

Islam in the Netherlands

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As is true of most western European countries, the Netherlands has witnessed the emergence of Islam as a result of large-scale immigration. Over the past twenty-five years, somewhat more than 700,000 immigrants and refugees from Islamic countries have settled in the Netherlands. Today they constitute 4.5 percent of the total population of 16 million. Turks form the largest group (300,000), followed by Moroccans (252,000), Surinamese (35,000), Pakistanis (5,000), and a few thousand Moluccans. Most of them came as migrant workers. In more recent years, a growing number of Muslims have arrived as refugees from countries such as the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, Iran, Afghanistan, and Iraq.

For a long time, hardly anyone realized that, with the influx of so-called guest workers, a new religion had also entered the Netherlands.¹ Initially, Islamic practices remained hidden behind the walls of the boarding houses where the single male immigrants lived. On special occasions such as Ramadan, Muslims were sometimes able to make use of factory halls or churches to perform their religious duties and to celebrate their holidays. It was really only on these occasions that the Dutch citizenry sensed their presence. Until the end of the 1970s, the government and the society considered the presence of Muslims a temporary phenomenon. Islam was brought to Europe as "cultural baggage" by immigrant laborers who would soon return to their home countries. The few who stayed permanently, they assumed, would gradually assimilate into Dutch society, which itself was in the middle of a process of secularization and modernization.

A quarter of a century later, the idea that Islam is a kind of residue from former societies that would soon "dry up" or fade away has at least partly been seen to be false. In the early 1970s, there were only a few provisional places of Muslim worship. A decade later, some 100 permanent mosques had grown up across the country, a number that has now increased to more than 400.² In other respects, too, Islam has become more visible to the outside world. Muslim families have settled in the old quarters of the main cities, where they have opened their own shops and teahouses. Children attend the public schools, and in 1988 the first Islamic primary school was started. Currently there are more than thirty Islamic schools. In many fields, special arrangements have been made to enable Muslims to live according to Islamic prescriptions. It is clear that in the past twenty-five years, Islam has gained a foothold in Dutch society. Muslims have managed to create a religiocultural infrastructure and to give Islam a public face. This has been referred to as the institutionalization of Islam.³

In this chapter we first focus on the conditions under which this institutionalization process has taken place in the Netherlands and, more generally, how the Netherlands has dealt with the new religious and ethnic diversity over the past decades. The Netherlands, like other western European countries, grants religious freedom to all religious denominations. The possibilities for Muslims to set up a religious infrastructure are generally conditioned by constitutional principles of freedom of religious worship and the separation of church and state. The argument put forward here is that, in addition to these general principles, in each country there are specific conditions and circumstances that produce considerable differences with respect to the place of religion in society and the model of civic incorporation.⁴ This not only structures the way in which institutionalization takes place but also shapes the ongoing debates about the place of Islam in society.

Religion and the Dutch State

Apart from the general principles of freedom of religion and the separation of church and state, there are three main constitutive factors that have influenced the place of Islam in Dutch society. The first is the constitutional principle of religious equality. The Dutch Constitution of 1983 stipulates that all religious denominations are equally valued.⁵ Although this principle of equality actually dates back to the liberal Constitution of 1848, the idea was reinforced and reformulated in 1983, when all financial and other ties between the churches and the state were severed. An important aspect of the equality principle is that the Dutch system does not apply the principle of religious recognition and registration, as is true in Belgium or Germany. Thus, there are no religious denominations in the Netherlands that formally have more privileges than do others. Equality means equal treatment in similar situations. Although there still remains a good deal of inequality between established denominations like the Reformed and the Catholic churches and "new" religions like Islam and Hinduism, this principle of equality has offered Islamic leaders legal and political leverage to demand equal treatment and, in some cases, extra provisions in order to be able to catch up with established denominations.

The second factor relates to the era of pillarization that shaped Dutch society and the political landscape from the 1920s until the 1960s. The Dutch pillar system is one of the more complicated aspects of Dutch political history. During those forty years, Dutch civil society consisted of two pillars, a Catholic one and a Protestant one. In addition, there was a Socialist movement and a so-called Liberal sphere.⁶ These politico-ideological blocks determined, to a large extent, the political relations in the Netherlands; they also, however, fragmented the Dutch population. The two confessional pillars comprised more than 50 percent of the Dutch population and ran through all social classes. They had their own political parties, trade unions, schools, universities, media, and all kinds of other associations. The churches were at the heart of these pillars. The Socialist movement, not a pillar in the literal sense, was actually organized as one, although it had its political base mainly in the labor class. These three blocks were organized from top to bottom and exerted great influence on their rank-and-file. The ruling elite of the Liberal sphere was economically the strongest faction in society, but it did not have a social-organizational base like the other three blocks. To a certain extent, it also represented a

category of people who were not affiliated with one of the three other blocks and who adhered to the principles of the liberal Constitution of 1848.⁷ Although these kinds of politico-ideological divisions were not unique to the Netherlands, they served to almost completely shape and determine the political relations during that period. Dutch society was characterized by a political (in some critiques, rigid) stability that contributed to a sense of "natural" character. Despite the divisions, there was a strong feeling of belonging to one nation. The different political and ideological blocks were considered more or less equal and balanced. Social conflicts were resolved and neutralized by closely cooperating ruling elites at the top of the four blocks. It is mainly because of the rigidity of the system from the 1920s and the 1960s that political changes were slow to develop in the Netherlands. For that reason, the system continued to shape political relations for a considerable period of time, even after the Second World War.

By the 1960s, the system ceased to function as it had, and most sections of civil society experienced a process of decategorization and a breakdown of the pillar structure. Although the societal forces that sustained the pillarization process are today almost completely replaced by the centralizing mechanisms of the modern welfare state, the juridical remnants of the system do still play a role in some crucial areas. The most important is the Dutch school system, which is still largely pillarized. The particular (*bijzondere*) school system continues to operate parallel to the public (*openbare*) schools and receives equal support from taxes; at the same time, it maintains relative autonomy, making it a crucial element in educational politics. These principles of equality with respect to education were officially effectuated by the constitutional changes of 1917, the so-called pacification laws. Public education is organized and administered by the state. Particular schools, which are usually confessional, have their own administrative boards. Most of these confessional schools were of Christian (Catholic or Protestant) origin. In addition to that, there were some Jewish schools and "Free schools" (anthroposophical), which grew in number after the Second World War. Since the waves of postwar immigration, Islamic and Hindu schools have been added to the list.⁸ Although there is today a steady increase in public schools, the majority of pupils at primary schools are still enrolled in particular education. It is important to recognize, however, that the basic core curriculum is similar and obligatory in all types of schools. This curriculum is the responsibility of the state. The difference between public and particular schools is mainly a matter of educational method, extracurricular activities, and amount of religious education.

Other activities organized on the basis of juridical provisions originating in the pillar system are pastoral welfare work in hospitals and prisons and various kinds of public broadcasting. Muslims can relatively easily make use of these provisions. Since the end of the 1980s, a little more than thirty state-financed Islamic primary schools and one secondary school have been founded in the Netherlands. Despite the fact that discussion about the implications of secularization has taken place even in many confessional schools, the system is one of the most delicate issues in Dutch politics.

The third factor concerns Dutch minority policies. Muslims are generally considered immigrants, and as such they are subject to specific requirements and aims of the Dutch minority policies that have been set up and developed since the early 1980s. Key to these policies are the concepts of permanent residence and integration of immigrants into Dutch society, in light of a (limited) recognition of cultural diversity. Thus, Muslims have the right to set up their own religious infrastructure, and they can make use

of the juridical provisions that enable them to found their own schools, with the understanding that this should in no way hamper their integration into society.

The shifting interplay between these constitutive factors over the past decades has rendered particular meaning to the typical Dutch model of citizenship. In the following sections we first give an historical account of general developments in the past two or three decades. We then illustrate one particular aspect of the discussions about immigrant Islam that offers good insight into the complexity and sometimes contradictory aspects of Dutch political culture, namely the ongoing debate about the wearing of the headscarf in public places.

Muslims, Migrants, and Citizens

Until the end of the 1970s, the cultural and religious backgrounds of immigrants did not play any significant role in debates about their position in society. Immigrants were defined in terms of ethnic origin, but this was of no political consequence. Officially, the Netherlands did not yet conceive of itself as an immigration country. Immigrants were seen primarily as temporary laborers who would return to their countries of origin. Policies were based on this idea of temporariness. The creation of religious facilities was therefore considered to be something that should be completely left to private initiative. No special policies were needed.

Toward the end of the 1970s, important developments took place. The number of immigrants increased considerably, primarily because of family reunions. These families settled in the old quarters of the main town centers. Although the vast majority of the Muslims still hoped to return to their country of origin, the actual return was usually postponed. Many immigrants had no alternative other than staying in Holland because of financial constraints. Religious activities increased, and organizational structures began to grow up, creating an increased need for religious facilities and especially for qualified religious personnel. Many mosque organizations developed into real centers for immigrants, with teahouses, shops, and other facilities. The first attempts were made by various local Muslim associations to work together, to improve communication, and to coordinate activities. The number of religious organizations grew steadily. It was, however, a development that hardly caught the attention of Dutch society.

Toward the beginning of the 1980s, a turning point was reached. For the first time, the government acknowledged that the idea of temporariness was, for most immigrants, unrealistic. It began to be recognized that the majority of the immigrants would stay in the country permanently. In 1983, the government issued a report in which the outline of a new policy was formulated. It was at this point that the concept of "integration with the preservation of identity" (*integratie met behoud van identiteit*) was introduced.⁹ Immigrants were granted basic rights to live according to their own cultural backgrounds; at the same time, they were expected to integrate into society. This became the typical Dutch trajectory to full citizenship. "Integration" was narrowed down to "participation" in the central sectors of society: labor, housing, and education. Along with this concept of integration, the term *achterstand* (best translated as "deprivation") made its way into the discourse. Failure to integrate was equated with *achterstand*, and vice versa. Equality meant "equality of starting positions," not "similarity."¹⁰

An important aspect of this new discourse was that a relation was constructed between integration on the one hand and cultural background on the other. "Guest workers" were now called "ethnic minorities," "cultural minorities," or "ethnic groups," and later on "allochthonous." In other words, a shift in the definition of the situation took place. From an economic category, immigrants came to be seen in terms of a cultural one.

Cultural background thus became a relevant factor in integration policies. During the 1980s, the government adopted a lenient attitude toward cultural specificities. In the first place, there was the general notion that culture and religion are basic properties of human beings. The Netherlands, with its history of pillarization, had always been a society that supported religious pluralism, and the general feeling was that it should live up to that ideal. In addition, the relevance of cultural background to one's well-being should be acknowledged. In the trajectory to full citizenship, the relevance of culture and religion for the people concerned was recognized as an important psychological outlet. Immigrants should have time to adapt to their new circumstances, and this could best be accomplished in "their own circles." Organizations of immigrants were considered to function as bridges between individuals and society in order to ensure a smooth integration. As such, they gained more significance in the integration process. They were politically and ideologically incorporated into the government's policies. Also, Islamic organizations were considered important to immigrant identity, and their activities were judged in terms of their function in the process of integration. Organizations could now apply for subsidies to develop activities for their rank-and-file members, provided these activities sustained the integration process. This has been described as the "migrantization" of Islamic organizations.¹¹ One of the consequences was that the number of such organizations grew disproportionately during the 1980s.

Despite this political climate favorable for the growth of Islamic organizations (as immigrant organizations), there was a simultaneous concern about the attitude of Muslims and their organizations toward the principles and priorities of integration programs developed by the government. The new policies of integration took shape at a time during which some rather dramatic events were taking place in the Islamic world itself, such as the revolution in Iran and the assassination of the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat. These events resulted in a tremendous increase in the number of publications about Islam and its adherents. Suddenly immigrants from countries like Turkey and Morocco were "discovered" as Muslims. A new cultural category called "Muslim immigrants" began to emerge. For convenience's sake, people with completely different backgrounds were lumped together as the possessors of "Muslim culture." Since it was mainly Muslims who faced problems of deprivation with respect to housing, labor, and education, "Muslim culture" carried a specific meaning.

Islam increasingly became the explanatory factor, not only for specific (collective) behavior of Muslims but also for the kinds of societal problems they face. This "Islamization of the discourse" in many cases led to some sort of narrowed awareness: "when one wants to know what goes on in the head of a Muslim then one should study Islam." All other possible explanations were in fact reduced to "the" Islam.¹² Although this line of thinking was not found explicitly in official documents, it was part of public discourse on Islam as expressed in newspapers and magazines, as well as in statements by individual politicians in Parliament and on television. Besides that, there was a growing

interest in Islam and its adherents among welfare workers and other people working with and for Muslims in various situations.

Consequently, a specific image of Islam based on the idea that Muslims are the least integrated of the immigrants became prominent. Just as the country itself was on the way to eliminating religion as a binding force in society, a new religious group had appeared and asked for provisions that had almost disappeared in Dutch society. And it was representing not just another religion, but one known for its antimodern character, one whose adherents are seen as passive, fatalist people who are turned inward and who find it difficult to keep up with the pace of modern society and who for that reason easily fall back on their faith. One of the main objections to the formation of Islamic schools is that they cause undesirable isolation of young children; Islam enforces rules upon them that prevent them from taking part in society.

The origin of this image is related to the so-called rural bias. Because most of the first-generation Muslim immigrants came from a rural background, the very word "Muslim" suggested a rural image. Rural habits and Islamic prescriptions were seen as woven together into the fabric of the religion as a whole. Despite the potentially negative tone in this type of discourse, boundaries between "them" and "us" have not been seen by the Dutch to be impermeable. The image, rather, suggests a kind of understanding, compassion, and even inclusiveness. Muslims are not fundamentally excluded as a separate category; they are seen as constrained by their faith, which enforces rules upon them. But these problems can be overcome through systematic socialization; the boundary between Muslims and the rest of society may be temporary, provided certain conditions are fulfilled.

As a result of the political and ideological developments that took place in the 1980s, a new type of Islamic leadership emerged. These leaders had lived in the Netherlands for a relatively long time; they knew society quite well and acted as intermediaries between Muslim immigrants and Dutch society. They were entrepreneurs rather than "ideologues" and were oriented toward mobilizing as many resources as possible. They successfully made use of their contacts with Dutch policymakers and institutions. They emphasized that Islamic organizations must be considered as the main forms of self-organization among immigrants. These leaders increasingly took part in discussions on the position of immigrants in Dutch society, and as opinion leaders they were influential in defining the situation. They represented the Muslim populations to society as a whole and articulated the needs that existed among Muslims and what it means to be a Muslim in a non-Islamic society. By stressing the foreign character of Islam as part of a specific cultural heritage, they were able to convince policymakers that certain facilities were required.

Toward the end of the 1980s, because of several particular developments, a change took place. The lenient attitude toward the preservation of cultural identities and the prominent role that had been given to immigrant organizations came under pressure. In an advisory report, the influential Scientific Board of Government Policies (WRR) warned the government about the continually weak socioeconomic position of minorities.¹³ Unemployment figures among immigrants remained relatively high, and educational results remained below the expected levels. The conclusion was that integration was bound to fail unless the government put more emphasis on the struggle against poverty and deprivation, even at the cost of cultural multiplicity. Integration gradually

came to have a more individualized connotation. Notions of the collective integration of certain minority groups were replaced by the stress on an individual trajectory to full-scale integration into the "hard" sectors of society. More than before, participation in the central institutions of society became key term in the integration policy. General programs for combating poverty and deprivation gradually replaced specific programs targeted to specific groups.

In addition, the image of Islam itself changed considerably. More or less as a direct consequence of the Rushdie Affair, a new type of image made its way into the public discourse. This image is far from harmless and links Muslims in the Netherlands to the violence in the Middle East. Muslims are conceived as a fifth column that may be a threat to society. The ongoing debate about growing fundamentalism among immigrants, the alleged connections between Muslims here and fundamentalist groups and regimes in the Middle East, and the perceived strong orientation of Muslims toward their country of origin are all the results of this alleged association.

The main difference between the new understanding and that which underlay the first model is that boundaries are now seen to be impermeable. In this new view, Muslims constitute a different "brand." They will never become part of Dutch citizenry unless they abjure their religion completely. They do not fit in the Dutch nation, since it is not the preservation of culture that they aim at but transnational political activism. One of the leaders of the Dutch conservative party said in 1991 that he considered Islam to be the main threat to European liberal civilization. Muslims, therefore, must be carefully monitored.¹⁴

At the turn of the new century, there seem to be two main, contrasting positions in the public debate about cultural diversity, multiculturalism, and Islam in the Netherlands. The first one is a slightly revised version of the neoliberal view on individual rights. It envisions society as being made up of individuals who have equal relations to the state. Integration means an individual trajectory into the central institutions of society, and equality is defined on an individual level. Cultural diversity, therefore, is subservient to this principle. Members of religious or ethnic collectivities cannot claim specific collective rights on the basis of cultural peculiarities with respect to their position in society, since this would jeopardize equality. At this point the approach is reminiscent of the French republican model; it does not, however, mean that cultural peculiarities are to be discarded completely. The state should acknowledge that culture can have an important impact on the well-being of the individual, so there must be room for cultural and religious expression. But, at the same time, all individuals must have a moral responsibility toward the nation as a whole. They should enter into a sort of social contract with the state and with society and subscribe to the liberal principles central to the nation-state.

Distinct from the French model in which citizenry is defined as a territorial community and where civic incorporation is based on the *jus soli* principle, and from the German model by which the understanding of nationhood and citizenship is based on descent,¹⁵ this Dutch version of citizenship can be described as "contained pluralism," or "plural equality." The model is in some respects similar to the American "nation of nationalities" in that the Netherlands is today acknowledged as an immigration country with immigrants from different ethnic backgrounds, although in terms of the integration trajectory it follows the French assimilationist logic. The assumption is that, through a coherent program of economic and educational measures, structural inequality between immigrants

and native Dutch society should disappear. Once this is accomplished, everybody can take part in society on an equal basis without having to deny ethnic or religious specificities. According to this argument, when material equality is achieved, ethnic differences will become irrelevant and may eventually fade away completely. The Dutch term "allochtonous," referring to the ethnic minorities, in fact contains all these elements. It refers not to culturally distinct collectivities but to equal and distinct individuals.

The other view hinges on the idea that the history of pillarization in the Netherlands offers a relevant framework for the development of a model that grants certain collective rights to religious groups. According to this view, it is unrealistic to deny the fact that the Netherlands is a multicultural society. Although the collective emancipation of religious denominations at the beginning of the twentieth century led to a fragmentation of society into confessional blocks, at the same time it contributed to the building up of the Dutch unified nation. The pillars were the principal integrative devices in the Dutch nation-state. In a modern multicultural society, new ethnic or religious collectivities can integrate into society in a similar way. Supporters of this view question the fear of neoliberals that an emphasis on ethnic and religious autonomy jeopardizes the integrity and unity of the nation. Recognition of religious diversity and certain collective rights granted to religious denominations, it is argued, will in no way infringe upon the goals of the governmental policies of civic integration (*inburgering*).¹⁶

Each of these positions invokes different principles and emphasizes different aspects of Dutch political culture. As a consequence, each gives different meanings to concepts like equality, freedom, emancipation, and integration. The recent debates about multiculturalism clearly reflect these different positions. In order to elucidate this, let us now look more closely at some cases with respect to a seemingly controversial aspect of Islamic identity: the headscarf.

The Headscarf Debates: Between Ideals and Pragmatism

For many Muslim women, the wearing of a scarf is an essential part of their identity, although there always have been and still are many discussions on whether it is an absolute religious requirement and how its use should be interpreted. Women wear different types of scarves or veils; some cover only the hair and others the whole face. In the Netherlands, most Muslim women who dress Islamically wear a scarf that covers only the hair and ears. The scarf, of course, is not the only element of Islamic dress; many Muslim women feel that they also should wear clothes that cover all of their bodies, except their faces and hands. In Holland as elsewhere, however, not all Muslim women believe that it is incumbent on them to wear Islamic clothing. The children of the early guest workers, who were often born and raised in the Netherlands, do not necessarily adopt the Islamic style of clothing, and girls as well as boys often can be seen wearing western clothes.

Since the 1980s, several so-called headscarf affairs have taken place in the Netherlands. These have varied from relatively small discussions in public schools to national debates, although they have never reached the extent of the controversies in France, where a large part of society, including politicians and intellectuals, have been involved in discussion.

The first headscarf affair in the Netherlands took place in Alphen aan den Rijn, a town in the province of South Holland, in January 1985. The city council decided that girls should not be allowed to wear scarves in public primary schools, because these scarves would impede the integration of Muslim girls with other pupils in the classroom. Muslim parents protested the decision. They organized themselves into a committee and sought to discuss the issue with the council, but the council refused because it did not consider the committee to be an official representative body. The community then decided to contact an expert on Islam from the University of Leiden, who would be able to give them advice on the delicate matter. This specialist concluded that the wearing of an Islamic scarf is neither essential nor absolutely necessary to exercise Islamic duties. This was, of course, the answer that the city council wanted, since it supported the council's decision.

However, protests continued, by local Muslim organizations and also by the national organization for foreigners (NCB). This led to a discussion in Parliament, where the minister of education was questioned about the matter. He had to admit that it was not up to a city council to interpret the Qur'an and to judge the importance of a scarf for Muslims. Consequently, the city council saw no other option than to reverse the measure. Girls were allowed to wear scarves in public school again. This case illustrates some important things. First of all, the argument of the city council that integration of Muslim girls was possible only if they renounced the headscarf points to the growing concern in those years about the results of the integration programs. Taking off the headscarf was seen as a sign of integration, whereas wearing the scarf was a sign that integration was somehow being hampered. Thus, religious symbols became conflated with policies related to the integration of minorities.

Second, the case shows that, in those years, self-representation of Muslims was still very rudimentary. While there were some official representative organizations, Muslims themselves were at that time barely able to raise issues themselves, since their representatives, if any, were almost never consulted. Third, this case shows the typical Dutch way of solving these kinds of cultural problems. Instead of asking Muslims themselves, the matter was referred to "experts." Although this is still a common practice, more and more young Muslims, most of them born and raised in the Netherlands, demand that they themselves be asked. They consider the wearing of the headscarf such a personal issue that it should not be a matter for external "experts" to decide.

The reaction to the initial decision by the municipality was certainly not expected. It was one of the first cases of "Muslims talking back." The relative ease with which the municipality gave in also shows that the question about headscarves was an issue that had not been thoroughly discussed internally. After this incident, which took place relatively early in comparison to France, where the Creil debate broke out in 1989 (see chapter 2), no other significant debates on female dress took place. Since there was no official national guideline regarding the veiling of girls in schools, communities and schools generally could decide for themselves, within the boundaries of the principles of religious freedom, what their regulations should be.

In the 1980s, the Alphen aan den Rijn incident was a novelty, but the fact that there were no other incidents in the Netherlands, as was true in France, does not imply that there were no problems. In many schools throughout the country, discussions arose with Muslim girls on practical issues. For example, there were girls who refused to take

their scarves off during physical education, chemistry, and handicraft lessons, despite the argument of some teachers that wearing them might be dangerous. Some pupils indeed took their scarves off during these courses, but others did not. Usually, a solution was found; the girls wore tighter scarves or bathing caps to diminish the practical danger. Swimming lessons, which are compulsory in Dutch primary schools, have also caused some discussion. Muslim girls sometimes do not want to swim in bathing suits that leave large parts of their body uncovered, nor do they want to swim in the presence of boys or men. In most cases, this has been resolved through discussions among parents, community members, and teachers. In several large cities, separate swimming lessons for girls have been organized. Instead of bathing suits, Muslim girls sometimes wear less revealing old-fashioned clothing.

These relatively small skirmishes have continued since the beginning of the 1990s. Solutions seem to be found more easily now, however, as most schools have experienced and know what to expect of their Muslim pupils. There is, in other words, an increase in argumentative skills on both sides, not least because the media have given a great deal of attention to such issues. Incidents have been documented and publicized, and in general the debates are now conducted in a more sophisticated way.

In the 1990s, another factor arose to complicate the discussion, namely Islamic "fundamentalism." In September 1994, another major headscarf affair broke out at a secondary private school, the Protestant-Catholic Baandert College, in the town of Heemskerk, in the province of North Holland. Two female pupils of Turkish descent were refused admission because they wore headscarves. The school's headmaster stated that he considered the Islamic veil a sign of Islamic fundamentalism and of the inequality between men and women in Islam. After lengthy discussions among the schoolteachers and the board, the school finally accepted the girls, but it still stressed its concern about the position of women in Islam. It was the first time that a school had openly raised such issue related to the religion of its pupils. Arguments about practicality or about integration were replaced by arguments about principle.

In November 1994, another problem arose at a public secondary school in Vlaardingen, a town in the suburbs of Rotterdam, when two Muslim girls of Turkish descent refused to take off their headscarves during physical education. The school's headmaster argued that headscarves constituted a practical danger during these classes and that the girls should take them off. He emphasized the fact that it was not an antireligious argument, for Muslim girls were allowed to wear clothes with long sleeves and trousers during physical education. After discussions between the school officials and the father of the two pupils, with the help of a school inspector of Turkish descent, a compromise was reached: the girls were allowed to wear scarves, provided they were tight enough to allow the girls to move freely during the course. Again, a solution was found in compromise.

Another issue came to the fore as a result of an incident in December 1999 at the Caland-lyceum in Amsterdam, namely the status of public schools in relation to the pillarized educational structure in the Netherlands. Seven "well-integrated" female Muslim pupils asked the school for permission to pray in a vacant classroom during school break. The school's headmaster refused this on the grounds of the public character of the school. Praying was said to be something that one should do at home, not in a public school. To stress the fact that he was not anti-Islamic, he added that his school was very considerate of the duties of Muslim pupils during Ramadan, allowing them to

go home early during this month. The pupils insisted that prayer is an Islamic religious duty, that they were not bothering anyone, and that all they were asking for was the key to a classroom.

A debate arose in the press and also among Dutch politicians, who were reluctant to make statements about the issue. A great range of arguments was put forward. Those in favor of allowing the prayer said that a refusal would cause the Dutch Muslims to ask for their own Islamic secondary schools, which could mean an end to integration in public schools and the complete segregation of Muslim pupils. Others pointed out in the name of equal opportunity that facilities for prayer existed in many workplaces and that a school should provide for the same. But most politicians agreed with the headmaster's arguments, fearing that allowing the prayers would open the door to the demands by pupils of different religions and nationalities, which would undermine the general rules in public schools.

Several cases are known of female Muslim teachers who have applied for jobs but were not accepted because of their headscarves. Muslim women teachers are regularly asked to take off their headscarves in front of the class. In Islamic primary schools, it is of course no problem if a teacher is veiled. On the contrary, even non-Muslim teachers are sometimes asked to wear headscarves inside the school because such practice is in accordance with the prevailing moral code.

Besides problems in schools, Muslims in the Netherlands often encounter problems in the sphere of work. Although it is legally forbidden to discriminate against a person because of his or her religion, employers still face such problems, for example, when a Muslim employee asks for time and facilities for prayer during worktime, appropriate food choices in the lunchroom, time off for the observance of Ramadan and other religious holidays, and, of course, permission to wear a headscarf. Numerous cases are known of Muslim women having problems on the job because of their headscarves. Some employers argue that a veiled woman is not good for business or that a woman with a headscarf will discourage clients. In Dutch supermarkets, one seldom sees a veiled employee. Employment agencies often note on their information sheets if a candidate is veiled. There is a very well-known case of a doctor's assistant who was fired because she insisted on wearing the headscarf. These commercially oriented arguments show that many companies in the Netherlands are ready to give in to existing prejudices in society. In general, it is difficult to accuse these employers of discrimination and violation of the first act of the Constitution, because they can always argue that there were better candidates for the job.

Nevertheless, since the passing of the law on equal treatment in 1994, which is based on the first act of the Constitution, there have been some 300 reported cases of its violation. Twenty of these cases deal with wearing the headscarf. The Commission for Equal Treatment (*Commissie Gelijke Behandeling*), which was created in 1995, handles the incoming complaints. Although the commission does not have the same jurisdiction as the court, its decisions have some binding force for the parties involved. Besides, one can always go to court to challenge one's dismissal from a job. In most cases, the aggrieved person is juridically backed by one of the so-called semi-official antidiscrimination offices that one can find in every city in the Netherlands or, of course, by a regular lawyer.

In general, it can be said that wearing the Islamic veil is not a huge problem in the Netherlands. There have been several headscarf affairs in schools, and there still are

many problems in workplaces, but most of the cases have been resolved through compromise. This does not mean, of course, that Muslim women who wear veils are completely accepted by Dutch society. On the contrary, many Dutch believe that the veil is a sign of oppression and that Muslim women are all slaves of their husbands. Emancipation is considered a necessary development, and that implies taking the scarf off. This paternalistic and highly simplistic view is widespread in the Netherlands, even among the highly educated. But the cases also show that the general lack of clear regulations with respect to ("new") religious symbols and practices in the Netherlands often leads to unclarity and inconsistency with respect to decisions taken. The proverbial Dutch consensus society always leaves room for endless debates without clear solutions.

A very interesting new development is that, toward the end of the 1990s, young Muslims increasingly began to take part in these debates. They are confronted with stereotypes that they consider not applicable to them and feel that they have to account for their Islamic identity and correct the errors in the dominant image.¹⁷ There seems to be a growing self-awareness among young Muslim girls of Turkish and Moroccan descent, born and raised in the Netherlands, who have deliberately chosen to wear headscarves as a sign of their religious convictions. They argue that wearing a scarf is a democratic right that has nothing to do with their attitudes toward Dutch society. They want to distance themselves from the image of the poor immigrant who has nothing but his or her faith and to show that Islam and modernity can go together quite well. These Muslimas are becoming increasingly visible in universities, higher professions, the media, and (local) politics. It is very possible that they will become the spokespersons for the young Muslim women in the Netherlands in the future. In contrast to their mothers, these young women consider themselves to be Dutch citizens of foreign descent, with the same rights as the other Dutch people. They also see no reason why full participation in the central institutions of society cannot go together with religious conviction.

Young Muslims in the Netherlands today are finding their way in Dutch society very well. They increasingly display the appropriate skills to be able to cope with society's growing complexity and to meet the requirements of modern culture. Muslim identities are not necessarily bound only to traditional social networks of families and fellow countrymen, and the traditional definitions of concepts such as "culture," "community," and "ethnicity" are no longer adequate to describe the various roles being played by the Muslim community in the Netherlands.

Notes

1. Before the Second World War, there were already small Muslim communities in the Netherlands, made up of immigrants from the former Dutch colonies of Indonesia and Surinam. The University of Leiden is renowned for its archives of old Islamic texts, since it was the principal place where administrators for the colonies were trained. The Netherlands once dominated the most populous Muslim area in the world. Yet it was not before the large-scale postwar immigration that Islam took root in the public imagination.

2. When we speak of 400 mosques, we refer to registered public places designed for worshipping with an Imam and with a more or less permanent character, run by an Islamic organization. Most of these places are, however, not recognizable as mosques from the outside. They are housed in factory halls, former churches, rebuilt ordinary houses, and so on. Currently,