

Living Outside The Box

**A Feminist Analysis Of Processes Of
Identification Among Young Muslim
Women In Contemporary Dutch Society**

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Introduction

1.1 Islam in a global context

It was in 1978 when American-Palestinian author Edward Saïd published his by now world famous book titled *Orientalism* (1978). In it, he deconstructed and criticised the way Europeans and North-Americans have viewed what was known as ‘the East’ or ‘the Orient’ for centuries. He also wrote about Western encounters with Islam. Saïd described how the Orient was imagined as an exotic and mysterious world: a widespread view he referred to as ‘orientalism’. He argued it was a threefold phenomenon consisting of a field of academic study, a dichotomous thought pattern involving the Orient/the East on the one hand and the Occident/the West on the other, that shaped the thinking of countless poets, philosophers and political theorists, and lastly a “corporate institution for dealing with the Orient ... a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (Saïd, 1978, p. 2). In order to reach their imperialist goals, Western elites created a hierarchal distinction between their own societies and the Eastern ones they sought to dominate, in which the former were characterised as far more sophisticated, civilised and modern than the latter (Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens, 2010, p. 963). To reify this distinction, they pictured Eastern women as being oppressed by men and reinterpreted the Islamic veil as a symbol of their pitiful social position (Hoodfar, 1997, p. 255).

This image of Eastern women as suppressed and ignorant has most likely affected modern views of Muslim women, regardless of their ethnic origins. While in contemporary Western discourse the Islamic veil is represented as a symbol of Muslim women’s subordination on religious grounds, voices speaking from a Muslim perspective oppose this view (cf. Douwes, De Koning and Boender, 2005). Among them is Homa Hoodfar, who argues in her 1997 article *The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads: Veiling Practices and Muslim Women* that the veil’s meaning is dynamic and that Muslim women wear it for a variety of reasons, including beautification, symbolising a transition to a new stage in life, and emphasising their female identity, religious dedication, or self-discipline. When put side by side, it becomes apparent that evaluations of the Islamic veil vary widely as some see it in a very negative light, while others attribute positive meanings to it. In the last two decades, and especially after the attacks in the United States on September 11 2001, tensions between Muslims and non-Muslims have increased on a global level. This has led to polarisation as

both groups are represented as homogenous in popular discourse. The resulting essentialised images are then presented as dichotomous and used to pressure Muslims as well as non-Muslims to choose a side. In their recently completed extensive analysis of the changing image of Islam in modern Dutch society, Poorthuis and Salemink trace this image from the time of orientalism to the contemporary Western fear of Muslim terrorism. They sum up the current situation when they write: “In het Westen staan Islam en Midden-Oosten nu voor geweld, terreur en bloed, bommen en burka’s”, as the Orient is no longer seen as a mysterious and exotic place, but as the region of origin of an Islamic threat to the West (2010, p. 590).

1.2 Islam in Europe

As the relationship between the West and Islam on a global scale has deteriorated since the late twentieth century, Europeans have come to view Islam differently. According to Mepschen, Duyvendak and Tonkens (2010), across Europe one can find evidence of antipathy to the presence of Islam in the public sphere: minarets have been banned in Switzerland, in France and Belgium laws have been created to restrict the wearing of Islamic veils in public places such as schools, and in the Netherlands the admissibility of Islamic symbols in the public sphere has become topic of fierce debate. In addition to antipathy, expressions of outright Islamophobia can be heard in Europe as Islam is considered a threat to what are regarded as modern Western liberal values and traditions. Besides aversion to Islam, Mepschen et al. report a European trend in which “culture and morality” play an ever more important role “in shaping citizenship and integration policy” (2010, p. 964). As a result of the influx of migrants from other parts of Europe as well as other continents, European nations have come to accommodate people from an increasingly large variety of cultural backgrounds. This cultural diversity is seen as problematic by some who fear that foreign, especially non-Western, cultural influences will displace European, Western-style culture. The founding of the European Union and the recent admission of new member states has amplified this notion in two ways. First of all it made it easier for migrants to cross national borders, which stimulates cultural diversity. Second, the creation of a “Europe beyond nations” stirred voices of nationalism who expressed concern that the subsequent development of a unified European culture would come at the expense of national cultures (Baumann, 1999, p. 35).

In Europe national, religious and ethnic communities are differentiated along cultural lines. As they came together in new ways the aim of multiculturalism arose: a strive for

“equality across all cultural differentiations” (Baumann, 1999, p. 135). In his 1999 book *The Multicultural Riddle* Gerd Baumann formulates the goal of multiculturalism as an effort to reconcile three notions of culture: culture as part of a unified national identity, culture as part of ethnic group identity, and culture as part of religious group identity. He pictures multiculturalism as a triangle with the three notions as corners and the concept of culture in the centre. He then proceeds to critically analyse each corner for its potential to reach the multicultural aim of equality of all cultural groups. The first corner concerns the nation-state, about which Baumann writes: “A nation is one or several ethnic groups whose members think, or are thought in some way, to “own” a state, that is, to carry a special responsibility for it” (1999, p. 30). The nation-state is thus founded on ethnic ties, while the modern nation, according to Baumann, is presented as being both “postethnic” and “superethnic”, that is, as having moved beyond traditional ethnic community bonds to being modern ethnic community that includes all citizens of the nation, thus effectively turning the nation into one coherent ethnic unity. This transformation is problematic because it has been incomplete, as some ethnic groups have been left out of the new superethnos, known as *the Dutch*, *the British*, or *the Italian people*. Their exclusion has caused them to become marginalised, while others, having been included, have come to occupy a privileged position. The resulting sense of nationalism can only be found among the latter, which indicates that ethnic categorisations still divide nation-states.

Besides claiming to be superethnic, the modern nation-state claims to be post-religion, or secular. Baumann defines secularisation as “the process of pushing religion out of public life and banishing it to the private sphere of each citizen” (1999, p. 52). He argues states did this to accumulate power and wealth at the expense of religious authorities. However, in doing so, states became secularist rather than secular as they created their own form of religion, which political scientist Robert Bellah named ‘civil religion’ (Baumann, 1999, p. 42). In order to survive, each state needs to instil a sense of community among the individuals that make up its nation: a goal that is achieved by employing religious principles. In this way citizens are made to feel part of a national whole, are provided with a moral compass, and are inspired to act in service of their fatherland. The successful creation of civil religion again leads to nationalism (Baumann, 1999, p. 53). The conclusion of Baumann’s assessment of the first corner of the multicultural triangle is that “the nation-state is neither ethnically neutral nor religiously neutral” (1999, p. 45). Because it favours some groups over others along ethnic or (quasi)-religious lines rather than being neutral, the modern nation-state cannot provide equality of all cultural groups.

The second corner of the triangle is ethnicity. While commonly considered a characteristic determined by birth, a natural given that cannot be changed, Baumann argues that it is “the product of people’s actions and identifications” (1999, p. 63). Despite being founded on a basis of naturally individual and group differences, ethnicity is ultimately a social construct. As a concept it is also flexible in that it is employed in different ways in order to suit varying political, economic, and social needs, desires, and interests. The third corner of the triangle is religion. Like is the case with ethnicity, religion too is generally seen in an essentialised fashion. Elite groups take advantage of this essentialist view with the goal of furthering their own agendas. For example, religious elites can affirm power over believers by presenting faith as being an unchanging, and therefore reliable, element in the ever changing world around them. However, Baumann argues against the essentialist view of religion as he claims: “To repeat the same statement in new circumstances is to make a new statement” (1999, p. 69). So, contrary to popular belief, religions are subject to change as their central message is repeated time and again. In addition, believers move through time and space as they go through different stages of their life, or migrate in order to settle elsewhere. In the process, their faith changes. Since both religious belief systems and believers are in constant motion, it cannot be said that religion remains the same.

With regard to enabling multiculturalism a notion of culture based on either ethnic or religious identity does not suffice because both forms of identity are incorrectly essentialised. As a result, cultural differentiations are thought of as absolute, rather than flexible. The solution Baumann proposes is to start thinking in terms of situated identifications instead of fixed identities, and to begin seeing culture as a continuing social process rather than a finished product that is passed on from generation to generation. By shifting from an essentialist to a processual notion of culture, the aim of multiculturalism can be achieved (Baumann, 1999, p. 137). However, when studying everyday life it becomes clear that in certain situations the essentialist understanding of culture is useful to minority groups because by appealing to a shared cultural background they can rally their individual members. In other circumstances, people employ a more flexible understanding of cultural differences. Baumann concludes that, since both notions of culture exist side by side, culture should be understood as discursive. Moreover, as people regularly switch between them they develop what he calls a “double discursive competence: People know when to reify one of their identities, and they know when to question their own reifications” (Baumann, 1999, p. 139).

1.3 Muslims in the Netherlands

In the Netherlands, a process of secularisation has unfolded during the last fifty years along the lines indicated by Baumann. Religions had lost much of the influence they once had in Dutch society as believers turned their backs and religious institutions were reproached for being authoritarian and old-fashioned (Mepschen, Duyvendak, and Tonkens, 2010, p. 966). This resulted in religion being pushed into the private sphere of citizens while its role in Dutch politics and the public sphere diminished. However, the Dutch state became secularist, rather than fully secular, as can be seen for example in the fact that Christian political parties were part of recent Dutch governments (cf. Baumann, 1999, p. 44; Poorthuis and Saleminck, 2010, p. 29).

In addition to secularisation, Dutch society has changed under the influence of multicultural thinking. This ideology has its roots in the colonial era, when relations formed between white Dutch colonisers and colonised peoples in Surinam, the Antilles and Indonesia. These historical connections still bring migrants from the former colonies to the Netherlands (Phoenix, 2001, p. 9). Another category of migrants are those who came to the Netherlands for economic reasons, mostly from Spain, Italy, Morocco and Turkey. They arrived in the 1960s at the invitation of the Dutch government who recruited workers abroad to satisfy the large demand for unskilled labour created by domestic economic growth after World War II (Ghorashi, 2003, p. 2). These labour immigrants were called ‘gastarbeiders’ (guest workers), a term indicative of the presumed temporary nature of their stay. However, in the decades that followed it became clear that their residence had become permanent (cf. Tijdelijke Commissie Onderzoek Integratiebeleid, 2004).

Since the 1970s, multicultural thinking in the Netherlands emerged as a response to the cultural diversity brought along by new influxes of immigrants since the 1950s. The goal of multiculturalism was to create a modern Dutch society, in which all cultural groups would be equal regardless of their different ethnic, national and religious backgrounds (cf. Baumann, 1999; Poorthuis and Saleminck, 2010, p. 597). This led to the creation of a 1980s national integration policy based on the slogan ‘integratie met behoud van eigen identiteit’ (integration with preservation of one’s own identity) with the dual objective of allowing immigrants to maintain their culture of origin in the private sphere, while adjusting their ways to Dutch norms and values in the public sphere (Captain and Ghorashi, 2001, p. 158). In practice this multicultural approach meant that foreign cultures were given space to exist within the boundaries of the Dutch state (Midden, 2010, p. 235). In the 1990s, multiculturalism was

criticised by some who argued that the result was a society made up of different cultures that undermined the unity of the Dutch nation and its culture. The criticism focussed more and more on immigrants from Islamic countries until they became synonym for all that was wrong with multiculturalism (Baumann, 1999, p. 13; Ghorashi, 2003, p. 2).

Among the first to openly criticise multiculturalism was Dutch liberal politician Frits Bolkestein, who argued that immigrants, Islamic ones in particular, were detrimental to Dutch society on various levels, and that their norms and values, being very different from traditional Dutch ones, could change Dutch society for the worse. His proposed course of action was twofold: the number of new immigrants entering the Netherlands had to be restricted and the integration of immigrants who had already entered had to be encouraged. Although Bolkestein voiced what others only thought, his bold claims were considered controversial at the time. Ten years later, Dutch publicist Paul Scheffer recycled some of Bolkestein's ideas in his own critique on multiculturalism. This time however, the proposed new, more restrictive, approach to immigrant integration resonated widely within Dutch society. The early 2000s also saw the rise to fame of openly gay politician Pim Fortuyn, who popularised the views of Bolkestein and Scheffer as part of his anti-Islam and anti-immigration discourse. The nation was shocked when Fortuyn was killed in 2002. His death, and the murder of controversial filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a young Dutch-Moroccan Islamist two years later, further fuelled criticism of multiculturalism (Ghorashi, 2003, p. 3).

1.4 Dutch anti-Islamic sentiments

Over time, the focus of multicultural discourse in the Netherlands shifted from equality of ethnic, religious, and cultural groups in society to Islam as a religious, social, and cultural threat to the Dutch nation-state. The preservation of immigrant cultures that was key to multiculturalism was criticised for preventing the integration of immigrants (Rijkschroeff, Duyvendak, and Pels, 2003). The failure of immigrants to integrate in Dutch society in turn was thought by some, such as politicians Fortuyn and Wilders, to lead to the demise of Dutch culture and identity. Events on the global stage, such as 9/11 and the 'War on Terror' that followed, bolstered and popularized the anti-Islam message of Dutch politicians, such as Fortuyn. Consequently, some immigrant groups are no longer categorised according to their nationality, but according to their religious affiliation as perceived by the Dutch majority. This is mostly so for Moroccans and Turks, who comprise the largest national minorities in

Dutch society. Their cultures, though very different from each other, are both seen as Islamic and therefore as potentially problematic (cf. Baumann, 1999).

What began as an issue of minority cultures was thus transformed into a conflict between so-called Islamic culture and Dutch culture. The conflict revolves around the perceived incompatibility of the two cultures, which are thought of as opposites (cf. Botman and Jouwe, 2001, p. 12). In order to maintain this dichotomous view, both cultures are essentialised (Van den Brink, 2004). Where Islamic culture is presented as the product of a mix of political aims backed by an unambiguous and definite set of traditional, religious beliefs and practices, Dutch culture is depicted as modern and secular. In this view, an Orientalist-style culture hierarchy is implied, where Dutch culture is considered more advanced, since it has moved beyond its original roots in Judaism, Christianity and humanism. Participants of the political anti-Islam discourse argue that Islam has the potential to restrict liberal Dutch culture, undermine the constitution and democracy that are at the foundation of the Dutch nation-state, and oppress Dutch national identity and culture.

The proposed solutions of the participants of this discourse are integration of Muslims and limitation of Islamic influence in the Dutch public sphere. Both propositions are aimed at cultural assimilation of Muslims in Dutch society by pressuring them to take on Dutch norms and values. Apart from the recent anti-Islam discourse, the Dutch government has been occupied with integration policies since the 1970's. The objective and concepts of these policies have, however, shifted dramatically over time. However, a major goal that has endured throughout the past forty years has been the improvement of the socio-economic position of immigrants to the level of Dutch nationals. In this area substantial progress has been made (Rijkschroeff, Duyvendak, and Pels, 2003). According to public opinion, there is a risk of long term insufficient integration leading to a dramatic increase in social tensions and a decline in social cohesion between groups and individuals. Moreover, this situation can result in social alienation that, in combination with being lower class and having little economic prospect, may cause a rise in the number of Muslims who become religious extremists. However, efforts to bridge the dichotomies that separate social groups within the Dutch nation-state are undermined by current discourse on Islam that is based on a thought pattern in which Dutch and Islamic cultures are considered conflicting (Baumann, 1999; Douwes, De Koning, and Boender, 2005; Ghorashi, 2003; Mepschen, Duyvendak, and Tonkens, 2010; Poorthuis and Saleminck, 2010).

Among the contributors to the Dutch anti-Islam discourse were also feminist voices. The most prominent of these has been politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali, a former refugee from

Somalia who engaged in politics after completing her studies in political science in the Netherlands. She used to be a Muslim, but became one of the most outspoken advocates against Islam after leaving the faith. She claimed that Muslim women are oppressed by Islam, and that Islamic law and beliefs do not allow for women's emancipation (Ghorashi, 2003, p. 1). In the view Hirsi Ali carries out, there are two kinds of Muslim women: those who detach themselves of their religion in order to emancipate, and those who accept their subordinate position and are ignorant of their emancipatory rights. This dichotomy excludes the possibility that women can claim their rights within an Islamic environment, and thereby sabotages the efforts of Muslim women to emancipate in their own manner and within their Islamic surroundings (Ghorashi, 2003, p. 8). The dominant discourse of Islam as repressive infringes on their agency¹ because it renders their feminist struggles invisible and weakens their credibility as women who are emancipated and Muslim. In addition, their agency is limited by the fact that the image of oppressed Muslim women is reinforced in its use as an argument against Islam by participants of the anti-Islam discourse (Botman and Jouwe, 2001, p. 12).

1.5 My research

Contemporary discourse on Islam in the Netherlands is still dominated by the voices of white male Dutch natives, such as Bolkestein and Fortuyn, who represent the non-Muslim majority of Dutch society. At the same time the input of Dutch Muslims, both men and women, has been marginal. This results in the discourse being narrow in terms of the perspectives it includes, as many of its dominant participants have a similar background in terms of gender, ethnicity, class, and nationality. Therefore, one could say the discourse on Islam has been mostly *about* Muslims, rather than *with* or *by* Muslims. It was an interest in a Muslim perspective in debates on Islam, multiculturalism, integration, and emancipation that led me to the topic of my thesis, which is processes of identification among young Dutch Muslim women. I here use the word 'processes' since identities are not fixed. Rather than being set in stone, as they tend to be portrayed, identities are multi-faceted and varying. I began my research by wanting to learn more about the position of young Muslim women in today's Dutch society, since it seemed to me we were similar in terms of age group and gender, while being very differently situated in terms of religion and ethnic origin. My own position is that of a white, native Dutch woman: a privileged position in some respects.

¹ In the context of social sciences, the term 'agency' is used to refer to a person's ability to control their own lives and act as an individual.

Moreover, I grew up in a small-town, Christian environment and had little personal contact with Muslims. Therefore my knowledge of Islam and Islamic culture was shaped by high school teachings and Dutch media reports until at university I started reading texts from Muslim authors that broadened my horizon.

In order to investigate the identities of young Dutch Muslim women, I turn to two theories from the field of Gender Studies: intersectionality and standpoint theory. For intersectionality I draw from the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, Gloria Wekker, Helma Lutz, and Nina Lykke, while my understanding of standpoint theory is informed by the work of Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway, and Nira Yuval-Davis.² Both theories will be explained in detail in my next chapter, but here I shall introduce them briefly. Intersectionality starts from the notion that the lives of all people are shaped along axes of gender, ethnicity/race, class, religion, age, sexuality, and nationality, among others. These axes intersect as well as interact with each other. Therefore, the theory of intersectionality proposes that attempts to understand the complex whole of for example an individual's life or group's position should start at the intersections.

Standpoint theory maintains that knowledge is socially situated and that groups in society who are able to assess their social situation are more reliable as sources of knowledge than groups who are not (Harding, 1991 and 1993). In other words, standpoint theory argues that dominant social groups are ignorant of the privileges of their social position and are thus unable to recognize the biases that stem from it. This detracts from the objectivity of the knowledge they produce. In contrast, people from marginal social groups are conscious of their (limited) social position, and of the privileges and beliefs of dominant groups because the latter have a large impact on their lives. Consequently, the experiences of people in the margins are considered to be a more favourable starting point for producing objective knowledge, as it allows for more effective identification and questioning of dominant views that otherwise remain hidden. In response to Harding, Haraway (1991) proposes a shift away from Harding's understanding of objectivity. Instead Haraway argues that in order to reach feminist objectivity all knowledge, including that produced by marginal groups, must be viewed as socially situated, and therefore partial. This means that people who produce knowledge have to acknowledge that their view on reality is limited, and that their

² In addition, Eva Midden's (2010) thesis on feminism in multicultural societies has benefitted my understanding of intersectionality and standpoint theory. It has also pointed me to the work of Norman Fairclough, in particular his 1989 book *Language and Power*.

understanding is filtered through a lens of human embodiment. Only then can objectivity be reached.

In my analysis I will take an intersectional approach to analyse the positioning of young Muslim women in contemporary Dutch society on the axes of gender, religion, ethnicity, and age/generations, as well as intersections of these axes in order to investigate their identifications. Moreover, I will build on ideas from the field of standpoint theory to argue why the marginal social position of young Dutch Muslim women renders their ideas beneficial to current Dutch discourse regarding Islam, integration, multiculturalism, and emancipation. Before discussing the methodology I have chosen, I will describe the three ways in which I think my research contributes to existing knowledge. First of all, in addition to the benefits standpoint theory associates with looking at topics such as the four I just mentioned from a marginal place, the perspective of marginal groups, such as Dutch Muslim women, allows for themes such as secularisation, citizenship, and nationalism to be revisited and critically reflected on by deviating from the commonly assumed, dominant view. This approach can offer new insights about taken-for-granted concepts, definitions, and thought patterns concerning for instance processes of in- and exclusion in the Dutch nation. Incorporating marginal perspectives can thus enrich the socio-political discourse that currently is dominated by voices that speak from privileged socio-economic positions.

Secondly, many young Dutch Muslims have grown up in the Netherlands and are familiar with the norms, values, and traditions of Dutch native culture as well as their culture of origin. This means they are in a favourable position to act as mediators to help reduce tensions between Muslims and native Dutch people in debates on controversial issues such as the wearing of headscarves in public places and the building of mosques. This principle could be applicable to members of the younger generation of other (former) immigrant groups or communities as well. My thesis can be exemplary in exploring the possibility that the cultural position of these young people allows them to bring the older members of their social group and native Dutch people closer together. Thirdly, my investigation into the identities of Dutch Muslim women can help nuance the fixed image of Dutch Muslim women that is mainly informed by white Dutch men and dominates the Dutch public discourse on Islam.

The methodology I have chosen is to follow through my analysis is based on the ideas of social theorist Norman Fairclough (1989). He proposes an approach to the workings of power in the realm of language, which he calls 'critical language study' or CLS. His aim in using this approach is to make apparent how power, ideology, and language affect each other and work together to influence language users (1989, p. 5). His goals as an author are to

further understanding of the importance of language in power relations, and in a more practical sense to increase people's awareness of the ways in which language helps dominant social groups or individuals maintain their power (1989, p.1). It is Fairclough's attention to effects and struggles of power that makes his theory relevant to my investigation, as well as his focus on thought patterns that are considered 'common sense' and therefore go unnoticed.

I will use Fairclough's teachings to perform a critical discourse analysis of essays written by young Dutch Muslim women as entries to two essay contests. In their essays the authors were free to investigate topics of their choice within the broad themes of the contests. By chance, both organisations chose as their theme the relationship between Islam/Muslims on the one hand and the Netherlands/Dutch citizenship on the other. *My main question is: How do young Dutch Muslim women represent themselves in their essays?* In order to answer this question I will organise my analysis according to two sub questions. The first is based on intersectionality and asks: how do these female Muslim authors position themselves on intersections of religion, gender, ethnicity, age/generation, and class? The second is based on a standpoint theory perspective: what knowledge about their identifications do these authors produce in their essays? By way of answering these questions I will explore the processes of identification of these women with the goal of learning more about who they are. Since my analysis is based on a small collection of essays, I intend this research to be exemplary rather than representative. Since my scope and my research material are both limited, I hope that this thesis will inspire other researchers to continue what I started.

Methodology

2.1 Introduction

This feminist theoretical framework consists of two parts: intersectionality and standpoint epistemology. For intersectionality I draw from the work of Kimberlé Crenshaw, Gloria Wekker, Helma Lutz, and Nina Lykke. My understanding of standpoint epistemology is based on the writings of Sandra Harding, Donna Haraway's work on situated knowledges, and Nira Yuval-Davis' notion of transversalism.³ In this chapter, I will introduce their ideas as they informed my analysis. Next I will turn to explaining discourse analysis as taught by Fairclough, after which I will provide some background information on how the essay anthologies that make up my case study material have come to be.

2.2.1 From single-axis framework to intersectionality

Kimberly Crenshaw, a United States lawyer, is credited with coining the phrase 'intersectionality' in her 1989 article *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*. In this article Crenshaw analyses how black women in the United States are affected by the single-axis framework that is the prevalent manner in which they are seen and treated in the contexts of antidiscrimination law, feminist theory, and antiracist politics. She argues that this single-axis framework is characterised by a "tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 139). As long as race and gender are viewed as distinct and unrelated axes of difference that do not overlap, black women's experiences will be misrepresented as the interaction of its multiple dimensions remain unacknowledged. Crenshaw believes the solution lies in abandoning the single-axis way of thinking and adopting an intersectional framework. While the single-axis framework starts thought from gender, race, or a sum of both, intersectionality allows for an analysis of black women's experiences as being shaped by multiple dimensions, including race and gender, that interact to make up the unique circumstances of black women's lives (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 140).

³ In addition, Eva Midden's (2010) thesis on feminism in multicultural societies has benefitted my understanding of intersectionality and standpoint theory.

From her analysis, Crenshaw concludes that both feminist theory and antiracist politics fail to accurately incorporate and reflect black women's experiences in their discourse. In the society she describes, feminism is based on the experiences of white women which results in the exclusion of black women whose experiences are not only shaped by issues of gender but also by racial forces. The black liberation movement is centred around the experiences of black men and mainly fights racism. In doing so the black liberation movement fails to recognise that black women are not only disadvantaged on the basis of race but also on the basis of gender. Crenshaw's solution to these shortcomings is to introduce an intersectional approach to black women's lives instead of the single-axis thinking strategy employed by both movements. She concludes that only by abandoning their single-axis approach and acknowledging that black women's experiences are located at an intersection of racial and patriarchal forces can feminist theory and antiracist politics hope to include and represent black women (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 166).

2.2.2 Developing Crenshaw's intersectionality in the Dutch context:

From sex and race, to gender and ethnicity

Kimberlé Crenshaw's investigation into the lives and experiences of black women has become the starting point for numerous feminist investigations into the possibilities of intersectionality as a method for deconstructing women's experiences. As the focus of my case study is the Netherlands, I have chosen to review some of the work on intersectionality that focuses specifically on Dutch society. In the Netherlands, non-white feminists, including Muslim women, have been using the term 'zmv', which stands for 'zwarte, migranten, en vluchtenlingenvrouwen' (black, migrant, and refugee women) to refer to their combined feminist struggles as opposed to the white feminist movement.⁴

The situation of marginalised zmv women in the Netherlands is similar to the experiences of black women as described by Kimberlé Crenshaw. Zmv women have been the object of a hegemonic way of thinking which is referred to by Gloria Wekker and Helma Lutz as an 'or/or' framework (2001, p. 27). Underlying this framework is the notion that in the

⁴ What the women who refer to themselves as 'zmv women' have in common is their marginalised position in Dutch society, while the phrase zmv simultaneously acknowledges their different ethnic and migrant backgrounds. As separate groups black, migrant, and refugee women have been small in numbers, so they teamed up in order to reach their goals. Whether the term zmv should still be used today to refer to the children and grandchildren of zmv women is debatable, since many of these women are born in the Netherlands, have a Dutch nationality, and/or feel Dutch (Botman and Jouwe, 2001, p. 18-19).

Dutch public sphere zmv women are not considered part of the category 'woman', which only includes white women; and are also excluded from the category 'zmv' or black, migrant, refugee, as that category only includes men. As thinking is focussed on either 'women' or 'blacks, migrants, refugees', zmv women are left out completely (Botman and Jouwe, 2001, p. 19).

In addition, zmv women, like the black women Crenshaw studies, also found they were excluded from the white women's movement as it focussed only on the influences of biological sex and did not incorporate influences of race or ethnicity in their feminist discourse. They responded by attempting to have the importance of race on women's lives recognised by the women's movement so that it became possible to fight racism alongside sexism, a struggle in which they persevered (Wekker and Lutz, 2001, p. 35). In the 1980s and 1990s the concepts (biological) sex and race were replaced with gender and ethnicity, which expressed and allowed for a more fluent and dynamic understanding of the social and symbolic differences between men and women, as well as ethnic differences between individuals (ibid, 2001, p. 36). It was from the newly introduced concepts of gender and ethnicity that intersectionality developed in the Netherlands.

While Crenshaw argues for intersectionality as an analytical tool for the investigation of the marginalised position of black women, others including Wekker and Lutz show intersectionality can be applied in other feminist contexts as well. They believe that in order to fully understand the complex situation of marginalised women, one has to analyse it as being an intersection of forces related to variables such as gender, ethnicity, sexuality, class, and nationality (Wekker and Lutz, 2001, p. 39).

2.2.3 A reflection on the concept of intersectionality

In her article 'Intersectional analysis: black box or useful critical feminist thinking technology?', Nina Lykke argues that as the use of intersectionality as a concept has become more widespread in recent years, it is time to reflect on the areas in which it has been used, the ways in which it has proven useful as an analytical tool, but also the criticism that it has met. With this as her goal she sets out to investigate the shortcomings of the concept of intersectionality and to outline new directions for the future. Lykke believes that intersectionality should be regarded as a nodal point, which means that the concept should not be given a fixed definition but instead be kept open for discussion and adjustment wherever

desirable. As a result intersectionality becomes a thinking tool in the feminist toolbox that can be used in many ways and contexts (Lykke, 2011, p. 208).

According to Nina Lykke, when using concepts like intersectionality one needs to contextualize them in order to make full use of their potential as critical thinking tools. She argues that if this is not done properly, intersectionality can become a black box, a mere rhetorical device that is used by analysts who do not think it necessary to contemplate the implications of its use, for example with regard to the content and interaction of the categories involved. When using the concept one should therefore always pay attention to the context so that intersectionality does not become “an explanation in itself” (Lykke, 2011, p. 210). A possible solution to the threat of decontextualisation resulting from black-boxing is to choose a restricted number of meaningful intersections, like the one of gender, race, and class, that can then be studied extensively using a suitable and consistent theoretical framework (ibid).

Lykke advocates a Deleuzian approach to the black-boxing effect that can change it from something problematic into an opportunity to reach new theoretical and political insights. In their work, Deleuze and Guattari use the concept of the rhizome, which Lykke describes as “underground plant stems that move horizontally in all directions” (2011, p. 211). Like the rhizome moves horizontally rather than vertically, so can black-boxing lead to a form of knowledge production that crosses borders between various theoretical fields rather than remaining within the boundaries of a given field. When producing knowledge in a rhizomatic way one moves along what Deleuze and Guattari called “de-territorialising lines of flight” (Lykke, 2011, p. 211).

In conclusion, Nina Lykke believes that when using intersectionality as an analytical tool, one should take care to contextualise it and contemplate the feminist genealogies of specific intersections, as some, like the one of gender, race, and class, have received ample consideration, while many others have not yet been investigated thoroughly. In addition, she advocates for the exploration of new intersections, as well as troubling and conflicting ones (Lykke, 2011). To aid the latter, Lykke refers to Nira Yuval-Davis’ concept of transversal dialogue, which combines the actions of ‘rooting’ and ‘shifting’, which Lykke describes as “reflectedly situating oneself” and “temporarily identifying with the perspective of the other dialogue participants” respectively (2011, p. 217). By first analysing the intersection which one occupies as a human being and then reaching out to another person’s intersection by transferring without losing connection to one’s roots, a researcher can learn about both positions as well as the connection between them. The concept of transversal dialogue will be discussed in more detail in section 2.3.5.

2.3.1 Maximizing objectivity: Standpoint theory and its origins

In the early 1990s, Sandra Harding developed feminist standpoint theory and took a new approach to the goal of maximizing objectivity. Her work will form the basis of the standpoint epistemology dimension of the theoretical framework I will use in my case study of young Dutch Muslims. Now, what is feminist standpoint epistemology? In a nutshell, it argues that all knowledge is socially situated (Harding, 1991, p. 119). This means that knowledge is rooted in a social context, a view very different from conventional sciences' conviction that, when procedures are followed correctly, researchers come to knowledge that is objective, so entirely free of any influences from its origins in time, place and culture.

Harding traces the history of standpoint theory back to Hegel's considerations of the insights that could be gained from perceiving the master-slave relationship from the standpoint of the slave compared to that of the master. Others have developed Hegel's findings into the notion that knowledge claims produced by dominant groups in contemporary society are not completely objective when judged from the standpoint of marginalised social groups. This is because, while knowledge is socially situated, dominant groups fall short when it comes to critically and systematically analysing their own privileged social situation and the ways it affects the knowledge claims they produce (Harding, 1993, p. 54). This lack of self reflection makes their position less favourable for generating objective knowledge as it limits their ability to see how relations within human society, and between humans and the natural world, truly function. In contrast, the people who occupy marginal social positions are able to look at these relations critically, and question dominant beliefs that shape their experiences and lives but remain unnoticed by the dominant groups themselves. Dorothy Smith believes one of these marginalised groups is women. Studying their lives can therefore open up new possibilities for critically examining their lives as well as men's lives, and the interactions between these lives (Harding, 1993, p. 54).

2.3.2 Strong objectivity

As mentioned earlier, Harding's feminist standpoint epistemology advocates a view on scientific knowledge and objectivity which is very different from that of conventional, non-feminist science. Harding's main point of criticism is that the procedures and norms of conventional science are not sufficient to reach proper objectivity since social values, beliefs, and interests that are held by most or all members of conventional scientific communities are

allowed to enter the results they produce without being detected or questioned. Harding advocates feminist standpoint theory's standards, which are aimed at reaching what she calls 'strong objectivity'. The standards are designed to erase social and cultural beliefs that are collectively held from scientific research processes, and that are therefore overlooked by conventional science methods, which are only aimed at removing from scientific results the traces of the ideas of individual researchers (Harding, 1993, p. 52).

In order to reach this goal, one has to acknowledge that a knowing subject, for example a researcher, is comprised of characteristics that are very different from the ones bestowed on it by conventional science. In standpoint theory the subject of knowledge is embodied and visibly present, as the results of research are always socially situated. Because of this, there is no essential difference between subjects and objects of knowledge, as both are affected by comparable social forces. Furthermore, Harding argues that knowledge is produced by groups of people rather than individuals, which also means that knowledge claims that are not criticised by group members become part of what that community holds as truth. Consequently, these (heterosexist, eurocentric etc.) assumptions become part of the worldview of that community and are what characterises it to outsiders or later generations, who may regard these assumptions as false. Lastly, subjects of knowledge, according to feminist standpoint epistemology, are not homogenous and coherent, but heterogeneous, contradictory and multiple, as the lives and experiences of very different women are taken as the starting points for generating knowledge, and women's social position as outsiders within⁵ is inherently contradictory (Harding, 1993).

In sum, Harding is convinced that "the problem with the conventional conception of objectivity is not that it is too rigorous or too 'objectifying', as some have argued, but that it is *not rigorous or objectifying enough*" (1993, p. 50, italics in original). In order to strengthen objectivity it is necessary to employ what she calls 'strong reflexivity', which means individual researchers as well as the larger scientific community look critically at their own beliefs and practises to find and critically evaluate those ideas, values and attitudes, that are held by such a large part of the scientific community that they have become woven into scientific paradigms. As unquestioned standards, these thought patterns influence for example the choice of research topics, content of hypotheses, and interpretation of data; all processes that are not monitored by conventional scientific methods aimed at maximizing objectivity (Harding, 1993, p. 69). She summarises this approach when she argues that standpoint theory

⁵ See also Harding (1991, p. 124) for more information on the notion of the 'outsider within'.

provides a solution to the matter of objectivity by demanding that both the subjects of knowledge - researchers - as well as the object of knowledge - that which they study - be assessed using equally strict (scientific) standards to achieve strong objectivity (Harding, 1993, p. 71).

2.3.3 How standpoint theory leads to more objective knowledge

Starting research on human social relations and nature from the lives and experiences of marginalised groups in society, such as women, produces knowledge that is more objective than conventional knowledge that is produced by dominant societal groups. Harding provides several reasons why this is so. First of all she argues that women's lives have been underestimated as points of departure for scientific investigation as conventional science has been based mainly on the lives of men in dominant class, ethnical and cultural positions. As science is supposed to be based on social relations and nature in their entirety, it cannot afford to omit women (Harding, 1991, p. 121). Secondly, women occupy a 'stranger' position with regard to the social order, resulting in them being able to see behavioural patterns and value and belief systems that are difficult to see for scientists within the social order (Harding, 1991, p. 124).

Other feminists, such as Patricia Hill Collins, expand this notion and argue that women, specifically women researchers, occupy an 'outsider within' position, which provides them with the advantage of being able to see beliefs and activities as they are present within both dominant and 'outsider' groups, as well as the connections between them (Harding, 1991, p. 131). As strangers, women possess "just the combination of nearness and remoteness, concern and indifference, that are central to maximizing objectivity" (Harding, 1991, p. 124). Lastly, the outsider position and oppression of women render them more likely to procure and maintain a critical stance toward the dominant social order. This is because they have fewer interests in remaining oblivious to its processes or making an effort to support it. Taken more broadly, when one begins research from the perspective of the experiences of oppressed groups and gathers insights in the forces that shape their position, one arrives at elements of the dominant social order that are hard to perceive from the perspective of those that have their place within it (Harding, 1991, p. 125).

2.3.4 From standpoint theory to situated knowledges

Donna Haraway has further developed Sandra Harding's work on standpoint theory in her 1991 article 'Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective'. Here she describes her view on how to reach feminist objectivity, which she also refers to as the science question in feminism. Haraway observes that feminists have thus far largely held on to either one of two theoretical directions – radical social constructionism or feminist critical empiricism (Haraway, 1991, p. 183). According to Haraway the problem feminists have tried to solve is how to resolve three challenges at the same time: properly handling knowledge claims and knowing subjects, critically evaluating their own knowledge producing processes as feminists, and making an honest attempt to represent the world truthfully (1991, p. 187). She believes to have found a solution – “feminist objectivity is about limited location and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object”. This means she sees feminist objectivity as embodied and socially situated, therefore one has to take responsibility for the claims one produces and acknowledge that one's own perspective is partial. Only then can scientific knowledge become truly objective (Haraway, 1991, p. 190).

In the quest for maximum objectivity, the subject has to accept that their vision is partial; “never finished, whole” but “simply there and original” (Haraway, 1991, p. 193). Not all perspectives are equally preferable. The perspective of the subjugated or the less powerful is favoured because it is deemed more likely to provide knowledge that is more sustained objective than knowledge produced from privileged standpoints. However, Haraway warns those who attempt to “see from below” not to romanticise this approach or make the mistake of believing it to be unproblematic or easy (1991, p. 191). Dominant positions, on the other hand, are standpoints from which objectivity cannot possibly be achieved, as they are disembodied, unmarked and transcendent (Haraway, 1991, p. 193). With regard to the preferred object of knowledge, Haraway argues that “situated knowledges require that the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a resource”, only then can “gross error and false knowledge” be avoided (1991, p. 198). By employing the objects of knowledge as passive resources that can be appropriated at will, they come to be mere means to the end of supporting the interests of a dominant subject of knowledge. Haraway sums up her argument when she says

I am arguing for politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where partiality and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims...We do not seek partiality for its own sake, but for the sake of the connections and unexpected openings situated knowledges make possible. The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular. The science question in feminism is about objectivity as positioned rationality (1991, p. 195).

2.3.5 From situated knowledges to transversal politics

Nira Yuval-Davis adds to Haraway's idea of situated knowledges when she discusses how groups of women with very different social, cultural, and ethnical backgrounds can be brought closer together through dialogue, using a method known as 'rooting and shifting' or 'transversalism'. She explains

the idea is that each participant [to the dialogue] brings with her the rooting in her own membership and identity but at the same time tries to shift in order to put herself in a situation of exchange with women who have different membership and identity (1994, p. 192).

When using this method, participants occupying different positions attempt to temporarily see things from another's perspective in order to create connections between them. According to Yuval-Davis, two things are very important: first, one has to make sure not to de-centre or forfeit one's own roots and values when shifting, and second, shifting should not lead to homogenisation of the occupants of other positions (1994, p. 193). Transversal politics revolves around dialogues that allow for the acknowledgment of "the specific positionings of those who participate in them as well as to the 'unfinished knowledge' that each such situated positioning can offer" (Yuval-Davis, 1994, p. 194).

2.4 From theory to practice:

Discourse analysis of Muslim women's essays

My understanding of critical discourse analysis is based on Fairclough's teachings (1989). His goal is "helping people to see the extent to which their language does rest upon common-sense assumptions, and the ways in which these common-sense assumptions can be

ideologically shaped by relations of power” (1989, p. 4). This means that “ideologies are closely linked to power” (1989, p.2). I will employ his approach of critical language study mostly as a tool to find relationships between the language of the essays, and underlying influences of power and ideology. For my analysis I will be using the term ‘ideology’ broadly, to include implicit thought patterns more generally. Fairclough (1989, p. 34) distinguishes between two types of power: ‘power in discourse’ and ‘power behind discourse’. The former will be discussed at length in the second part of my analysis as its influence is found within discourses, where some participants have more power than others, thus allowing them to control whose voices are heard and what can be said (1989, p. 46). The other form of power is what Fairclough calls ‘power behind discourse’, to which I will return at the end of this section in order to briefly investigate how this power operates in the case of my research.

While discourse analysis provides the practical framework for my essay analysis, the theoretical foundation of my work is made up of intersectionality and standpoint epistemology. Both frameworks function together. First of all, intersectionality is employed as a way to dissect the authors’ stories and experiences in such a way that the underlying axes of difference are laid bare, which makes it possible to access and analyse identifications of the authors. Second, standpoint epistemology provides arguments for why the authors’ experiences are valuable as part of knowledge production from marginalised socio-economic positions and as part of the process of developing a minority standpoint that can bring more balance to discourses otherwise dominated by voices from privileged socio-economic positions. Moreover, in a context of situated knowledge and transversal politics it is important to better understand these authors’ processes of identification because knowledge of their marginalised worldview, despite being by definition partial according to situated knowledges, can be a valuable addition to the existing spectrum of partial worldviews and as such provide valuable insights to those who engage in transversal politics with them.

Thirdly and lastly, the authors’ identifications do not exist in an ideological vacuum and are not devoid of power influences. The discourses that the authors are engaged in, whether they are willing participants or are unwillingly being subjected to them, affect them in ways that are more or less visible. Examples of such discourses are the socio-political discourse on integration in Dutch society, the public discourse on female emancipation that is found mainly in circles of secular, white, Western feminists, and the Dutch public as well as political discourse on the question whether visible symbols of Islam, such as headscarves, should be allowed in public places. These discourses, among others, solicit responses from the authors as well as the Islamic communities they reside in and in that way invade their thinking

on these topics. This not only renders them powerless and cornered but also, more implicitly, forces upon them a certain way of thinking about the topic under consideration, which affects them inconspicuously by framing and constricting their thinking and limiting their options as to reactions that are considered socially acceptable. It is in this way that ideologies and the effects of power that accompany them influence the authors' identifications and it is therefore that they should be taken into account in analyses such as this one.

The material for the discourse analysis consist of two essay anthologies: *Hou vast aan je dromen: Essays van jonge moslims over burgerschap*, published in 2001 by the Dutch Steering Committee on Islam and Citizenship, and *Jonge moslims, andere geluiden: Voorbij traditie en teleurstelling*, published in 2006 by the Dutch Forum Institute for Multicultural Development. Each of these two organisations held an essay contest for young Dutch Muslims and bundled the best entries for publication. *Hou vast aan je dromen* consists of the thirteen best contest entries as well as two essays and one poem written by established authors. *Jonge moslims, andere geluiden* comprises three large essays as well as short biographies of the authors. The published essays were selected from a total of twelve entries and the authors received help from a team of editors during the writing process, which was not the case for the authors published in *Hou vast aan je dromen* (Huinder and Krijnen, 2006, p. 9).

Now it is time to return to Fairclough's notion of power behind discourse and discuss what it entails with regard to these essay books. In the case of *Jonge moslims, andere geluiden*, there was a language criterion in that the essays entered had to be written in Dutch. *Hou vast aan je dromen* had no such criterion, and even the format of the entries was left open by the organisation. While both organisations did not use their power over the contests and the participants in a very restrictive manner, the fact that both contests included a stage of judging means there was a certain amount of 'power behind discourse' influencing present since decisions had to be made regarding which entries were good enough to be included in the published booklet. The fact that no exact recording of the selection process is included in the booklets adds to the secrecy that comes with this type of power.

For me as a feminist researcher, the notion of 'power behind discourse' entails that I have to be aware of the effect I have upon the research I do. There are many possible blind spots that I, from my personal socio-economic position, can be affected by without knowing. The fact that my knowledge of the lives of young Dutch Muslim women comes primarily from academic interest rather than personal interaction, could act as a bias on my analysis. All I can do is be open about where I stand as a person and what my interests are regarding this

research. That is why I here, in addition to what I wrote in section 1.5 of my general introduction, briefly describe the steps that led me to the source material that my analysis is based upon. After choosing the essay books as a result of my personal interest in literature analysis, excluding the texts that were not part of the contest entries, and deciding to omit the male authors and instead focus on the female authors only, I was left with a total of thirteen essays from the combined total of the two books. Since the essays of one of the female authors that were left was written in a very artistic style, I decided it was too ambiguous to incorporate in my analysis. Moreover, one of the other essays left was co-authored by a man, who had submitted an essay together with his wife. This latter essay I chose to incorporate since the combined genders of the authors gives them a unique perspective, which will be discussed in more detail in the second part of the analysis. At the end of my selection procedure, a total of twelve essays were left, written by twelve female authors and one male co-author.

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I will analyse the collected essays with the aim of answering the two sub questions of my research: how do the young Dutch Muslim authors position themselves intersectionally, and what knowledge about their identifications do they produce in their essays? From the intersectional point of view underlying the first question, the authors' positionings on the axes of difference of gender, ethnicity, religion, age or generation, and class are most relevant to my research. The first four of these are part of my main question, which asks how young Dutch Muslim women represent themselves in their essays. The fifth, class, is fundamental to social issues that also involve power and ideology, and therefore also most likely plays a role in contemporary Dutch discourses involving Muslim women. However, as investigating these axis one by one would not yield many meaningful insights, I will not spend much time analysing each one by itself. Instead, I will focus on three intersections, which a thorough reading of the essays revealed to be important sites of identification by the authors: religion and gender, religion and ethnicity, and religion and age/generation.

Notably, the axis of religion is included in all intersections. A preliminary answer to the question of why this is the case is the fact that the theme of both essay contests was the relationship between Islam or Muslims on the one hand and the Netherlands or Dutch citizenship on the other. This set up the topic of religion as a core element of the participants' thinking and writing. In addition, with regard to the axis of class the authors do not provide sufficient explicit information for analysis to include it in my sections on the first sub question, since the topic of class is acknowledged by only two authors, who mention it in passing. However, in the sections discussing the second sub question the influence of the axis of class will be taken into account as it does affect the essays on a subconscious level. Lastly, while the first sub question is mainly concerned with examining explicit positioning by the authors through textual analysis, the second sub question investigates the implicit dimensions of the authors' identifications.

3.2 Author identification through intersectional positioning

3.2.1 Religion and gender

The first of the intersections that is important to the authors is the one of religion and gender, which I will explore by assessing authors' explicit self-positioning along lines of religion and gender first, and then their positioning on the intersection of these two axes. While according to the titles of the essay books and the criteria of the essay contests all participating authors are Muslim, only four of them explicitly identify themselves as such in their essays. The first one to do so is Naziha el-Bousikhani (2001, p. 39), who uses the phrase "wij moslims", which indicates that she feels part of a Muslim community. Next is Jamila Douairi, whose identification as a Muslim shines through in phrases such as 'I believe' and 'my faith', that she uses multiple times throughout the poem that is her essay contest entry. In addition, she ends her text with a clear identifying statement: "Weet waarom ik mezelf moslim noem" (2001, p. 44). Third is Sanaa el-Mallali, who identifies as a Muslim by writing: "Als moslim weet ik dat..." (2001, p. 48). She later explains that Islam is important to her because it provides her with spiritual guidance and thus acts as "een gids in het leven" (2001, p. 49). Fourth and last to explicitly identify as a Muslim is Petra van Helden, who describes in her essay why she converted to Islam: "Toen ik op mijn negentiende,..., voor het eerst de koran ging lezen, werd ik getroffen door de waardering voor het menselijk leven en voor de schoonheid van de natuur. Ik werd zelfs zo geraakt dat ik besloot moslim te worden" (2006, p. 24).

With regard to authors explicitly identifying along the axis of gender solely, it is interesting to note that none do. As is the case with several other intersectional and single-axis positions that no authors explicitly position themselves on, the most likely explanation for this is that no author felt the need to do so, possibly because they had no personal concerns, regarding that aspect of their identity. The only indication of the authors' gender identity are their names and the short biographies that accompany the three essays published in *Jonge moslims, andere geluiden*. In contrast, five authors position themselves at the intersection of religion and gender by self-identifying as Muslim women or girls, without there being any overlap with the four authors I discussed earlier. Some begin their essay by stating they are female as well as Muslim: Zainab Katib (2001, p. 45) refers to herself as a Muslim girl, "een moslimmeisje", Mirthe Schutteman (2001, p. 64) begins her essay with "Ik ben een meisje van 19 jaar en ben sinds drie maanden een moslima", and Hanane Oulhaizoum (2001, p. 50)

writes “Ik kijk naar mezelf. Een jonge meid van in de twintig....ik ben moslim.” Others describe their position on the intersection in a more indirect way: Khadija el-Marcouchi (2001, p. 13) mentions her veil (“mijn sluier”) in her essay and explains her reasons for wearing it, while Olga Vos (2001, p. 70) tells the story of a young woman who converts to Islam, which is most likely her own story given the large amount of personal details included.

3.2.2 Religion and ethnicity

The second intersection that authors position themselves on is the one of religion and ethnicity. Only three authors, all of whom already identified as Muslim women, explicitly identify themselves as being of a certain religion: Hanane Oulhaizoum (2001, p. 50) asks “Maar wat ben ik nu eigenlijk: een Marokkaanse Nederlander of een Nederlandse Marokkaan”, Mirthe Schutteman (2001, p. 64) writes “ik ben een Nederlands meisje”, and Olga Vos (2001, p. 73) identifies indirectly by writing “ze werd niet meer gezien als een Hollandse vrouw, maar als een Turkse of een Marokkaanse”. The fact that all authors who position themselves ethnically identify as being (at least partially) Dutch is striking. It seems that this is the case because of all authors these three are the only ones to whom their ethnic positioning is confusing, as described by Oulhaizoum, or problematic, as explained by Schutteman and Vos. The latter two’s positionings are very similar as both describe themselves as Dutch women who converted to Islam on their own accord as young adults. Moreover, while only Vos mentions that she began wearing a headscarf, both describe being treated differently by non-Muslims after converting. Vos even narrates multiple instances of being discriminated against. Schutteman writes

ik ben een Nederlands meisje en men gaat ervanuit dat ik geen moslim ben. Toen ik het aan een aantal mensen vertelde, keken zij mij raar aan en reageerden vreemd... Ik zou heel graag willen laten zien dat ik een moslima ben aan deze maatschappij, maar ik heb gemerkt dat je dan anders behandeld wordt dan wanneer de mensen denken dat je geen moslima bent. (2001, p. 64, 65)

Vos describes one of her encounters with discrimination in the following way:

Zo zat ze onlangs in de drukke metro en voelde iets op haar rug, keek achterom en zag een grote man in driedelig pak staan. Hij riep op iets te luide toon: “Zou je niet eens opstaan voor een echte Nederlander!?” (2001, p. 74)

Vos then explains how such experiences make her question whether she belongs in the Netherlands, where she grew up but is discriminated as a Muslim, or in an Islamic culture like the Moroccan one:

Op deze momenten verlangt ze ontzettend naar een islamitisch land, een land waar ze zichzelf kan zijn, zonder zich ‘anders’ te voelen dan de anderen. Marokko is zo’n land. Marokko, omdat haar man daar vandaan komt, haar schoonfamilie daar woont, maar ook omdat het land haar hart heeft gestolen. Ze is daar geaccepteerd zoals ze is, en zo voelt ze dat niet altijd in Nederland ... Toch is Nederland haar ‘thuis’ want daar komt ze vandaan. Na een aantal weken in Marokko gaat ze ‘thuis’ missen. (Vos, 2001, p. 74)

These descriptions are exemplary of how religion and ethnicity are interwoven in the minds of many within the non-Muslim majority of the Dutch population. They see Islam as a foreign religion and therefore they associate being Muslim with being of non-Dutch ethnical origins. Hence, identifying as ethnically Dutch is considered incompatible with identifying as a Muslim. This dichotomous thought pattern is investigated extensively in several essays and I will be discussing it in more detail in the second part of the analysis. As a result of this view, Schutteeman and Vos are no longer seen as Dutch women when they identify as Muslim, and consequently they are excluded by non-Muslims. This, combined with Islam’s bad public image, makes them liable to discrimination. Arguably, the authors ponder these negative experiences because they were only confronted by the darker side of this thought pattern after converting, since both originated from within the (‘autochtone’) native Dutch majority of the population.

In addition, the experiences described by Schutteeman and Vos are shaped by another combination of notions of religion and ethnicity, one that has taken the form of a conceptual framework of in- and exclusion operating in Dutch society. This framework governs notions of in- and exclusion⁶ with regard to the Dutch nation and is founded upon a hierarchical

⁶ This dichotomy is one of the many expressions of the fundamental duality of the Self and the Other, as explained by Simone de Beauvoir in her introduction (1993, p. xvi).

dichotomy that is represented most prominently in the Dutch language through the words ‘autochtoon’ and ‘allochtoon’. In theory, ‘autochtoon’ refers to native Dutch people and ‘allochtoon’ to foreigners. However, as the words have become part of the Dutch vernacular, the use of ‘allochtoon’ became limited to foreigners of non-Western origin, such as people from Turkey, Morocco, Somalia, or Surinam. Immigrants from Europe and North America are not commonly labelled ‘allochtoon’ but are referred to using more neutral terms such as ‘immigrants’.⁷

‘Autochtoon’ and ‘allochtoon’ are problematic concepts for several reasons. First of all, they are social constructions that reflect sentiments of ‘Dutchness’, rather than objective concepts.. Secondly, as labels the two terms are distributed arbitrarily and inconsistently (Wekker and Lutz, 2001, p. 27). Moreover, as argued by Esther Captain and Halleh Ghorashi (2001, p. 159), and Guity Mohebbi (2008, p. 22), ‘allochtoon’ as a term does not do justice to the existing cultural and ethnical variation among the people and communities it refers to. They also argue that the term is assigned to people whose families migrated to the Netherlands several generations ago, but who were born and raised in the Netherlands themselves. Although these people might see themselves as ‘autochtoon’, they are labelled ‘allochtoon’ by others (cf. Mohebbi, 2008, p. 70, 168).

The dichotomy’s implicit hierarchy presents ‘autochtoon’ as the norm and ‘allochtoon’ as the deviant (Captain and Ghorashi, 2001, p.161). Constituting the norm of ‘Dutchness’ are the ‘autochtone’ majority of the Dutch population. The standard they set is ethnic as well as cultural, with the latter being based on religion: ‘real’ Dutch people are white and raised within Dutch culture which is based on Christian, Jewish, and humanist traditions (Captain and Ghorashi, 2001, p. 161; Poorthuis and Salemink, 2010, p. 600). The opposite, ‘allochtoon’, refers to non-white Dutch citizens who have a non-Dutch cultural background. Although ‘allochtoon’ is an ethnical distinction and Muslim a religious one during the last twenty years the two terms have become increasingly interchangeable in Dutch public discourse, possibly as a result of both groups becoming ever more marginalised in Dutch society (Douwes, De Koning and Boender, 2005, p. 19).

Regarding the intersection of religion and ethnicity, it is interesting to note that authors have chosen different ways of identifying themselves. I already discussed three authors who explicitly mention being of certain ethnic origin, all of whom identified as (partially) Dutch.

⁷ More information on ‘allochtoon’, ‘autochtoon’, and related terms can be found in the Definitions section of the website of the Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics: <http://www.cbs.nl/nl-NL/menu/methoden/begrippen/default.htm?Languageswitch=on&ConceptID=37>

Several other authors also position on the intersection, but do so by referring to themselves as being Muslims in Dutch society or in a Western environment. What this formulation does is create an implicit distance between the author's Muslim self and the cultural environment they live in. This distance, involving a mixture of religion and ethnicity, is reminiscent of the first of the two dichotomous thought patterns that I described earlier in this section and will return to at a later stage in the analysis. One example is provided by Katib (2001, p. 45), whose essay revolves around her question of how to combine the two: "Hoe leef ik, een moslimmeisje, onder de mensen van een westers volk als het Nederlandse?". She observes that: "Een moslimmeisje en een Westerse samenleving gaan samen als ja en nee. Gaan dus niet samen, tenzij ze beiden een beetje toegeven." (2001, p. 46). The fact that another author, Saliha Bochhah (2001, p. 32), remarks: "Alhoewel gezegd moet worden dat moslim zijn én burger zijn van de Nederlandse samenleving elkaar niet uitsluiten", shows that being Muslim and being Dutch are considered two separate identity aspects.

Among the authors who do not identify themselves as being of a certain ethnic origin, are the four authors of the three essays in *Jonge moslims, andere geluiden*, although two of them do write about positioning as a Muslim in Dutch society. The first of these is Petra van Helden (2006, p. 41): "Moslims in Nederland staan voor de uitdaging hun geloofsbeleving zo vorm te geven dat deze aansluiting vindt bij de cultuur van het land waarin zij wonen." The second one Selma-Heleen Lustig (2006, p. 98), who writes that "moslima's proberen een balans te vinden tussen een actief leven in de samenleving en het geloof." The short biographies that accompany these three essays mention the authors' ethnic origins: Petra van Helden has Dutch parents, Peter Scholten also has Dutch parents, his wife Amal Tourabi has Moroccan parents, and Selma-Heleen Lustig has a Turkish mother and a Dutch father. Other facts mentioned are the authors' age, education, and place of birth, but this summing up of facts does not mean that the authors identify according. Whether or not they do so remains unknown as they do not position themselves explicitly in their texts. However, it may be that the absence of self-positioning might have been caused by the addition of biographies, as it could have signalled to them that they do not have to introduce themselves anymore.

3.2.3 Religion and age

In contrast to the previous two intersections, is the intersection of religion and age not discussed in great length by the authors. Only two authors, Oulhaizoum (2001, p. 50) and Schutteman (2001, p. 64), mention being young and neither pursue this specific aspect of their

identification any further. Both of them do, however, explain have made or wanting to make different choices regarding religion than their parents. Oulhaizoum (2001, p. 51) narrates how she herself was brought up in a household that was quite modern in some respects, while being traditional regarding other issues. As a response to her own restricted upbringing she wants to raise her children differently, namely as Dutch citizens as well as Muslims (2001, p. 57). Schutteman (2001, p. 65) describes being caught in a very different situation as her mother ridiculed her for wanting to convert to Islam. Their relationship has deteriorated to the point that Schutteman writes her mother has not even noticed she has been a Muslim for several months. A similar situation is described by Vos (2001, p. 71), also a convert. Fortunately, Vos' parents did eventually accept her choice for Islam and have even come to support her decision to begin wearing a headscarf. Despite her parents' approval, Vos writes that converting was hard, as it was "Een confrontatie met zichzelf, want ze was nou eenmaal anders opgevoed." (2001, p. 73)

3.3 Producing knowledge about Muslim women's identifications

3.3.1 Writing style of the essay authors

In this second part of my analysis I will investigate the second of my sub questions: what knowledge about their identifications do the essay authors produce? In order to do this I will first go into the style which the authors have used, most notably the tone of their essay and the mark they have left onto their text as its author. Next I will investigate the connection between style and the patterns of power and ideology that underlie the essays. As the web of ideological thought patterns that the authors engage in is fairly complex, I unfortunately cannot discuss it in much detail.

The tone of the essays is best described as diverse, and consequently the level of detail and intensity of author identification varies. Some authors, such as el-Bousikhani and el-Mallali, have chosen more of a neutral tone and explain their view on matters without showing much emotion until they make a passionate final plea. As a result, their style is less personal, which creates a distance between them and the reader. At the other end of the spectrum are authors like Douairi and Schutteman, whose tone is very passionate and whose style is somewhat aggressive as they write using exclamation marks and capital phrases. Their direct style makes them appear strong willed as authors and as women. Others, Oulhaizoum and Vos for example, have written their essays as if they were telling their life's story and use

a more mellow tone. As a consequence of the personal nature of their essays, these two authors leave a distinct impression of their presence behind in their text.

Together with varying levels of author identification caused by differences in style and tone among the individual essays, there is also a notable difference between the two booklets. As mentioned in their biographies all four authors in *Jonge moslims, andere geluiden* are either university students or graduates. This fact not only makes it likely they all belong to the Dutch socio-economic upper class, but also provides an explanation for the observation that all three of their essays are written in a style that is reminiscent of academic writing. This resemblance is caused by the essays' incorporation of secondary sources, overall assertive tone, and frequent use of formal language. Moreover, the texts contain very few instances of explicit author self-identification, which creates a sense of distance between the authors and their writing. In academic contexts, this kind of distance generally signals objectivity and is therefore considered a good thing. However, in this case there is reason to believe that these four authors have a closer personal connection to their essays than meets the eye. An example of this is Selma-Heleen Lustig's choice of main argument. Her main argument is twofold; she criticises western norms of emancipation while also defending Islam with regard to the position it grants women (2006, p. 83). Since Lustig does not mention any personal involvement with these issues, one would assume her not to be personally involved with the topic of her argument. However, her author biography reveals she has a Turkish mother and a Dutch father, which reduces the odds of this assumption being true. It now seems more likely that as a woman of mixed ethnical descent, who was born in the Netherlands, she has not only come into contact with both of the views regarding the position of women that make up her main argument, but has also formulated her personal opinion on the two views.

Also found in *Jonge moslims, andere geluiden* is the only male (co-)author to have been included in this analysis. His name is Peter Scholten, and together with his wife Amal Tourabi he wrote an essay titled *Integratie met! Voorbij de vermeende kloof tussen culturen* (2006). This title opens up a very interesting line of thought, that I will here discuss only briefly but will return to in a short while. For now I want to start with a discussion of the influence Scholten, being a man, has had on their combined essay, which, according to an editorial remark added to their biographies, was inspired by their mixed marriage (2006, p. 48). First of all, what does that remark refer to? I think the most likely answer is that their mixed marriage (Scholten being of Dutch descent and Tourabi being Moroccan) is proof that the course of action they advocate is not a utopia, but is actually possible. The course of action they propose is, in short, that Muslims who are trapped between what the authors refer

to as ‘Dutch culture’ and ‘Islamic culture’ and are pressured to choose either culture over the other, break away from this dichotomous and absolute representation of culture and instead create their own cultural identity by combining elements of the two cultures into a dynamic personal mix (2006, p. 49). It is interesting to note that Zainab Katib (2001, p. 45), whose essay is published in *Hou vast aan je dromen*, has chosen the same problem of being caught in the middle of a tug of war between Western/Dutch culture and one’s own ethnic culture (without specifying what culture that is in her case) with both sides claiming to be opposites and both requesting undivided loyalty of the individual Muslim. Perhaps surprisingly, Katib proposes the same solution as Scholten and Tourabi, which is to combine preferred elements of both. She writes “Profiteer van de twee culturen, voeg ze samen, maak er je eigen cultuur van, desnoods een subcultuur.” (2001, p. 47).

I think Scholten’s influence is most clear when it comes to the way he and Tourabi refer to gender. As authors they themselves do not identify with regard to their gender, and what’s more, they seem to have adopted a desire to pursue gender neutrality. This implicit aim is reflected in the language of their essay: in lists of examples they make sure to include topics that specifically pertain to women, such as headscarves, and they are consistent in their use of the combinations “moslim of moslima” and “hem of haar” (2006, p. 49), with the latter appearing to be attempts to be inclusive of women or gender-neutral on a linguistic level. It appears that as partners in a marriage that is mixed both ethnically and sexually, they want to convey the message to readers that they have taken gender into account in their thinking by explicitly addressing both Muslim men and Muslim women when formulating their proposed way out of the cultural dichotomy (2006, p. 56).

3.3.2 Power and ideology

First of all I want to make clear that where Fairclough refers to ‘ideologies’ I prefer to talk about ‘thought patterns’, as I think my term represents more closely what happens inside the heads of these essay authors. I recognise that Fairclough’s and my term are not full synonyms because, for one thing, his refers to thinking that takes place at a larger scale and is more pervasive than the more neutrally connoted term I choose to use. The first of these thought patterns I have already explained in my previous section, where I described how Scholten and Tourabi, and Katib had very similar ideas. I think this thought pattern of Dutch and Islamic culture being presented as a comprising opposite sides of a chasm is at the heart of most other pervasive thought patterns discussed frequently by the essay authors. Let me

start with the Dutch discourse on Islam's bad public image. Van Helden (2006, p. 24) writes that she researched prevailing negative ideas of non-Muslims about Islam and that she has found among those the notion that "De islam is een vreemde godsdienst die eigenlijk niet thuishoort in Nederland. 'De islam' en 'het Western' staan in veel opzichten lijnrecht tegenover elkaar." In this quote, a clear connection is made between Islam's bad public image and the idea that Islam and the Netherlands cannot be combined. Van Helden is not the only author to discuss Islam's public image as Schutteeman, el-Mallali, Lustig, and Scholten and Tourabi also include it in their essays.

Another discussion that is based on the cultural chasm thought pattern is on the topic of integration of Muslims in Dutch society. Striking in this regard is an argument made by former Dutch minister of Justice Hirsch Ballin, who writes: "Zou van moslimburgers worden verwacht dat ze hun geloof en identiteit maar op een laag pitje zetten om daardoor gemakkelijker als medeburgers te worden aanvaard, dan maakt men een valse start" (2001, p. 7). The premiss on which this former minister founds his argument is that it is not possible for Muslims to be truly accepted as Dutch citizens as long as they maintain and express their religious identity to the full. The essay author who discusses the issue of integrating as a Muslim in Dutch society the most extensive is Oulhaizoum. The topic of integration combined with the cultural chasm thought pattern can also be found in my discussion in section 3.2.2 on the dichotomous hierarchy that revolves around the Dutch words 'allochtoon' and 'autochtoon'.

A third discourse that draws on the cultural chasm thought pattern revolves around the emancipation of Muslim women.⁸ As we saw earlier, this issue is the main focus of Lustig's essay. She argues it is demanded by Dutch non-Muslims that Muslim women emancipate by following the path towards secularisation chosen by Dutch secular feminists (2006, p. 97).⁹ This argument indicates that here too, Islamic cultural ideas and Dutch cultural views are seen as incompatible. Other essay authors who discuss emancipation of Muslim women in a Dutch context are Bochhah and Oulhaizoum. A fourth and last discourse I would like to mention that I think is also based on the cultural chasm thought pattern is about the headscarf. Several authors, including Lustig, Vos, Oulhaizoum, and Schutteeman address this matter.

⁸ See Yamani (1996) and Hoodfar (1997) for an anthology of explorations and analyses that approach connections between Islam and feminism from a variety of angles.

⁹ See also the chapter *Three feminist waves* by Buikema and Van der Tuin (2010), in which they describe the ways feminism has changed Dutch culture and society. Moreover, for an analysis of notions of culture, religion and feminism as discussed in a popular Dutch feminist magazine see Midden (2012)

At this point I would like to continue my analysis by investigating the way forces of power interact with thought patterns such as these four. Questions to be pursued would be for instance the extent to which the essay authors are consciously aware of the forces of power that lie behind the discourses they engage with in their texts, whether or not they even have knowledge of the thought patterns that are the basis for these discourses, and if, when they do criticise ideas as they find them to be, they react against the surface expressions of the thought patterns or attempt to make a mark on the conceptual structures hidden beneath.

Unfortunately, such questions are too extensive for me to deal with at this place and point in time so I will finish my analysis here and focus on drawing conclusions from the knowledge I have produced thus far.

Conclusion

In the process of answering my first sub question, it was clear from the start that the axis of religion would play a central role. The fact that religion was also in the theme of both essay contests may very well have contributed to its prominence as a topic. It was interesting to note that the axis of gender by itself was not referred to by any author. Instead, gender only seemed to become meaningful when paired with religion. Although it remains unclear why this is the case, it may have to do with my choice to focus only on essays written by women, as it left no room for comparison to the essays that were in the same booklets but were written by men. One place where gender was prominently present was the essay from the one male author that was included, Peter Scholten, and his wife Amal Tourabi. Their attempt to seemingly exclude gender bias or create a state of gender neutrality, stood out very clearly, and may therefore have missed the mark of obscuring effects of gender difference. Like gender, ethnicity appeared to acquire most meaning as an axis of difference when intersecting with religion. The combination and mixing of ethnicity and religion can result in dichotomous thought patterns such as the one regarding notions of in- and exclusion to the Dutch nation that is epitomized by the words ‘allochtoon’ and ‘autochtoon’. The cause of this may be the themes of the essay contests, since both were phrased in such a way that intersections of religion of ethnicity were implied to be uncommon or open to discussion. The two axes of age and class were hardly explicitly referred to by the authors, why is uncertain. The apparent invisibility of class might be nothing out of the ordinary, since class more often goes unnoticed, or its presence in the published essays might have been limited by a bias among the jurors, as it was their task to select the winning essays within the boundaries set by the contest theme. In order to see if any of the biases mentioned here indeed affected author positioning, further research will be needed.

In the second part of my analysis I first of all investigated the style the authors use, especially the tone of their essays and the way they self-identified in their essays as authors. I found that the style of the authors is very diverse as different authors employ different approaches to writing. I then continued to investigate the specific case of the authors who were published in *Jonge moslims, andere geluiden* and suggested that the fact that they were all university students was reason to position them as members of the upper class and had likely affected their style of writing, as that could best be described as academic. Notably, I found this to be the only role class played in the case of these essay authors. Next I argued

that although the authors in this essay booklet do not explicitly identify themselves often, it is likely that there is a closer personal connection of the authors to the texts than meets the eye. The only male author that I included in my analysis was Scholten. He wrote an essay together with his wife Tourabi and their main aim was to provide a course of action for Muslims trapped between the two opposites of Dutch and Islamic culture that both demand complete loyalty. Their proposition was for Muslims thus caught to create their own personal and dynamic combination of elements of the two opposing cultures. Interestingly, Katib's essay focused on the same cultural situation and provided the same solution as Scholten and Tourabi did. The influence of Scholten's gender was most clear in the way he and Tourabi dealt with gender in their essay.

In my part on ideology and power I first of all explained my choice for the phrase 'thought pattern' rather than 'ideology' as used by Fairclough. Then I argued the course of action laid out by Scholten and Tourabi as well as Katib to be an escape from a thought pattern of opposing cultures presented as the opposite sides of a chasm. As I consider this particular thought pattern to be at the core of thinking about the Netherlands and Islam, it sets the stage for other Islam-related discourses such as the ones concerning Islam's bad public image, the integration of Muslims in Dutch society, the emancipation of Muslim women, and controversies surrounding the headscarf.

The main question of this thesis asked how young Dutch Muslim women represent themselves in their essays. Analysis of their intersectional positionings has revealed how they explicitly identify with regard to several axes of difference, but it has also shown that the scope of intersectionality as employed here, is limited. While positioning was observed at some of the axes and intersections where it was anticipated, it was not found at all anticipated sites. Unforeseen findings were the small number of positionings on the axes of class and age, and several observations regarding the axes of gender and ethnicity. Each of the latter by themselves seemed to carry little meaning but became particularly meaningful when combined with the axis of religion. However, the intersection of gender and ethnicity, which I anticipated to be important turned out not to be. As mentioned earlier, intersectional analysis can be a large source of information on explicit positioning of essay authors as well as more implicit matters. At the same time, looking back at my intersectional approach it appears limited, perhaps as a result of boundaries that followed from decisions made early on and that in hindsight excluded meaningful opportunities. An example of this may be the fact that I altogether omitted essays written by men only, which prevented me from comparing women's positionings, for example regarding gender, to men's. My analysis has yielded many valuable

insights on these authors' positionings, especially regarding the versatility and variation within the range of their identifications. Simultaneously, one has to take into consideration that my research has been restricted by both my own choices as well as by the criteria laid down by the essay contest organisations and selections made later by the jury's. The latter part of my analysis has shown that what is not said/the silences can be just as informative, or maybe even more, than the things that are voiced. In addition, the manner in which information is worded can provide many insights as to structures of thought and power that are hidden underneath, far more than I initially anticipated.

All in all, I think I can conclude by saying that the young Dutch Muslim women (and the one man) that wrote those essays have managed to represent themselves in a surprisingly large diversity of ways. These are young women who use their wits to live outside the box in their own way.

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