forget that.

Assistant school director Nadia mentions that aside from the dialogue with parents, there are certain guiding rules about religion in the school that are non-negotiable:

> What the parents think and do at home is fine for us. But of course, we do have our rules here. […] For example, we have the rule that from the seventh-grade girls have to wear a headscarf. And this is more so that they have at least once early in their live they have practiced how it is to wear a headscarf. If parents want to send their child to school without a headscarf this can be a difficult issue because we of course did clearly communicate

> what we want. In fact, [parents] already hear so during the application interviews. […] In such a case, parents are then invited to the school for a talk […] and parents eventually do understand our intentions. […] Sometimes ladies put on the headscarf when they arrive and take it off when they leave the school. In that way we have been able to come to a compromise.

At the level of individual schools, it seems that intra-religious diversity is something that is quite easily negotiated. At the level of regions, however, things can become much more complicated. Having direct hands-on experience with this process, regional educational manager Mehmet recounts:

> In term of financial and managerial efficiency we have tried to develop four regions in which all Dutch schools would be divided. […] We were given five years to execute this plan to fuse the schools into regions. And indeed, [the schools] have been in extensive dialogue with each other, but we did not succeed. [We only succeeded in establishing one region out of four.] Because of the increase in scale we were able to make a professional organization out of our region, with an office, and staff. We build up expertise. We can provide our schools with this expertise. We can also intervene if things go down the hill for a school, financially or in terms of educational quality. In that sense we have become much more effective. […] But a real regional fusion has not yet materialized, because it is far from easy to come to a compromise. This is also the reason why the regional dialogue failed at the time. […] We [as a Muslim community] have not learned to integrate with each other under the flag of religiosity, to form a unified whole, to unify our aims and develop shared initiatives.

Non-Muslim Teachers in the School

Already in the early days of the first established Dutch Islamic schools in the late 1980s and early 1990s schools had to deal with a shortage of Muslim teachers. Hence a lot of teacher had a non-Islamic background. Geert Driessen in his 1999 article already observed that (at least in the beginning stages) there was a lack of qualified Islamic teachers, which he assumed "makes it difficult to convey Islamic norms and values".[200]

Assistant school director Nadia mentions in this regard:

> A few years after the establishment [of the Islamic school] I started to attend the school. So, everything was ready and prepared. But it did have a lot of

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[200] Driessen and Bezemer, p. 237.

Dutch teachers, some from Surinam. And also a Chinese teacher. So, the composition of teachers was really diverse.

School director Eyyub remarks:

> In those times [when the first Islamic schools were established] there were no capable school directors or teachers. Also, there were not a lot of Muslim teachers. The first Islamic schools were established by [several] people from the Turkish Muslim community who did not even speak Dutch. They had heard that article 23 [of the Dutch constitution] allowed Muslims to establish Islamic schools. […] For the schools that were first established no [Muslim] teachers could be found. So what did they do? They took a plane and went to Surinam [a former Dutch colony]. There they found several Muslim teachers and they brought them [to the Netherlands] as a teacher. This is how it all began.

Regional educational director Mehmet, who has an extensive history in the establishment and management of the earliest Islamic schools of the Netherlands, corroborates this story and adds some historical background information. In this case it is about how one of the very first Dutch Islamic schools dealt with Islamic principles in the school and non-Muslim teachers and staff. This example also exemplifies a certain learning curve with regards to non-Muslims in Islamic schools:

> When we started these Islamic schools, we obliged everyone to wear the headscarf. In our regulations this was a condition at the time. If you will be working for us, Muslim or non-Muslim, you will have to wear a headscarf. The reasoning behind it was that we wanted them to be role models for our children, that they would not only theoretically but also physically be confronted with the phenomenon of the headscarf. The line of thought was that it would stimulate [the children] to put on the headscarf. […] However, in Islam you cannot force certain religious principles upon other Muslims, let alone non-Muslims. […] So very early on we started to understand that this was going to go wrong. And indeed, within two years we experienced a lot of resistance from these schools. We heard that the non-Muslims implemented the rule in a very sloppy and careless way. Then we understood we needed to change this rule, because this will not end well. Regularly there would be fights and disagreements between staff members [about these issues]. […] In the meantime, we also had done some research amongst parents, pupils and staff to see if our intended aims [with the rule] were being realized. They were not. [All of them] realized that the [non-Muslim teachers] simply wore the headscarf because of the rule in the school but did not practice this at home. [We asked them] "does it affect you if they would not wear the headscarf?", they said "no". […] When we learned the rule had no effect anyway, we abolished it. It is good we did, because eventually we gained more because of it, since the teachers were able to focus on education once more. The rule had become a liability, it had become an obstacle during job interviews, because the good teachers pulled out because they did not want to commit to this. […] As an Islamic school we still do have certain regulations, such as not drinking alcohol, certain behavioral conditions for teachers and (except for the headscarf) certain clothing regulations, such as

decent clothing, not too revealing or offensive, that sort of stuff. People do need to dress civilized and neatly, but we allow for a certain freedom. […] This compromise has been heavily discussed within the organization until we could finally come to a decision. We did settle on certain minimal conditions, because otherwise we would not be able to justify towards the parents that we are a Muslim school.

School director Betul mentions the challenges of Islam being taught in an Islamic primary school with Muslim and non-Muslim teachers:

Of course, you're also dealing with teachers who are not Muslim. […] That can be tricky. What do you expect from a teacher that does not share your [religious] faith? The religious instructor also plays a large role in this. […] You start the day with *Sūra al-Fātiḥa* [a prayer from the Quran] and before eating another prayer is said. During the lessons you're constantly trying to connect with Islam, when it is suitable.

But aside from the question of what to expect from non-Muslim teachers in light of the Islamic practices at the school throughout the day, Betul seems to have had relatively positive experiences:

We have a [non-Muslim] who is currently teaching. And last year we also had a PABO-student, a non-Muslim, who really wanted to do an internship here. She wanted to research what the difference is between Islamic education and other schools. I said fine, because this is something I'm also interested in. When she finished [her internship] I asked about her experiences. She concluded both are nearly the same. […] So I said, if you say this, as someone who is a non-Muslim and who did a one and a half year internship, then you have really seen it all. And I think that's great. Therefore, my main attitude is like, alright guys, be welcome [towards non-Muslim teachers].

School director Aliyah had similar positive experiences with non-Muslim teachers teaching in their Islamic school:

We do have non-Muslim teachers in the school. One stands out in particular. [The person in question] was simply looking for a job. But she appreciated [her work at the school] so much that she stayed around. We have another one working here, a young and hip girl, and she likes it so much she simply cannot stay away [from the school]. She could really work anywhere, and sometimes I wonder "what on earth are you doing here?" But she truly wants to stay. Not per se because she is very interested in Islam, but because of the culture and atmosphere in the school. So she stays. Even though it is not always easy to work at this school. She simply feels at home.

Religious teacher Zahid also incorporates diversity and tolerance towards non-Muslims in his lessons:

> After the eighth-grade children [at Islamic primary schools] will transfer to regular Dutch public secondary schools. […] So, from the sixth grade onwards I teach them that it is not *us* against *them*, not the believers against the disbelievers. These are simply people, albeit that they think differently. And we should not mind this, after all at home we also sometimes differ amongst ourselves. […] You are attending an Islamic school, but at the same time the school is established on Dutch soil.

In terms of practicalities it seems that most non-Muslim teachers at Islamic schools do not mind abiding by the Islamic principles of the school. Some of them have such a good relationship with the school that they absolutely feel as part of the school community, even though they are not Muslim. religious teacher Zahid gives the example of practicing the prayer in school:

> At one point the call to prayer (*azan*) was called and I was slightly later [for the prayer]. Two of our Dutch non-Muslim teachers [took the initiative] and guided the children towards the prayer room, one of them with the boys and the other with the girls. And they instructed them to do the ablution (*wudu*) […] and then they rolled out the prayer carpets. [Without me being there the children] were already under their guidance. I found that very special and remarkable, […] the amount of understanding that non-Muslims show. Because the teachers also took it very seriously.

School director Eyyub remarked that Muslim pupils do not only deal with non-Muslims within the confinements of the school. Also, outside of the schools, in their neighborhoods and sport clubs, they are confronted with diversity:

> A lot of external organization approach us for projects regarding citizenship. We, as an Islamic school, organize activities and internships, such as trips to elderly homes. In that way [children] get in touch with the realities of [Dutch] society. […] Another example is that they hand out roses to local residents of the neighborhood when we celebrate the birth of the prophet. With these activities we involve all people, it does not matter what their religion or identity is, or what kind of life they live. […] Eventually these kids will enter society, and they should not be shocked when that happens. So that's why we organize lots of activities, so that they learn to understand in what kind of a society they live. […] Of course, they have a lot of Muslim children around them, but the neighborhood is diverse. We have residents who are from the Antilles, or Surinam, or who are Dutch. All kinds of cultures mixed up. [They] also meet during sports activities in sporting clubs. Almost all children participate there, so they come into contact with non-Muslims a lot.

3.3. Concluding Remarks: What do Muslims Really Believe?

In 2007 John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed published a book with the provocative title *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think.*[201] The book's research is based on a mammoth, multi-year (2001-2007) empirical study amongst Muslims living in thirty-five Muslim majority nations conducted by the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies. The goal of the book might be clear from reading the title; it is concerned with the lived experiences of Muslims. It argues that, instead of only lending our ears to rightist-populist political agendas and media reports that maintain that somehow Islamic values are inherently and indisputably conflictual with those of the West, we should in fact lend our ears to what Muslims themselves actually think, believe and experience. While obviously infinitely humbler in size and scope, in this thesis I have also been concerned with "what Muslims really think". I have endeavored to speak *with* the Muslim community in the Netherlands, rather than speaking *about* them. I have been concerned, in a sense, with giving them a voice; to fill the lacuna in scholarly literature regarding the lived experiences of Muslims who try to find a place for themselves in Dutch society. I hope that the analysis of the cross-section of in-depth interviews from my field research amongst Muslims who are engaged in Islamic education in the Netherlands has shown the complexities and diversity of the process of value negotiation, and how, indeed, it in many ways vastly differs from the image of Islam and Muslims in the Dutch public opinion and political arena. In the following section I will present the conclusions of my research, while trying to connect the findings of all previous three chapters. In this context I will revisit the guiding research questions stated in the introductory chapter of this thesis. In addition, I will share my reflections upon how this research could possibly be fruitfully extended and which areas of inquiry were beyond the scope of this thesis, but nevertheless worthy for further exploration.

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[201] John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007).

4. Conclusions, Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research

This thesis has been concerned with the question of how the Dutch Muslim community negotiates religious and national values in an era of growing societal tensions, particularly in the sphere of the Dutch educational landscape. The presence of Muslims in Europe has been met with considerable resistance on the account that Islamic and Western values would be in conflict with each other. This discourse is mainly perpetuated by politics and the public discourse. In this thesis I have tried to give a voice to Muslims themselves. How do they perceive this alleged value conflict and how do they negotiate these values belonging to apparently different value systems in the educational field? It appears that the answer to this question is much more complex and much less black-and-white as many politicians and commentators would have it.

That being said, the mass migrations of the second half the twentieth century have been a major event in recent European and human history. It has indeed been one of the most "vivid dramas of social reality" in our contemporary times.[202] This large-scale movement of people across national borders has had a tremendous social impact in the receiving host countries. Twentieth century mass migration has been a major instigator of social change. It has tested the limits peaceful coexistence and tolerance towards those cultures and religions that are different from the autochthonous population, as host countries struggled (and still struggle) with accommodating Islam and Muslims in their respective societies. More often than not, it has given rise to various forms and levels of xenophobia and Islamophobia, especially against the establishment of separate Islamic schools.

At the same time, the migrations have had significant socio-psychological effect on migrants themselves, who had decided to make the life-changing choice of making the journey from different parts of the world to countries that were culturally and religiously starkly different from their own. While the reasons for migrating might not

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[202] Peter Kivisto and Thomas Faist, *Beyond a Border: The Causes and Consequences of Contemporary Immigration* (California: Pine Forge Press, 2010), p. 1.

all stem from personal tragedies and humanitarian causes in their home countries but might for example have been inspired by poverty and economic reasons, still the effect of migration is tremendous and dramatic. Muslim migrants traveling and settling in Europe have experienced the very real effects of psychological, social and cultural dislocations and have had to meet the challenges of learning new languages, different values and new social institutions. As if these challenges were not enough, Muslim migrants have had to embark on a long, complex and multi-generational process of negotiation, in which they needed to learn to mediate and navigate between apparently different value systems and create a religious and cultural identity that incorporates both. This process is still ongoing today, although the newer generations might be better equipped for the task.

This process has been further complicated by the dynamics of exclusion, marginalization and securitization. Muslims suffer from the prejudice that Islamic schools are somehow against Western values or otherwise teach matters that would hinder the proper integration of Muslim children into Dutch society. Similarly, Muslims are continually confronted with the recurring idea that Islamic values clash with the values and principles of the Islamic faith. This line of thinking has resulted in an increase of the surveillance and monitoring of Islamic schools on the part of the Dutch government. It also has resulted in the predominant perception of the Islamic community as a security issue, as opposed to an ethnic, cultural or religious minority. This process we have called the "Islamization of securitization". As has become clear from many of the Muslim informants I interviewed during the process of this study, Muslim spend a tremendous amount of time dealing with the Inspectorate of Education and their public image in the media in order to remedy their negative image. Time that could arguably be better spend focusing on the development and wellbeing of children (and parents) in Islamic schools.

It is true that it might have taken a long while before the newly arrived first-generation Muslim community settled down in the Netherlands and got adjusted to the Dutch educational system. The Muslim community however has been active from early on to try and establish organizations and institution for the continuation of their Islamic faith, in the form of mosques and other foundations. They have also tried to find a place for themselves in Dutch public schools and even in Christian denominational

public schools. While a large portion of Muslims still attend these schools, there has been a growing percentage of Muslims who grew dissatisfied with these options and saw a viable and preferable option in establishing separate Islamic schools, once the Muslim community understood this was a right under the Dutch constitution.

The Dutch educational system and its legal and constitutional underpinnings have provided religious denominations, including the Muslim communities, a lot of opportunities with regards to establishing state-funded schools. However, from their inception Islamic schools have been met with opposition from Dutch politics and the public. This resistance has been ever increasing with the rise of xenophobia, Islamophobia and anti-Muslim sentiment after the events of the 9/11 attacks. That being said, the amount of Islamic schools has been growing over the years, with tens of schools in various Dutch cities, and even two Islamic primary schools in the major cities of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. As opposed to what has been suggested by (at least part of) the scholarly literature, it seems unlikely that this increasing trend will become less, as I've experienced during my empirical research, field trips and interviews that the community of Islamic schools is lively and active and the new generation is ambitiously working towards the further improvement of their Islamic schools.

As admitted in scholarly literature, not a lot of attention has been given to the role of Muslim parents in Islamic education. This, however, has not withheld some scholars to make far-reaching claims about them. This study has tried to show how Muslims differ from generation to generation, and that recent scholarship has yet to pay due attention to how the Muslim parents of the second-generation deal with the issue of value negotiation in education. This process is still very much an ongoing process, and as shown in the previous chapter, different generations tend to vastly differ in the ways in which they negotiate this process. In any case, as opposed to what much of the scholarly literature on the subject suggests, the new generations of Muslim parents are far from inactive, disengaged or uninterested with regards to the Islamic education of their children. In fact, quite the opposite, they are critical, engaged, highly educated, demanding and they know the Dutch language and educational system inside out.

This new generation is adamant about the claim that Islamic and Dutch values would be diametrically opposed to one another. No matter how differently Muslims exactly negotiate religious and national values, how they incorporate, implement or practice their religion in the Dutch societal and cultural context or where they lay their limits or fight for their rights to be themselves, one thing seems to be clear and unanimous: Muslims do not seem to see a straightforward conflict of values and believe that by-and-large Muslims can fully function as Dutch citizens and be active participants of Dutch society, while also adhering to the religious principles and values of their Islamic faith.

The final conclusion I draw from my research, is that imparting Islamic knowledge as such, that is, religious instruction and the transmission of information about the Islamic faith to Muslim children, does not seem to be a primary concern of Muslim parents and school leadership. Obviously, religious instruction is part of the educational curriculum (albeit not a very large part), but the vast majority of the educational program concentrates on regular school subjects, such as mathematics and language. But "teaching" the Islamic religion does not seem primary. What seems to be much more important to the Muslim community involved in Islamic education, is that Islamic schools provide a warm, familiar and safe space for Muslims to practice their religion, while similarly experimenting with how to be a Muslim in Dutch society and culture. Islamic schools, thus, seem to function as a safe space for the negotiation of values, where Muslims are not constantly confronted with their identity being different or their so-called "otherness". Instead, they can focus on developing their personality, identity, selfhood and self-confidence, in a society in which they experience increased pressure, negativity and even animosity.

Policy Recommendations

In the course of this study we have encountered and addressed various concerns regarding the policies and perceptions of the Dutch government regarding Muslim migrant minorities and Islamic schools in the Netherlands. We have observed two main trajectories regarding Dutch government policies and how they developed over time in the first two chapters of this thesis, namely: (1) the transition from

multiculturalist integration policies towards policies that tended more towards assimilationism and (2) a stress on surveillance, monitoring and securitization regarding Muslim religious communities and Islamic educational institutions (see respectively chapters 2.3 and 1.2).

With regards to the first trajectory, Dutch government policies regarding Muslim minorities since the very first Muslim migrations to the Netherlands in the 1970s, throughout the 1980s until roughly the mid-1990s, were characterized by multiculturalist integration policies that were generally accommodating of the religious and cultural specifics and sensitivities of Muslim minorities. In this initial phase, Muslim migrants were not seen as co-citizens but as guest workers who would eventually return to their respective countries of origin. These multiculturalist policies were established with the consideration in mind that most migrants would not stay in the Netherlands and hence focused on integration into Dutch society with preservation of the cultural and religious identities of Muslim migrants. From the mid-1990s, and especially after the advent of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in America, these multiculturalist policies were severely criticized and came under increased scrutiny. The government policies subsequently shifted to assimilationism. This shift may have been assisted and strengthened by the more general rise in Dutch society of anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant resistance, xenophobia and Islamophobia. It might even be argued that the Dutch state itself has been directly informed by Islamophobic tendencies (see chapter 1.2). These developments in government policies and the political and public discourse have given rise to two notions or presumptions: (1) that Islamic and Dutch national values are diametrically opposed to each other and (2) that Muslim migrants, in order to successfully integrate into and become part of Dutch society as full citizens, should wholly adjust to the dominant national values of secular liberalism.

The second trajectory in Dutch policy-making developed parallel to the first trajectory. Both trajectories, in fact, mutually influenced each other. The emergence of anti-Muslim resistance and Islamophobia in Dutch society and politics is also reflected in the increased surveillance and monitoring of Islamic schools, presumably because they would be a source of radicalization and anti-integration tendencies. Instead of approaching Muslims as individuals and co-citizens, they have increasingly been

treated as a potential security threat, a process that has also been called securitization. The Dutch Secret services (such as the AIVD) and government institutions (such as the Inspectorate of Education) have produced report after report, especially from the early 2000s onwards, that negatively portray Islamic schools. Paradoxically, no sustainable evidence has been presented that indicates Islamic schools are indeed instigators of anti-integration tendencies amongst Muslims. Rather, research shows quite the opposite. It has also not been shown that Islamic schools are a source of radicalization or represent a force that is obstructive to the Dutch democratic legal order.

Both of these trajectories have been found to have grave and far-reaching consequences for Islamic schools and the ways in which Muslim communities living in the Netherlands negotiate religious and national values. My research shows that Islamic schools are severely impacted and impaired by the constant and continual monitoring of and intervention in Islamic schools by the Dutch state. Not only does this add to feelings of marginalization and stigma amongst Muslims, which have already been a part of the anti-Muslim atmosphere in Dutch society since the early 2000s, it also obstructs and diverts Islamic schools from their true educational goals, namely to contribute to the healthy educational growth and personality development of primary school children.

In addition, my research shows that contrary to the recurring assumption that Islamic and Dutch cultural and religious values are diametrically opposed, Muslims involved in Dutch Islamic schools do not primarily view it that way. The basic approach amongst (especially second-generation) Muslims with a migration background, rather, is accommodating towards Dutch norms and values. Muslims negotiate religious and national values differently, but the basic assumption is one of overlap and agreement. They also view themselves as part and parcel of Dutch society, even though some religious values and principles might be different. The potential differences, if any, are seen as negotiable in the context of Dutch cultural pluralism and diversity.

From these considerations follow two main policy recommendations. Firstly, it much by now be recognized that the Dutch government and important and authoritative institutions such as the AIVD and the Inspectorate of Education have a vital role in the

public perceptions and media representations of Islamic schools in the Netherlands. From its earliest monitoring reports these institutions have been setting the tone of the debate on Muslim and Islam in Dutch society and politics, a tone that has by-and-large been negative and stigmatizing. These institutions would most probably benefit from a greater awareness of their influential and trend-setting role. They might also entertain more restraint and caution when communicating claims about Muslims and the role of Islamic schools in integration to the general public.

Secondly, it is recommended that a more constructive communication and dialogue with Muslims and those involved in Islamic schools (be they parent, teacher or school leadership) is established. A constructive dialogue between government, schools and the Muslim community would benefit mutual understanding. Going beyond mere statistics, it would also make plainer the actual lived experiences of Muslims who endeavor to become part of Dutch society by negotiating and (re)constructing identities that are accommodative of both religious and national values. A more constructive approach would be to see the schools for what they are, namely a space were Muslims can safely participate in the process of value negotiation within the educational and legal parameters set by the Dutch state, instead of a source of potential state security threat, radicalization of anti-integration. It would be helpful in this regard if the government recognized the stark difference between the first-generation of Muslim migrants, who were the primary targets of assimilationist policies in the late-1990s and 2000s, and the newly emerging, highly-informed, highly-educated and well-integrated second generation of Muslims living in the Netherlands, as it seems that current policies are not (or at least in a very limited fashion) taking into consideration this newer generation as significant stakeholders and interlocutors.

Suggestions for Further Research

A lot of material has been explored in this master's thesis, both in terms of scholarly literature and in terms of empirical field work. I had vast amount of data from my qualitative research in the form of in-depth interviews and transcriptions. I have tried to incorporate as much material as I was able that was relevant to the scope of the guiding research questions of this thesis. There were, however, several themes that

kept cropping up and were interesting, but were only indirectly related to my research. These themes I offer here, in conclusion, as recommendations for further research.

These recommendations are four in total. First, it would be worth exploring the transition from Islamic primary education to (public or Islamic) secondary education and how the Islamic educational background of children has (or has not) influenced the process of negotiation in this new context. As this thesis is concerned solely with primary education, I have not further explored this theme, while it was a topic of discussion during many of the interviews. Secondly, there seems to be a difference between how Muslims negotiate values with regards to children who attend Islamic schools in cities where Muslims are a small minority and in the big "super-diverse" minority-majority cities of the Netherlands, such as Amsterdam and Rotterdam, were Muslims are a large, visible and influential minority. Arguably, these very different social contexts have an impact on the process of negotiation. Thirdly, while not a primary concern of this thesis, it might be valuable to further investigate how Muslims negotiate values with regards to Muslim children who attend Islamic primary schools and Muslim children who attend regular public (and non-Islamic) primary schools. Fourthly, and lastly, I have had many conversations with teachers, school directors and religious instructors about the Islamic lessons and religious teaching materials in Islamic schools and how to attempt to implement Islamic values and principles in the school curriculum. This I have not further explored in this thesis and might be a fruitful venue for further research.

Appendix I: A Schematic Overview of the Dutch Educational System

PRIMARY

SECONDARY

TERTIARY

Pre University Education
VWO
Gymnasium
Atheneum
12–18 years

University

University of Applied Sciences
HBO or Hogeschool
3rd level vocational education

Primary Education 'Basis School' 4–12 years

Secondary General
HAVO
12–17 years

Theoretical
Preparatory

Vocational
Preparatory
VMBO
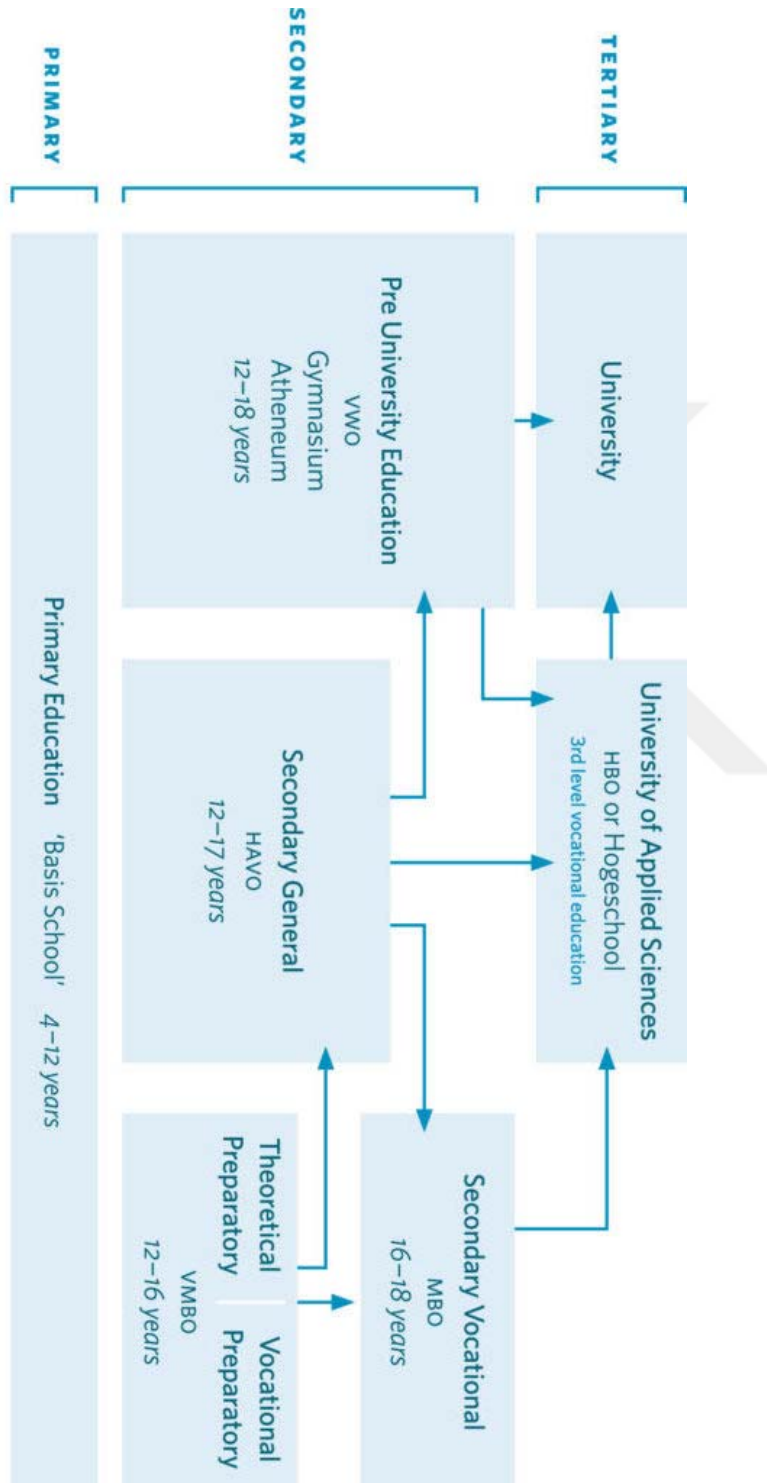12–16 years

Secondary Vocational
MBO
16–18 years

Table by Willemijn van Oppen, Educaide

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Appendix II: Biographical Profiles of Informants

In alphabetical order:

1. Aliyah (school director)

Aliyah is a school director of an Islamic primary school in a relatively small city in the Netherlands. Her family is from Moroccan descent who came to the Netherlands as migrants. She was raised in a small Dutch village where almost no other Muslims lived. She went to majority white Dutch primary and secondary schools (both Christian and public). During her university education for primary school teacher (PABO) she first got acquainted with other Muslims and Islam in general. She got further into Islamic education during an internship in the super-diverse city of Rotterdam, where a large minority of Muslims live. She was at first reluctant to work at an Islamic school as someone who did not wear the Islamic headscarf and did not really pay mind to her religious life and practice. However, once she started working at an Islamic school she felt right at home and never left. At one point in her career she made the switch from Rotterdam to the current Islamic school where she now works as a director. She describes the Islamic school she currently works at as "family".

2. Beyza (teacher):

Beyza is a teacher at an Islamic school in a super-diverse city which accommodates one of the largest Muslim minorities in the Netherlands. She was born in Turkey and migrated with her parents to Germany at the age of one and a half. During their time in Germany, Beyza's parents saw a generation of Turkish migrant children struggling to find their identity living between two cultures, including her own sibling. Her parents felt that German cultural norms and values clashed with Turkish culture and hence decided to send her back to Turkey. She enjoyed part of her school education in Istanbul, because her parents thought this would be better for her upbringing and safer. In what she called "the typical story of the first-generation migrant" her parents realized they were going to remain in Germany, instead of only working there for four

to five years. Before getting married and settling down in the Netherlands she also lived for several years in Germany, where she continued her secondary education. She regards her stay in Turkey positively, as she feels she was able to develop a strong religious identity and Islamic practice, while as a minority in Germany she could have been bullied for being different from the local native community. Upon returning to Germany around the age of sixteen she did feel a lot of social pressure as someone who wears the headscarf and she can understand the difficulties Muslim minorities go through. Beyza originally trained for being an administrator, but had difficulties finding a job because of her headscarf. Hence, she ended up studying to be a primary school teacher (PABO). After struggling through various internships at Christian and public schools, she ended up doing an internship at an Islamic school, where she at once felt at home and safe. Beyza remained a teacher at this school up until now.

3. Bushra (parent):

Bushra is a Muslim convert to Islam of originally Dutch Catholic background. She is a parent of several children who attend (or attended) Dutch Islamic primary schools. She was married with an Egyptian Muslim man and they lived in Egypt with their seven kids for a long time (ten years). Eventually she returned with her family to the Netherlands in 2011 and divorced from her husband. Her oldest children attended school in Egypt while her youngest children currently attend an Islamic school in the Netherlands. Hence Bushra is able to make keen observations between Islamic education in Egypt and the Netherlands. A key reason to send her children to Islamic schools is to help them learn about Islam and maintain a strong Muslim identity. She also found it important that her children would be educated in a safe environment where they would not be constantly judged because of being different. In addition, she thought the gap between the rather strict religious education her children received in Egypt and Dutch regular public education would be too large and that an Islamic school would make the transition of moving back to the Netherlands smoother. Bushra finds it important that her children learn how to pray and receive knowledge about Islam, but perhaps more important to her is that they can be "who they are" and that they can build a strong religious identity and be proud Muslims.

4. Betul (school director):

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Betul is a young school director of an Islamic school in a middle-sized city in the Netherlands. She is a second-generation child of migrant parents from Turkish descend. She grew up in a relatively small Dutch village with mostly Dutch friends and classmates. She received her primary and secondary education in the Netherlands and attended a Dutch university. She graduated as a primary school teacher (PABO) and further specialized during her graduate studies in the social sciences and orthopedagogy. In the final year of her study she sometimes substituted for the school as an internal supervisor (*intern begeleider*). It was the first time in her life she encountered Islamic education and the whole idea was new to her at the time. After her studies she worked full-time in this capacity at the school. When the former director retired, she was asked to become the director. She had to think long and hard before accepting this position since it brought a lot of responsibility and the school was going through rough times because it was monitored by the Educational Inspectorate. After long deliberation she accepted the challenged and after years of hard work the school was judged as "satisfactory" by the Inspectorate. When she first started out at this school an older generation of teachers and school management was dominant. Now there is a new team consisting of the younger Muslim generation and in her future vision for Islamic education she strongly believes in progressive change and openness towards Dutch society. At the same time, she struggles with the constant negative publicity of Islamic education and Islam in general in Dutch society. She however remains driven to prepare the new generation of Muslim children for full participation in Dutch society (and to include the children's first-generation migrant parents in this process). Betul is sometimes requested to give advice on Muslim parent participation by Dutch non-Islamic schools.

5. Eyyub (school director):

Eyyub is a school director of a sizable Islamic school in a major super-diverse Dutch city with a large and active Muslim minority. He is a first-generation migrant who originally hails from Turkey. Eyyub moved to the Netherlands in the early 1990s, primarily with the goal of studying. He studied mathematics and additionally graduated with a first-degree teaching permit (qualifying him to teach in both middle and high school). He started his career out as a math teacher in Dutch secondary

schools and taught at various schools for approximately eight years. When one of the first Islamic primary schools was opened in his city he started to work there, according to his own words "out of idealism". He wanted to do something meaningful for the Muslim minority of his city. At the beginning stages the school was lacking educational and organizational quality. At one point, Eyyub was asked to join the directional staff, while this was not his initial ambition. His passion was first and foremost to work with kids and to teach. Being one of the most senior employees of the school he was looked upon to gradually take over more and more directional tasks. This he did for several years (seven years in total). He worked at another Islamic school as the school director for five years before starting as a director at this current school. Hence, Eyyub has a wealth of working experience at different Islamic schools, both as a teacher and as a director. Under his leadership the school experienced an explosive growth from approximately 300 to 800 pupils. It is still rapidly growing, and they are seeking additional buildings due to space shortage. Eyyub is a driven educational leader who continues to develop himself. Most recently he finished an MA degree in behavioral sciences and currently he is finishing a second MA in sociology. As a director he also did additional courses in interim management and organizational change. He hopes to someday do a PhD in the field of education but is currently unable to find the time. His hart is with Islamic education. He loves working for these children and sees himself as a born educator.

6. Ibrahim (parent):

Ibrahim is a parent and first-generation migrant who was born and raised in Casablanca in Morocco. He is highly educated and graduated with a combined degree in law and economics and specialized in the banking sector. He comes from a rather secularized family that was highly influenced by French culture (Morocco being a former French colony). Islam did not play a major role in his upbringing in Casablanca. Ibrahim developed a renewed appreciation while living in the Netherlands. Now he is a practicing Muslim who holds his beliefs and faith dear. All four of his children are (or have been) in the same Islamic school. He has been passionately involved with the school as an active parent for over fourteen years. It has been a conscious decision of himself and his late wife to put the kids in an Islamic school. They did not regret this choice at all and are in fact rather proud. Ibrahim values Islamic culture and belief. His

wife and the mother of his four children recently passed away. This has been a great and sad loss for him. Still he was very glad to do this interview, because he is proud of his children and the school. He is also proud of the decision he and his wife made together. After being actively involved at the school for fourteen years it feels like the school community is family, especially since he has no family or relatives living in the Netherlands. He speaks fondly of the school; going to school is as if he is "visiting family". They currently are his and his children's greatest support in the mourning process of his recently deceased and beloved wife. In this process Ibrahim and his children find great support in their Islamic faith. All in all, he does find educational quality extremely important, but he finds the Islamic basis and principles of the school as equally important. At this school he thinks he has found a good combination of educational quality and religious faith.

7. Khadija (parent):

Khadija is a parent and a first-generation migrant from Morocco. She has four kinds who all have been to the same current Islamic school. During all these years she has been an active parent, both as a volunteer in school activities and in the parents' committee. She has consciously chosen an Islamic school for her kids. She treasures the Islamic values in the school; the prayers, the Islamic lessons, the Islamic morality, the religious feasts, the implementation of Islamic values and principles (for example the fact the boys and girls do gymnastics separately). Having been involved in Islamic education for these many years Khadija has observed many positive developments the school has gone through, such as major improvements in educational quality. However, she is also worried about the societal pressures on Islamic schools and the rise of islamophobia. She feels Muslims have to constantly proof themselves and have a negative stigma. She however maintains a positive outlook based on her own positive experiences in the school. Unable to exactly pinpoint how Islamic schools are special and differ from regular public schools, she thinks the general Islamic culture of the school makes all the difference. The school is a natural extension of the home and as Muslims they can be their selves, while also learning about Dutch society and values. Being at an Islamic school feels like "a puzzle that fits". As a parent Khadija feels the responsibility to teach her children Islamic values and morals. Choosing an Islamic schools seems like a positive contribution to this end.

8. Mehmet (regional educational manager):

Mehmet is a regional educational manager of a large umbrella organization for several Islamic schools in the middle and eastern regions of the Netherlands. He was ten years old when he migrated to the Netherlands with his parents from Turkey in 1970. He graduated as an engineer and chemist and worked in the technical sector for ten years, first in a laboratory and then in leadership roles. He got involved with Islamic education when it was in its early stages in the late 1980s as a volunteer. At the time Mehmet was a father of one child and they had been experiencing problems at the public school (availability of halal food, clothing requirements etc.). As a Muslim parent he felt his voice was not heard. When the news came in that the very first Islamic schools were opened in two major Dutch cities in 1988, he and other Muslim parents jumped to the opportunity and gathered information to start their own Islamic school in 1990. He was one of the founders and board member. Shortly after, he was asked to participate in the national umbrella organization for Islamic education (ISBO) as well. This organization was a legal requirement since all special and religious schools need to have one in the Netherlands, hence ISBO was also established in 1990. For a few years he acted as the organization's secretary on voluntary basis, but after tremendous growth in the amount of Islamic schools through the years this turned into a full-time paid position. Until that point Mehmet had a well-paid leadership role in the technical sector. However, out of passion for Islamic education he decided to give up his job and switch to the educational sector full-time. He worked at ISBO for several years and eventually became its director with a staff working under him. He worked for ISBO for ten years in various roles until 2000. In these years Islamic education in the Netherlands went through tumultuous times due to rapid growth and organizational mismanagement. Some of the reasons were the low educational level and lack of experience of the first initiators of Dutch Islamic schools. Islamic education also suffered in that time under bad media publicity and a negative public image. Aside from the issue of mismanagement there was also a general societal resistance and a feeling of undesirability towards the schools. There was no general idea of why these schools were desirable or beneficial amongst the Dutch public and politics. The steep growth of Islamic schools however showed the keen interest of the Muslim community in Islamic education for their children to develop their Islamic identity and to create a

space in education for Islamic sensitivities (requests for these issues by Muslim parents at regular public schools fell on deaf ears). Aside from religious identity, educational quality also played a major role in the establishment of Islamic schools. Children of first-generation Muslim migrants massively ended up in lower education and lower jobs due to various reasons (such as language deficiencies and underestimation). Strengthening Islamic identity and educational quality became two major pillars in Mehmet's vision and mission for Islamic education in the Netherlands. He was also involved in the attempt to organize all Islamic schools into regional units. This project only succeeded partially and the organization he currently heads (which covers the middle and eastern regions of the Netherlands) is one of the regional units that did materialize. In this role, he and his team build a professional organization that manages several schools in the region. The organization's main purpose is financial management, quality control and Islamic identity and policy development, and in this role the organization can anticipate and intervene in various local school organizations. It also develops educational materials for the schools and provides advice on Islamic educational policy to schools (both from within and from outside of the region).

9. Nadia (assistant school director):

Nadia is both an assistant school director and internal supervisor (*intern begeleider*) at an Islamic school in a middle-sized Dutch city. She started out as a teacher and has been active in the field of education for ten years in various roles. She graduated as a primary school teacher (PABO) and did internships at various schools (Catholic, regular public and Islamic schools). She herself went to an Islamic school as a child and always retained an interest in Islamic education. Therefore, she saved her longest internships (the so-called LIO internship) for an Islamic school. As someone who attended an Islamic school in childhood working at an Islamic school feels like "coming home". In fact, her internship was at her own old school, so her former teachers now became her colleagues. When the job opportunity came to work at her current Islamic school she jumped to the opportunity and moved to the city where the school is located. While not knowing her new colleagues yet, she had feelings of recognition because of the Islamic identity of the school, which filled her with positivity. Working at this Islamic school she has always experienced as pleasurable. Nadia is also part-time active at a different Islamic school in a major Dutch city with

a large Muslim community. Her parents made a very conscious decision by putting her on an Islamic school and they were also involved with the establishment of the school. Her older siblings went to Protestant Christian schools and were forced to recite from the bible. Her parents experienced trouble with the school when they objected. From then on, her parents saw the necessity of an Islamic school that adhered to the basic principles and values of the Islamic faith. Nadia firmly believes in the values of the freedom of religion and religious education that is ensured by the Dutch constitution and hence believes Muslims have a right to establish and run their own schools. Islamic schools provide a safe and warm space for Muslim children to develop their Islamic identity and self-confidence. Here children are not constantly bombarded with questions about their identity. They can focus on educational quality and developing their personality instead of continually being confronted with their cultural and religious otherness.

10. Rashid (teacher):

Rashid is a teacher at an Islamic school in a relatively small city in the Netherlands. He is of Moroccan descent, in his late twenties and grew up in a small Dutch village. He graduated from university as a primary school teacher (PABO) and works part-time as a primary school teacher. He also works part-time for a non-profit organization as a project leader for the "transformative school". For this project Rashid develops materials and activities to increase the self-confidence and self-efficiency of children. In this context he is also involved in teacher-trainings and masterclasses at nine different schools. He specialized in group dynamics and behavioral processes in education. After his final LIO-internship Rashid had several Islamic schools in his environment to choose from to work at. He chose this particular school because of its educational philosophy, which is very much child-centered. In terms of educational quality, he thinks this school is on par with regular public schools. His ideal is that in the future Islamic schools would be so good that non-Muslim Dutch parents would want their children to go to these schools as well. Rashid thinks Islamic schools can be effective because they know their target group and know with which problems they struggle with regards to finding their place in Dutch society and dealing with two cultures. But in essence he does not see a significant difference between his Islamic school and a regular public school, aside from the school's alignment with Islamic

values and practices (such as praying at school). The same subjects are taught and the curriculum is similar. In addition, he believes many of the Islamic values that are taught in an Islamic school are in fact universal values, that would also apply to Catholic or Jewish schools for example. Hence the real value of Islamic schools, according to Rashid, is the fact that the teachers know the culture, language, values and specific problems and challenges Muslim migrant parents and their children deal with and can thus help to effectively overcome them. Islamic schools can thus easily relate to the social environments of Muslim children. The Islamic faith is what binds the school and the Muslim community together, even though it is ethnically and linguistically diverse. The school, for Rashid, functions as a space were children can be their selves and where they are allowed to make mistakes. It is a place where they can practice and prepare themselves for Dutch society. The Islamic teachings should be taught in connection to the idea of citizenship, because in the end all children are individuals. As individuals the personality development of the children should be central. For the future Rashid hopes an institute will be established that conducts research in Islamic education and how this can be implemented in the Netherlands.

11. Sophie (parent):

Sophie is a parent and Dutch convert to Islam. In addition, she works at the same Islamic school her children attend as a class assistant and remedial teacher (the latter as part of the care team of the school). Sophie has an originally Christian background and lived in a small village in the "Bible Belt" of the Netherlands. She had a hard time finding a primary school for her children either due to educational quality issues or the fact that many of the schools in this region were strictly reformed Calvinist Christian (and hence not very open to religious diversity). Forced to look for other options, she heard about an Islamic school in a nearby small city. While the building was in a run-down state, they were very warmly welcomed. The school immediately felt "right". Her ex-husband's family lived abroad, and her own family was non-Muslim, so they craved a more Islamic environment that was more in line with the religious norms and values they tried to teach their children at home. While researching school options for her children Sophie first and foremost looked at the educational quality of the school by reading Inspectorate reports. She believes ultimately the educational aspect of a school should be more central, and not the particular identity of the school. But the

Islamic identity of the school did feel like a good match. For this particular school she also liked the balance between Muslim and non-Muslim teachers. She thinks it adds value that the school is guided by Islamic principles but that there is also room for diversity. Sophie is sometimes critical of Islamic schools for being too focused on educational accomplishments and achievements, while the aspect of personality development and creativity also deserves more attention (instead of mostly focusing on the traditional school subjects such as language, mathematics etc.). However, if she had to choose between regular public or Islamic education, she would choose the latter, because of the general Islamic culture of the school and the presence of Islamic prayers, religious holidays and other religious practices. She enjoys these aspects of the faith and wishes for her children to experience these too. She wants religion to be something that is "alive" in the school, as it is at home. This type of Islam as a lived culture she ultimately finds more important that the transmission of knowledge about the Islamic faith.

12. Zahid (religious teacher):

Zahid is a young religious teacher at an Islamic school from Dutch-Pakistani descent. He was born and raised one of the largest super-diverse cities of the Netherlands with a high percentage of Muslim migrants. He attended a regular public school, but also received additional religious instruction at home from his father, who is an imam and a religious scholar. His mother was also a religiously devout and practicing Muslim. Hence Zahid was thoroughly influenced by the deep spirituality of his Islamic upbringing throughout his childhood and youth. He therefore developed a strong interest in the study of Islam. He studied Islamic theology and Arabic language and culture at two major Dutch universities. In university he was also confronted with he academic study of Islam and orientalism, which opened up his intellectual horizon. During his bachelors he also spend a semester in Palestine to learn Arabic and Arab culture. Instead of merely learning Islam from books, he wanted to experience Islam as a living culture and see how Muslims practice Islam in an Arab country. After finishing his undergraduate he lived in Jordan for a year for traditional education in the Islamic sciences. After Jordan he spend on and a half year in Egypt to study at the famous al-Azhar University. There he studied two programs, for being an imam and a mufti. Upon returning to the Netherlands Zahid finished an MA degree in Islamic

studies in Berlin, Germany. Currently, he is a religious instructor at an Islamic primary school and a teacher in the Dutch language for Syrian refugees residing in the Netherlands. He is very much aware of the impact of modern culture and Dutch culture on the lives of young Muslims in the Netherlands and thinks Islamic education should correspond with the mindset and lifestyle of these children. Hence, he tries to teach Islam in a way that is appropriate to them. He also maintains an open attitude towards diversity and Dutch culture. Islam and Dutch culture, he believes, do not have to be antithetical. They can go hand in hand, if thought of in the right way. Hence, children can be taught to be good practicing Muslims and good Dutch citizens at the same time. He sees his role as a religious teacher as supplementing the Islamic upbringing Muslim children receive at home. The school, then, is a natural extension of the home. He tries to speak to the minds of the children by using humor and modern media in his lessons. Zahid appreciates that in the Netherlands there is a certain freedom for Muslims to set up Islamic schools and thinks Muslims should fully make use of these opportunities.

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