Stepping out of line

The experiences of ‘mixed’ couples in the Netherlands

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Love birds wedding cake topper

Preface

After studying International Development studies for almost five years in Wageningen, I decided that besides the research master that I was still finishing in Wageningen, I wanted to enter in a second master's programme. Namely Gender and Ethnicity in Utrecht. During the transition from the sociologically based programme in Wageningen to the more philosophical programme in Utrecht I have been challenged academically more than I had been challenged before. I learned a lot about the new field of gender and ethnicity but also about myself. Due to this, I was able to combine the skills and knowledge I had learned at the Wageningen University with my new knowledge from Utrecht University and analyse my own experiences in a 'mixed' relationship. After looking critically at my own experiences, I decided that I wanted to move forward with this topic and make 'mixed' couples the focus of my master thesis.

I would like to thank the couples I have interviewed. Without their willingness to open their homes to me and share their experiences with me, this thesis would not have been possible. I want to thank dr. Eva Midden for her supervision and guidance as my supervisor and mentor. Her feedback and trust encouraged me to think creatively and keep moving forward. I would also like to thank dr. Kathrin Thiele, who wanted to devote her time to reading this thesis as the second-reader and who helped me through the transition from Wageningen University to Utrecht University in the first year. The feedback provided by my parents and friends on earlier versions of this text were very helpful and guided me towards further developing my argument. Finally, I would like to thank Zohair for his love and encouragement. Without our shared experiences I would not have been able to produce this work

Content

Introduction

In this master thesis I will discuss how 'mixed' couples, in which the man is Muslim and the white Dutch woman is not, experience the boundaries created in Dutch society between 'The Dutch' and 'Muslims' and how they deal with these boundaries and their own boundary-breaking position. This topic was inspired by my own experiences with Dutch boundaries while being in such a 'mixed' relationship.

An example of such an experience is an evening me and my boyfriend Zohair, who was born in The Hague to Tunisian parents and is Muslim, went to the movies in Ede. Ede is a town next to Wageningen, which is the town where we live. While Wageningen is a university town with a large population of international students and other international influences, Ede does not have these influences. With a large Moroccan community, which is represented in the local news mostly as 'terrorising' the streets of Ede, the town has a different attitude towards 'foreigners' compared to Wageningen. A while ago, we decided to go to the theatre in Ede. The response of the people sitting in the theatre was disturbing. We got angry looks and I could hear people whispering about us, 'what a disgrace', 'how dare they' and other similar comments. We were both born in large cities (Rotterdam and The Hague), which are much more 'mixed' than the towns surrounding Wageningen and in the nine years that we have been a 'mixed couple', we rarely experienced such an openly disapproving encounter with people. However, looking critically at other encounters, showed disapproval or fear ('jokes' such as: 'Make sure when you go to Tunisia on a holiday, you are not locked in the house and we never see you again.'[1]). As a couple we have also received supportive and positive responses, but the negative responses indicated that I was not supposed to be in a

[1] Inspired by the infamous movie *Not without my Daughter* (1991) about an American woman who goes on a holiday to Iran with her Iranian born husband and ends up locked up in the house in Iran and unable to leave the country without leaving her child behind.

relationship with Zohair. These responses, which were said as ‘jokes’ or ‘well-meant advise’, were often coming from people I considered my friends or acquaintances. I experienced these comments as offensive, but usually did not want to spend too much attention to these uncomfortable moments. However, after I have been part of the research master Gender and Ethnicity in Utrecht for almost two years I have learned the needed analytical skills to analyse the processes at work when dealing with discrimination, sexism and exclusion. I was able to combine these learned skills with the knowledge and skills I gained while studying International Development Studies in Wageningen and now I did want to the pay attention to these moments and analyse what was going on. I would like to place my own experiences in a large context and investigate how other ‘mixed’ couples experience the boundaries in Dutch society and how they deal with the responses they receive. By paying attention to the experiences of ‘mixed’ couples, I would like to show the artificial quality of the categories ‘us’ and ‘them’ and indicate how couples can influence these categories and the boundaries separating ‘us Dutch’ from ‘them Muslims’.

Certain boundaries can be seen in Dutch society as separating ‘Dutch’ from ‘Muslims’ in the Netherlands. Since 9/11, the murders of Theo van Gogh and Pim Fortuyn and the rise of politicians such as Geert Wilders and Ayaan Hirshi Ali, social boundaries separating ‘us’ from ‘them’ have become more rigid. In the resulting debate nuances are often overlooked and two opposing groups have been created: ‘us’ (Dutch) versus ‘them’ (Muslims). I would like to analyse what happens to these boundaries in Dutch society when two people fall in love and defy them. In this thesis,these boundary defying couples will be the focus. The question that will be answered is: “How do mixed couples experience the boundaries created in Dutch society between ‘The Dutch’ and ‘The Muslims’ and how do they deal with these boundaries and their own boundary-breaking position?”

This research question will be answered by interviewing six ‘mixed’ couples. In the interviews and the analysis there will be a focus on the intersection between ‘race’ and gender. This will be achieved by combining theorists such as Sara Ahmed, Marleen Kamminga and Joan Nagel while using a feminist methodology.

The following sub-questions will be answered:

1. Do the couples interviewed identify themselves as mixed? How do they think other people identify them?
2. How have they and their surroundings responded to their relationship and the categories that are applied?
3. Which strategies have the couples used to deal with these responses and which effect did these strategies have?
4. Have the women in these relationships experienced a change in their position in Dutch society, going from unmarked to marked? Has the position of the man changed because of his relationship with a non-Muslim Dutch woman?
5. Can these couples be seen as actively *queering* the binaries experienced?

In the last ten years no research projects concerning ‘mixed relationships’ have been executed in the Netherlands that focused on the experiences of ´mixed´ couples in the current Dutch society. Because of this, this master thesis will contribute to the scarce literature on the experiences of ‘mixed’ couples in the current Dutch society. The research that has been focused on ‘mixed’ relationships in the past mostly analysed their experiences but not the potential of these couples to change the categories that are used to identify them as ‘not normal’. By using the concept ‘queering’ to analyse the actions of the *heterosexual* couples, I

would like to shed light on the potential of the ‘mixed’ couples to change the use of categories in Dutch society. I would also like to show how the interesting and useful concept of ‘queering’ can be used in a broader way.

This thesis is structured as follows: first the development and current state of the Dutch debate concerning Muslim migrants will be explained. In the second chapter the theoretical framework will be introduced. The term ‘mixed’ will be critically discussed and it will be explained why these couples, a Dutch white woman in a relationship with a Muslim man, are especially problematic within the gendered and racialised framework that is used in the current Dutch society. The concept ‘queering’ will be introduced and I will explain how I will use this concept to analyse the experiences of heterosexual couples. Thirdly, the research methodology used in this thesis will be explained. I will discuss feminist methodologies and how I collected and analysed my data. In the fourth chapter, the experiences of the couples with the category ‘mixed’ will be discussed. Do they identify as ‘mixed’? Do the people around them do this? And what does this mean for the possibility of queering the categories ‘us’ and ‘them’? in the fifth chapter I will discuss the responses the couples received more elaborately and analyse the strategies used by the couples to deal with these responses. Which strategy was the most successful one? Special attention will be paid to the question if the ‘mixed’ couples are indeed actively queering the categories ‘us’ and ‘them’. In the conclusion the findings will be summarized and the research question will be answered.

Chapter 1

The Dutch Debate:

The creation of 'Dutch' versus 'Muslims'

My own experience in Dutch society as a ´mixed´ couple described in the introduction shows that certain boundaries can be seen as separating 'The Dutch' from 'Foreigners', or more specifically from 'Muslims' in the Netherlands. The marking of difference between 'us' and 'them' and the creation of strangers in this process is the basis of social ordering according to Stuart Hall (1997). People give meaning to the world by classifying other people and things. The classification is based on the creation of binaries. By thinking in binaries someone sees two categories, terms, people or groups as opposed to each other. The symbolic boundaries that are created in this process keep the social categories pure and naturalize them. Which social processes can explain this discourse that is used to keep the social categories in the Netherlands pure? The origin of the boundaries that the 'mixed' couples are seen as transgressing can be traced in the history of the Dutch multicultural society. To indicate how this developed, the recent history of the Dutch multicultural society will be discussed in this chapter. This will show how the attitude towards Islam developed in the Dutch society in the last fifty years and why Muslims became opposed to 'The Dutch' in such a strong way.[2]

[2] In 2012 11,6% of the Dutch population was defined as a non-western 'allochtoon' (cbs). Allochtoon is the official term used in the Netherlands and indicates that at least one of the parents of someone is not born in the Netherlands. When these parents are born in non-western countries, this person is a non-western allochtoon. The opposite of an allochtoon is an autochtoon, which is used to describe someone whose parents are both born in the Netherlands. However, often third-generation migrants (whose parents are born in the Netherlands) are still seen as allochtonen and the term is highly contested for being stigmatizing and creating opposing groups in the Netherlands. The two largest groups were people from Turkish descent (392 923 people, 2,3% of the Dutch society) and Moroccan descent (362 954 people, 2,2% of the Dutch society) (cbs.nl). Although it is difficult to say how many Muslims live in the Netherlands because religion is not registered, it was estimated to be around 1 million in 2012 (Peters, 2006).

The development of the Dutch debate

In the 1960s, the first large groups of immigrants started to enter the country. They were guest workers who were invited by Dutch companies to temporarily work and live in the country. The first guest workers were mostly from South European countries like Spain and Italy and their stay was often, indeed, temporary. However, quite soon the largest two groups of guest workers came from Turkey and Morocco and these migrants wanted to stay in the country (vijfeeuwenmigratie.nl). At this time there was little friction within the Dutch society concerning the presence of these immigrants. The immigrants were predominately men and they were housed in separate communities. Due to this, they had very little contact with other people living in the Netherlands and they were still expected to leave the Netherlands after a few years of hard work. At the end of the 1960s, when it became clear that part of the immigrants coming from Turkey and Morocco were not planning on returning to their countries of origin, the integration of these groups became a political issue. During this time, the policy regarding these immigrants was based on the Dutch system of pillarization.[3] This means that the Dutch government wanted to improve the position of the immigrants without affecting their cultural identity (Peters, 2006). The government developed programmes for immigrants to keep their culture, such as the organisation of Turkish and Arabic language courses. Diversity was seen as something positive, not something that needed to disappear in the process of integration.

However, although the presence of the guest workers was not problematized during the 1960s, the marriages between Dutch women and male guest workers that were taking place were seen as problematic. This was mostly due to the fear that when these men went back to their

[3] This term is used to indicate the way Dutch society has been organised in vertical 'pillars' based on characteristics such as religion and politics. These pillars had little or no contact between one another (Peters, 2006).

home countries, it was expected their Dutch wives would go with them and that they would end up in a less progressive country than the Netherlands. The Dutch women marrying the male guest workers were portrayed as being unaware of the living conditions in the home countries of their husbands and naïve concerning their future in these countries. The discouraging attitude was mostly seen towards Dutch women marrying Muslim men. If a Dutch woman wanted to marry a Muslim man, she had to read and sign a form in which it was explained to her what it would mean to be married to a Muslim. In this form it was said that Muslim men did not treat their wives as equals, that they were allowed to have four wives and that the wife would have no say about the way their children would be raised. These forms that warned the women did not stop the marriages between Dutch women and Muslim men from taken place. The women were outraged about this treatment and surprised about the attitude of the Dutch government towards their marriage. (Hondius, 1999).

This positive attitude towards diversity changed during the 1970s and the 1980s. During these years, it became clear that the guest workers coming from Turkey and Morocco should not be seen as guests anymore. The majority of these men were not going back and they began to be categorized as immigrants (Hondius, 1999). At the same time, the unemployment rates were growing in the Netherlands and the debate concerning the integration policy of the Dutch government started to change (Prins, 2004). Where first the pillarization system with the preservation of the different cultures was preferred, this approach was criticized during the 1980s. The pillarization system was said to have failed and immigrants needed to ‘properly’ integrate. This integration was not only on the economic and social level, but also on the cultural level (Peters, 2006).

Interestingly, the tone with which the growing number of 'mixed' marriages were discussed changed from more cautious and negative in the 1960s to more positive and welcoming in the 1980s. To be in a 'mixed' relationship was becoming more of a possibility for a larger segment of the Dutch society and these relationships were seen as 'interesting, but a 'challenge' (Hondius, 1999). The more positive attitude towards ´mixed´ relationships can also be explained by the belief that these relationships were a sign of integration. It was often believed that a growing number of ´mixed´ relationships is proof that the migrant population was integrating in the Dutch society. It seems that the growing number of immigrants and the growing interest in multiculturalism at the time (in music, food, art, fashion) created a safer environment in which a 'mixed' relationship was seen as something 'trendy'.

However, this started to change from the beginning of the 1990s. In 1991 Frits Bolkenstein, the leader of the liberal party VVD, was one of the first who discussed in the mainstream media the threat that Islam could pose to Dutch society.[4] He published an article in the Dutch newspaper 'de Volkskrant' in which he argued that certain Dutch values were threatened by Islam and that these values should be protected. Bolkestein argued that these values could be protected by an integration policy with 'more guts' (Bolkestein, 1991).[5] This article indicated that the tone of the debate had changed. Where in the 1970s and the 1980s multiculturalism was already critically discussed and evaluated, the existence of a multicultural society and the presence of Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands were not discussed as negatively as Bolkestein did. The focus of the debate changed because of Bolkestein's statements from a debate concerning the integration and possible problems of *foreigners* to a debate concerning the integration and the problems of *Muslims*. It was no longer discussed whether

[4] There were others before him but the was the first man of great prominence to do so (v. Bruinessen, 2006).
[5] Which was also the heading of the article: 'integration of minorities should be treated with more guts' [translated from Dutch by A.R. Original text: 'Integratie van minderheden moet met lef worden aangepakt'] (Prins, 25).

multiculturalism had failed, this was assumed. The lack of integration of the Muslim male immigrants was identified as one of the causes and these men had to adjust and become 'good Dutch citizens' (Prins, 2004). They were causing problems and were spoken to in a manner that indicated that if they were to adjust, they could become equals to Dutch men. Immigrant Muslim women were seen in a different manner. They were seen as victims of their culture and religion and needed to be saved from their fathers, husbands and brothers (Van den Berg and Schinkel, 2009). Being true equals to Dutch women is not an option for these women, unless they move completely away from their culture and religion. It was assumed that men would have to be persuaded or forced to integrate, while for women it would be self-evident that integration into Dutch society would be good for them (Prins, 2004). The main concerns in this debate were the differences between the Muslim migrants and the native Dutch, how Muslim male migrants should change to successfully become part of Dutch society and how Muslim female migrants could most successfully be saved from their culture and religion.

During this time the relationships between Dutch women and Muslim men became a concern again. A discourse analysis of newspaper articles published in Dutch newspapers in the beginning of the 1990s concerning relationships between Dutch women and Muslim men showed that a negative image was created in the newspapers (Kamminga, 1993). The focus of the articles was often on topics such as the kidnapping of children, passport fraud and problems concerning divorces. 'Mixed' relationships between Dutch men or women and non-Muslim migrants were still seen in a more positive manner in these years. The negative attitude was exclusively towards relationships between Dutch women and Muslim men. Stereotypical images of the power differences between men and women, and specifically of Dutch women in a relationship with Muslim men, were used to justify this negative attitude. The women were described as being naïve and tricked by the overpowering and calculating

Muslim men. Men in general were believed to always have more power than women in a relationship but Muslim men were often seen as not only more powerful than their wives but also oppressive due to their religious beliefs and cultural background. The idea of a naïve Dutch woman falling in this trap was used to classify these 'mixed' relationships as unacceptable. Dutch women and Muslim men who had been married since the 1960s even stated that in the 1990s they felt less accepted and experienced more negative responses to their marriage than they had experienced when they got married in the 1960s (Hondius, 1999).

The debate concerning Islam and Muslim immigrants in the Netherlands intensified after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon on the 11th of September in 2001. A research executed by the Dutch research centre Bureau CentERData[6] showed that directly after 9/11, 87% of the Dutch interviewees (n=1565) expected that more conflict would take place between Islamic and Christian communities.[7] Another research centre Forum[8] showed in 2001 that 73% of the interviewed Dutch-Moroccans could partly understand why the terrorist attacks took place and 6% supported the attacks (Crebas, 2012). These type of research outcomes, the violent images of the terrorist attacks and the start of the War on Terror intensified the Dutch debate concerning immigrants and Islam. The social boundaries that appeared the most rigid in this debate were the boundaries separating 'us', the Dutch, from 'them', Muslims.

[6] A research centre that is affiliated with the Tilburg Universiteit.
[7] The outcomes described in this chapter of statistical research projects executed by institutes such as Motivaction and Forum should not be seen as factual representations of the opinions of the people interviewed. It is clear that the form of the questions posed, the respondents chosen and the conclusions made are often debatable with these types of research projects. However, the publication of these type of research outcomes do reinstate the growing distance that is seen between 'the Dutch' and 'Muslims' and indicate this larger trend within Dutch society.
[8] A research centre that executes research concerning multiculturalism in the Netherlands.

During this time, Pim Fortuyn appeared at the forefront of Dutch politics. He had already become famous during the 1990s for his controversial and 'honest' statements concerning immigrants, Islam, Europe and the Dutch welfare state. The controversy surrounding the comments made by Fortuyn in the beginning of 2002 increased when he lost his position as the leader of the political party Leefbaar Nederland (Liveable Netherlands). He lost this position because of an infamous interview in which he argued that the Netherlands was full and that Islam was a backward culture (Prins, 2004). After this, Fortuyn started his own political party (LPF), which was expected to be heading towards a large victory during the elections later that year. However, on May 6th, nine days before the elections were to take place, Pim Fortuyn was killed by an environmental activist. Pim Fortuyn can be seen to have radicalized the debate concerning Islam and the Dutch immigration policy (v. Bruinessen, 2006). This radicalisation of the debate concerning Islam made the boundaries between 'The Dutch' and 'Muslims' even more rigid then they were before. By calling Islam a backward culture, Fortuyn not only insulted the Muslim population in the Netherlands, but also created room for a new extreme anti-Muslim discourse. According to Martin van Bruinessen, 'he opened the floodgates of an aggressive, angry and resentful xenophobic, and especially anti-Muslim, discourse that no one has been able to shut again' (4).

Many people were relieved at the time when it turned out that Fortuyn's killer was not a Muslim immigrant but a white Dutch man. However, only two years later, Theo van Gogh was killed by a Muslim immigrant because of his critique of Islam and the multicultural society (v. Bruinessen, 2006). Theo van Gogh, a Dutch film maker and columnist, had become famous in the years previous to his death because of his 'gift' to insult people. He preferred to refer to Muslims as 'goat-fuckers', but he also targeted other groups in Dutch society, such as feminists and politicians. Van Gogh had collaborated with the Somali-born

Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali in making the short film *Submission*, which is a film written by Hirsi Ali to show how bad Islam is for women. His killer, a young Dutch-Moroccan man, shot him, attempted to cut his throat and planted two notes on his body with a butcher's knife. The notes, in which the killer had used Islamic rhetoric and made references to religious texts, made clear that the real target had been Ayaan Hirsi Ali and that she was intended to be the next victim (nos.nl). The killer was discovered to belong to a group of young Dutch Muslims of mixed ethnicities who wanted to bring the global jihad to the Netherlands. The group members were arrested after the death of van Gogh and their plans were not taken any further, but the fact that Theo van Gogh was killed by a radical Muslim had a large impact on the Dutch society (v. Bruinessen, 2006). These acts of violence in name of Islam were seen as evidence that the allegations made by people such as Ayaan Hirsi Ali and Pim Fortuyn about Islam were true. Certain Dutch values, such as freedom of speech, were at stake. In this debate, a picture was created of 'The Islam', a homogenous religion in which there is no room for interpretation or debate. After van Gogh's death, Ayaan Hirsi Ali argued in an interview that there is no such thing as a 'liberal Islam'. If someone is Muslim and follows the Qur'an and Hadith, then this person will inevitably become radical, anti-Western and violent. She stated that there is only one interpretation of Islam and people who indicate that their 'interpretation' of Islam is liberal are not to be trusted. Only people who take sufficient distance from Islam can be trusted (v. Bruinessen, 2006). This shows the opposition that is created between 'us Dutch' and 'them Muslims'. While someone is Muslim, this person can never be trusted and become part of 'us'. This can only happen when a Muslim completely turns away from her/his religion. Hirsi Ali argued for 'ideological profiling' in the same interview. With this she meant that people are not profiled based on their ethnicity, but on their possible dangerous ideologies at for instance airports or job interviews (v. Bruinessen,

2006). This argument was later often put forward by other Dutch intellectuals to argue that the targeting of Muslims was not racist, but based on ideological insurmountable differences.[9]

In 2004, the politician Geert Wilders (a former member of the liberal party VVD) appeared on the front stage of Dutch politics. Wilders started an independent party named Groep Wilders (group Wilders), which evolved into the Partij van de Vrijheid (Party of Freedom) (PVV) in 2006 (pvv.nl). One of the main points of the PVV when the party started was the danger that was posed by the 'Islamisation' of the Netherlands. Wilders has since proposed anti-Muslim laws such as a law that would fine women for wearing the hijab,[10] a law that would stop immigration to the Netherlands from Muslim countries and laws that would prohibit the existence of mosques and Islamic schools in the Netherlands (watwilwilders.nl). Though the proposed laws are in conflict with the Dutch constitution, and to some even sound ludicrous, Wilders and his PVV have become increasingly popular in the last decade. In the election of 2006, which was the first election in which the PVV participated, the PVV won 9 seats. This made them the fifth party and placed them above more established parties such as the green party Groenlinks (Greenleft), the progressive and liberal D66 and the centrist Christian Christenunie (Christianunion) (parlement.com). In 2007, Wilders announced that he would make a movie about the Qur'an named Fitna in which he wanted to show that Islam is inherently violent due to the content of the Qur'an. This caused for a lot of unrest in the Netherlands and the government distanced itself from Geert Wilders and his Fitna (rtl.nl). When the movie came out in 2008, it remained relatively quiet. There were some violent outbreaks, such as a rally organized by neo-Nazis in The Hague and the molestation of a Turkish boy in Oldenzaal, a small town in the east of the Netherlands (v. Donselaar and

[9] Racism is a very sensitive topic in the Netherlands. Halleh Ghorashi, for instance, explains that it had a big impact on Dutch society that the Netherlands, "that has historically been considered to be open and tolerant, had the highest percentage of Jews sent to the Nazi death camps." (Ghorashi, 108). Ghorashi argued that this shameful reminder still poisons national debates today.

[10] Kopvoddentaks

Rodrigues). Though the expected violent response to Fitna did not take place, the movie was internationally condemned. Ban Ki-Moon, the UN Secretary-General, said that he condemns "… in the strongest terms, the airing of Geert Wilders' offensively anti-Islamic film. There is no justification for hate speech or incitement to violence. The right of free expression is not at stake here." (un.org).

However, Wilder's popularity in the Netherlands did not seem to decrease. The popularity of Wilders in the Netherlands was very difficult for many Muslims. It showed that his racist and excluding attitude towards Muslims was shared by a large amount of Dutch people. A research executed by the Dutch research centre Motivaction in 2009 even showed that one third of all Muslims living in the Netherlands wanted to leave the country, while another 50% was considering leaving. One of the motivations mentioned was the growing popularity of Geert Wilders. Almost half of the respondents (47%) said they were disappointed and angry because of the comments made by Geert Wilders. It could also be seen that 75% of the Dutch respondents had a more negative attitude towards Muslims and Islam since the rise of Geert Wilders as a politician (Motivaction.nl).

In 2010 the PVV even won 24 of the 150 seats, which was an increase of over 9% compared to the elections of 2006 (parlement.com) and this made them the biggest winner. After the election, a minority government was established, which depended largely on the support of the PVV to make any decisions. The government collapsed in 2012 when the PVV did not want to support a large package of budget cuts. This cost the party a lot of the support they had and in the elections in 2012, they lost 9 seats (parlement.com). They were still the third party, but the two largest parties (the liberal party VVD and the labour party PvdA) decided to form a government without the PVV. Wilders changed his approach during the last elections

and instead of focusing on Islam, he focused on the EU and the dangers the EU posed for Dutch society (pvv.nl). Due to this, the debate concerning Islam has become much less heated in the last year and even almost completely disappeared out of the media.

Although the debate concerning Islam has become less intense in the last year, the tensions between 'The Dutch' and 'Muslims' that took place in the last ten years have left its marks in Dutch society. A research commissioned by the Dutch government on discrimination in the Netherlands, which was published in 2009 showed that one third of the interviewed Muslims said they felt discriminated against in 2008 due to their religion. The report also showed that the number of violent incidents towards Muslims in the Netherlands has increased every year since 2003, while the number of violent incidents in general has decreased (Monitor Rassendiscriminatie 2009). The Netherlands also stood out internationally for the violent acts against Muslims. In the period 2005-2010, 117 violent acts against mosques took place in the Netherlands, while this was 42 in the same period in the United States (Crebas, 2012). A research executed in 2012 by the Dutch research centre Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau (social and cultural planning bureau) showed that 63% of the Turkish-Dutch interviewees and 80% of the Moroccan-Dutch interviewees felt that Dutch people were too negative towards Islam. A part of this group (about 25%) also felt that in the Netherlands immigrants were often discriminated against (Maliepaard and Gijsberts, 2012).[11]

It is not clear how 'mixed' couples have experienced the turbulent last decade as no research has been done concerning the experiences of 'mixed' couples in the Netherlands during the

[11] The outcomes described here of the statistical research projects executed by institutes such as Motivaction and Forum should not be seen as factual representations of the opinions of the respondents. It is clear that the form of the questions posed, the respondents chosen and the conclusions made are often debatable with these types of research projects. However, the publication of these type of research outcomes do reinstate the growing distance that is seen between 'the Dutch' and 'Muslims' and can be used to indicate this larger trend within Dutch society.

last ten years.[12] In a research project executed in the beginning of the 2000s by Betty de Hart (2003) it was shown that the relationships between Dutch women and Muslim men are deemed the most problematic 'mixed' relationships in the Netherlands at the time. However, what the position of these couples is nowadays and how they have experienced this position is not clear. This master thesis will discuss the experiences of 'mixed' couples in the current Dutch society and shed light on the possibility of the couples to show the artificial quality of the boundaries separating 'us' from 'them'.

'Us' versus 'them'

The identified differences between Islam and Dutch norms and values

In the Dutch debate concerning Islam that took place in the last twenty years, two opposing groups have been created: 'us' (Dutch) versus 'them' (Muslims). The biggest and most important difference between 'us' and 'them' was identified as Islam, not ethnicity/'race' or a difference in nationality/country of birth (Peters, 2006). Rudolph Peters argues that three reasons can explain this. The first is that people in the Netherlands became increasingly aware of the political side of Islam. The Iranian revolution in 1979 and the assassination of the Egyptian president Sadat in 1981 exemplified this political and possibly violent Islam. Another factor that influenced the dominance of Islam in the debate was that after the Cold War, Islam was portrayed as the new global enemy of the West. The most widely used sources for this have been works published by Bernard Lewis and Samuel Huntington during the 1990s in which they introduced and explained the term 'Clash of Civilizations' (e.g. Huntington 1996, Lewis 1990). This term was used to indicate that the world politics after the

[12] In 2012 a book on 'mixed' couples was published, but this book was not focused on the experiences of 'mixed' couples in current Dutch society. This is a book written by Marga Altena, *A true history of romance, mixed marriages and ethnic identity in Dutch art, new media and popular culture (1883 – 1955),* in which she provides a historical discussion of the depiction in art, new media and popular culture of three 'mixed' couples in Dutch history (Altena (2012)).

Cold War would be dominated by cultural differences between countries. It was argued by authors such as Huntington and Lewis that the biggest cultural differences, which will cause violent conflict, are between the West and Islam, which in these works is represented by the Middle East. However, the most important reason why Islam became the marker of difference was the increased visibility of Islam in Dutch society. Mosques were built and halal butchers appeared. The often veiled wives and daughters of the former guest workers came to the Netherlands and were seen on the streets, going to the shops and schools. The Muslim identity of the guest workers could no longer be denied and was seen as the most foreign characteristic of the migrants (Peters, 2006). The different clothing, food, celebrations and prayer methods were confusing for Dutch people and increased the perceived distance between 'the Dutch' and 'Muslims'. Islam became the marker that determined your membership of 'us' or 'them' and consequently became an identity marker.

People who were identified as coming from countries that are predominately Muslim, such as Turkey and Morocco, started to be automatically identified as Muslim and thus as part of 'them' (v. Bruinessen, 2006), rather than as Turks, Moroccans, etc. As Martin van Bruinessen explains, "many [members of the immigrant communities] who had thought of themselves primarily in ethnic, class or professional rather than religious terms found that, being discriminated against as Muslims they had to live with this Muslim identity" (17). Karin van Nieuwkerk identified this as *cultural racism*. She explained that cultural racism means that individuals are excluded and discriminated against on the basis of their cultural difference, not their physical difference (v. Nieuwkerk, 2004). However, although religion is the marker that is used to categorize someone as either 'us' or 'them', I argue that 'race'[13] is still of importance in this process of exclusion. 'Race' is used to identify someone as Muslim,

[13] As explained by Sara Ahmed (2008), although' race' is invented by science, this does not mean that 'race' does not exist. 'Race', invented or not, still affects bodies and what they can do and its influence should be acknowledged.

namely specifically an 'Oriental' complexion. This means that someone who has an 'Oriental' complexion, which in the Netherlands often means this person is expected to be of Turkish or Moroccan descent, is often assumed to be Muslim. This makes these people part of 'them', as opposed to 'us'. Whether or not this person is actually Muslim is often difficult to say, especially when s/he does not wear clear religious markers (such as for women a veil or for men the caring around of prayer beads or the wearing of a beard).[14] This in practice often means that the conclusion that someone is Muslim is not based on how religious they look, but on their ethnic background. Thus although the religion is stated as being the problem, 'race' is still used to identify Muslims. Due to this identification, Muslims are excluded as 'Others'. This indicates that in the case of Islamophobia in the Netherlands, physical appearance is used to identify and exclude people as 'others', as opposed to Karin van Nieuwkerk's explanation of cultural racism. It also shows the error in the argument that has often been used by Ayaan Hirsi Ali and other Dutch intellectuals that the targeting of Muslims is not racist because they are not targeted for their 'race' but for their religion. 'Race' and religion are very much connected in these debates and should also be investigated as such.

In this process of exclusion, 'our' Dutch values, such as "liberal democracy, secular politics and the general acceptance of the principle of equality, regardless of gender, sexual orientation or religion" (Peters, 4) are portrayed as being threatened by 'their' Islam. Three points are often argued from a liberal Western point of view as representing the inherent problems that Islam has: namely the lack of a separation between 'church' and state, the unaccepting attitude towards homosexuality and the disadvantaged position of women in Islam. The image of a Muslim woman without any rights has been rooted in the Dutch image of Islam and is one of the main points used to prove the irreconcilable differences between

[14] The wearing of these religious markers still does not indicate which place religion has in her/his life or if these markers are indeed experienced as religious by the person wearing them.

Islam and Dutch society (Peters, 2006). Female genital mutilation, honour killings and forced marriages are examples of assigned characteristics of Islam in this debate. Muslim women are described as needing saving. The Muslim woman is oppressed and the oppressor is Islam (Bendadi, 2009). In this debate, a wide spectrum of intellectuals, politicians and policy makers have discussed the faith of the 'poor Muslim women' and in which ways these women can be helped. Topics such as headscarves, forced marriages, honour killings, genital mutilation, domestic violence are debated in, for instance, the Dutch parliament, television shows and newspapers (Van den Berg and Schinkel 2007). The headscarf has been the most debated topic and is often seen as a major instrument of oppression towards Muslim women. Ciska Dresselhuys, for instance, (the editor-in-chief of the influential feminist magazine *Opzij*) stated that "headscarves would not be accepted in her staff because they are a symbol of the oppression of women" (Van den Berg and Schinkel 2007, 398). In this debate, the position of Dutch women is portrayed as the example that Muslim women should reach and that they can only reach by completely turning away from their religion. Problems such as sexism, the oppression of women and gender-based violence do not take place in this Dutch society, which is constructed as a "liberal, free and emancipated society that secures equal rights for women and homosexuals" (v. Nieuwkerk, 240). These 'Dutch values' are used to indicate how different Islam is from Dutch society and to firmly indicate which boundaries differentiate 'us' from 'them'.

The position that Islam is bad for women has been successfully conveyed by so-called 'native testimonials'. These are for instance books written by authors such as the Somali-born Ayaan Hirsi Ali and the Egyptian-born Nahed Selim, in which these women want to show how misogynistic Islam is. These women are placed in this debate as 'Freethinking' feminists from a Muslim background who have an 'authentic voice' because of their 'inside position'

(Mahmood, 2008). Due to this background, the critique of these women is not easily labelled as xenophobic (Van den Berg and Schinkel, 2007). In, for instance, a memoir written by Ayaan Hirsi Ali, named *The Caged Virgin: an emancipation proclamation for women and Islam* (2006), Hirsi Ali stated that in Islam children are learned that people who are not Muslim cannot be good people and that Muslim mothers teach their children it pays to lie (Mahmood, 2008). Although many negative reviews have been written and scholars have shown the inconsistencies and errors in these books (Mahmood, 2008), they have been extremely popular amongst a broad audience, ranging from feminists to right-winged people. These women who share their 'native testimonials' have been awarded many prices for what they do in their struggle for 'women's empowerment'. Ayaan Hirsi Ali for instance was awarded the Harriet Freezerring Emancipation Prize in 2004. This is a price awarded by the Dutch feminist magazine *Opzij*, which she received because she was seen as representing "the embodiment of the struggle for the emancipation of Muslim women" (dutchreport.blogspot.nl). However, as was shown in the Dutch programme NOVA, Muslim women did not feel supported by the approach Ayaan Hirsi Ali was taking in, for instance, the movie *Submission*. In this episode of NOVA in 2004, four Muslim women who were hiding in a shelter because they were victims of violence were shown the movie and were able to discuss the movie afterwards with Hirsi Ali. They indicated that although they may have had the same goal as Hirsi Ali, namely the empowerment of Muslim women, the approach Hirsi Ali took was not helping them reach their goal. They were angry with her and felt very offended because of the way Hirsi Ali treated their religion (novatv.nl). This shows that while Hirsi Ali had received awards because of her use of her 'authentic voice' in her fight for the empowerment of Muslim women, these women themselves felt they were not represented by her or heard in the debate (Bendadi, 2009). The 'authentic voices' of women who came from Islamic backgrounds are used to show the 'real side' of Islam, while the voices of Muslim

women who oppose this position are not heard. The 'authentic narratives' of women such as Hirsi Ali were used to further strengthen the created dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' by focusing on the perceived misogynistic qualities of Islam.

Despite this image that has been created of Islam and the clear opposition created between 'us' (Dutch) and 'them' (Muslim), couples do fall in love and defy the created boundaries. In 2011, 340 people with at least one parent born in Morocco and 330 people with at least one parent born in Turkey married someone who was categorised as an 'autochtoon' (cbs.nl).[15] The younger generations, specifically the second-generation Muslim migrants who are born in the Netherlands, but who are still not seen as Dutch but as 'allochtoon', could be seen as having more often 'mixed' relationships with white Dutch people, although this is difficult to verify since only marriages are registered. These people and their boundary-breaking love are the focus of this research. The fact that the position of women is used as an argument to further the distance between 'The Dutch' and 'Muslims' is especially problematic for the boundary-breaking Dutch women who are in a relationship with a Muslim man. As was already discussed, the relationships between Dutch *women* and Muslim *men* are deemed much more problematic than the relationships between Dutch *men* and Muslim *women* (Kamminga (1993) and Hondius (1999)). One of the factors that caused this is the created image of Islam and the disadvantaged position of Muslim women. This will be further elaborated upon in the second chapter of this thesis. In this next chapter, I will theorize gender, 'race' and relationships as used in this thesis. I will zoom in on the couples and how they have been located within the existing debates and I will discuss why the relationships between Dutch women and Muslim men are deemed specifically problematic within a gendered and racialised framework.

[15] It is estimated that around 90% of the people of Turkish and Moroccan descent identify themselves as Muslim (Maliepaard and Gijsberts, 2012).

Chapter 2

Theorizing Gender, 'Race' and Relationships

As was described in the first chapter, the relationship between the Dutch majority and the Muslim minority in the Netherlands has become tense in the last decade. Within this societal debate concerning Islam, the relationships between Dutch non-Muslim women and Muslim men have been categorized as 'mixed' (Hondius 1999, De Hart 2003, Speelman 2001). In this chapter, it will be discussed what this categorization as 'mixed' means and why the relationships between Dutch non-Muslim women and Muslim men have been categorized as 'mixed'. Finally, the possibilities of these 'mixed' relationships to challenge the existing boundaries will be discussed. This will provide the theoretical framework that will be used to analyse the responses provided by the couples interviewed.

'Dutch' versus 'Muslims'

The categories used in this thesis, namely 'Dutch' versus 'Muslim' are not naturally exclusive categories. The opposition created between Dutch people and Muslims is artificial and based on the idea that Dutch people are not Muslim and Muslim people cannot be Dutch. As was explained in the first chapter, 'race' is also part of this opposition created between 'Dutch' and 'Muslim'. A certain complexion, namely a non-white 'Oriental' complexion, is used to identify someone as Muslim and thus as part of 'them'. To be Dutch means to be white. This means that an opposition is created between 'us', white Dutch people, and 'them', non-white Muslims.

The position of an individual within these categories may change. When Dutch people convert to Islam, they become part of 'them' as explained by Karin van Nieuwkerk (2004).

She showed that Dutch women who convert to Islam, a religion of foreigners, were treated as foreigners. Islam is not perceived as possibly being part of Dutch society since only foreigners are expected to be Muslim. As Van Niewkerk explained it, 'by becoming a Muslim one becomes a foreigner too' (2004, 236). The other way around, becoming part of 'us' by someone who is Muslim, is more difficult and depends on the visibility of the Muslim identity. For women who wear a form of hijab, this is often not possible. However, most of the 'mixed' couples interviewed in this research experienced that at times the Muslim man was identified as part of 'us'. This change of position and the effects of it will be discussed in the final two chapters of the thesis.

In this chapter, I will elaborate on the boundary-breaking position of the Dutch, non-Muslim, white women who are in a relationship with Muslim men and why this type of 'mixed' relationship is problematic within Dutch society.

'Mixed' relationships

The category 'mixed'

The characterization of a couple as 'mixed' indicates that such a relationship is not considered 'normal' according to the social norms within a society. Which relationships are categorized as 'normal' or as 'mixed' relationships change over time and the categorisations have many dimensions (Hondius, 1999 and Speelman, 2001). In general, a 'normal' relationship consists of a man and a woman, of the same age (although it is considered much more 'normal' for an older man to be in a relationship with a younger woman than the other way around), who have the same ethnic background, who share a (lack of) religion and who are from the same class (Hondius, 1999). A relationship can be categorized as 'mixed' when the couple deviates on one or more of these dimensions. The dimensions differ in weight when a couple is

categorized as either ‘mixed’ or as ‘normal’. This weight may change over time. It can be seen, for instance, that in the current Dutch society a couple which has a difference in age or class is more quickly categorized as ‘normal’ than as ‘mixed’. Couples which have a difference in ethnic background or do not share a religious orientation are more quickly categorized as ‘not normal’ and as ‘mixed’ (Hondius, 1999). This indicates that there are degrees of ‘mixed-ness’ and the opposite of one type of ‘mixed’ relationship is not necessarily a ‘normal’ relationship.[16]

The different dimensions (sex, ethnicity, religion, age, class)[17] that influence the categorisations ‘normal’ and ‘mixed’ are not easily separated and intra-act with each other. The identities of the couples are intersectional, which entails that the different dimensions are fluid, mutually influencing and related (Crenshaw, 1989). In the next chapter it will be discussed what intersectionality entails and how this is practiced in this thesis. The relationships that are the focus of this thesis are not ‘mixed’ on one level, namely a religious difference, but are also ‘mixed’ on a second dimension, namely ethnicity, and often on at least one more dimension, such as class. How these dimensions are present in the interviewed couples and in which way they are part of the analysis is more extensively discussed in the fourth chapter.

Relationships can also be considered more ‘mixed’ at one point in time and less ‘mixed’ at another. The marriages between Catholics and Protestants, for instance, were regarded as ‘mixed’ marriages in the 1950s. If two people of these two religions shared a bed, ‘a

[16] In this thesis, the focus will be on ‘mixed’ relationships between Dutch women and Muslim men. However, a relationship between two Dutch people who are not Muslim is not necessarily a ‘normal’ relationship as this couple can for instance consist of two women, two people from a different ethnic background or people who have different religious orientations.

[17] More dimensions can have an influence on the status of a relationship as either ‘mixed’ or ‘normal’ (such as hometown and profession), but these five dimensions are seen most often as influencing the status of a relationship (Hondius, 1999).

proverbial devil slept between them'.[18] Later, these marriages became more accepted and nowadays they would not be considered a 'mixed marriage' anymore by most people in the Netherlands (Hondius, 1999). A marriage that was not considered very 'mixed' can also become more 'mixed' over time, as was seen with Dutch women who married Muslim men in the Netherlands. While in the 1960s they did not experience that their relationship was categorized as 'not normal', they felt less accepted in the 1990s (Hondius, 1999). This also shows that while the religious difference between Catholics and Protestants is not considered as problematic anymore, the religious difference between not religious or Christian Dutch people and Muslims is considered to be problematic.

'Mixed' couples do not go through a linear process of becoming less 'mixed' until their relationship is considered normal. It is often assumed that the longer two groups have been living together in a society, the more 'mixed' marriages will take place. These 'mixed' marriages are seen as indicating that the boundaries between these two groups have dissolved and it is expected that the 'mixed' marriages will soon become categorized as 'normal' marriages (Speelman, 2001). However, the relation between 'mixed' marriages and the existence of boundaries is more complex. Hondius discussed that in the Netherlands in the 1960s the number of 'mixed' marriages between guest workers, who often were Muslim, and Dutch non-Muslim women substantially grew, because only men were invited to come to the Netherlands as guest workers. These unmarried men could not find marriage partners of their own background and religion in the Netherlands and this positively influenced the number of 'mixed' marriages. When in the 1980s the reuniting of families started to take place, more women of countries like Turkey and Morocco started to arrive in the Netherlands. This led to a drop in the number of 'mixed' marriages (Hondius, 1999). This indicates again that

[18] In Dutch: 'Twee geloven op één kussen, daar slaapt de duivel tussen.'

although prolonged contact between different groups in a society may have a positive influence on the occurrence of 'mixed' marriages, as was the case with the Catholic-Protestant marriages, this is not always the case and the occurrence of 'mixed' marriages is influenced by different factors. Examples of these factors are for instance power differences, taboos and certain events that have a large impact on a society, such as the terrorist attacks on 9/11 (Speelman, 2001). Due to these factors the boundaries can become more or less important over time.

'Mixed' in the Netherlands

The relationships that are deemed especially 'mixed' and problematic in our present society are the relationships between Dutch women and non-western, Muslim men (De Hart, 2003). In Dutch newspapers these relationships were cited most often as causing problems, such as passport fraud, the abduction of children or problems that occurred when the Dutch woman wanted a divorce (Kamminga, 1993). According to Betty de Hart, this is especially a concern when it comes to Dutch women marrying Muslim men because these relationships are assumed not to comply with the model of a 'perfect family' (2003). This 'perfect family' is a family in which the woman and man are equal.[19] This equality is seen as something that is ´naturally´ Dutch and it is often not specified, as explained by De Hart. It can be seen that it is especially important in these families that the Dutch woman is not taken advantage of by the foreign man, for instance because of money or because of obtaining the Dutch nationality. This is not expressed when it concerns a Dutch man with a foreign woman. This fear again points to how this stereotypical image of a naïve Dutch woman who has an overpowering Muslim partner is gendered. In which ways the relationship can be unequal because the foreign man is dependent upon his Dutch partner is usually ignored (De Hart, 2003). The

[19] Which already indicates that this model is normative and exclusive. What this equality entails and who decides which families are 'perfect' is unclear and more families than the families in which the woman is Dutch and the man is Muslim are excluded, such as single parent families and families were the parents are homosexual.

relationships of Dutch women with non-western Muslim men are deemed problematic because these relationships are seen as being unequal on an economic and a social level. The economic inequality stems from the expectation that these ´poor' non-western Muslim men tricked Dutch women into marrying them for their money. The marriage is deemed to be more a business deal than a romantic venture for the Muslim man. The social inequality stems from the belief that Muslim men have different expectations of marriage. It is especially believed that Muslim men treat their wives differently than is seen as 'normal' within Dutch society. However, more complex factors are behind this discourse in which the relationships of Dutch women and Muslim men are situated as especially problematic. In the following section, these factors will be discussed.

Dutch women and their Muslim lovers

The creation of strangers through the use of classifications such as ´foreign´ and ´them´ can also be termed *orientations*, as explained by Sara Ahmed (2006). The term orient is part of orientalism, which indicates the direction we are facing. Orientation does not only refer to finding one's way, but also refers to the East. By orientating oneself, one participates in a longer history in which certain places and people 'become' a certain place, such as *the* West and *the* East. The Orient is not-Europe, through which the boundaries between Europe and not-Europe are established. This boundary creates a distinction between *'us'* and *'them'*. The Orient that is created is the Other, which is what 'we' are lacking. By orientating oneself, one chooses a 'line' to follow. The lines followed in the process of orientating oneself, for instance, by the use of a map, are not natural lines. As Ahmed explains, they are lines that have been created and recreated by earlier orientations. These lines can be seen all throughout our lives and represent the directions taken. The lines are created through the action of following them, while at the same time they are followed through the process of creating

them. According to Ahmed, these lines "depend on repetition of norms and conventions, or routes and paths taken, but they are also created as an effect of this repetition" (16).

Ahmed explains that you can be orientated *towards* and *around* something. What we are orientated towards is what we face; it is what is 'other' than us. What we are orientated around is central to us. 'We' as Dutch people are orientated around 'Dutchness', which can be seen as representing a liberal democracy, secular politics and the general acceptance of the principle of equality, regardless of gender, sexual orientation or religion. This ´Dutchness´ partly overlaps with the more widely used term 'Whiteness'. 'Whiteness´ stands for being unmarked, for having the possibility of being without colour. It means that when you are white you are the universal norm (e.g. Puwar, 2004 and Frankenberg, 1993). While ´Dutchness´ is indeed the norm in the Netherlands, ´Dutchness´ is, unlike ´Whiteness´, a carefully constructed identity that represents a specific culture and heritage.[20] Although the meaning of the constructs 'Dutchness' and 'Whiteness' differs, they do intersect. Being Dutch is inherently linked to being white: to be Dutch means you have to white. The constructs together indicate a specific line followed, or orientation taken, which is opposed to what we are orientated towards. Ahmed uses the concept of 'Whiteness' to indicate that this is a line to be followed, which separates 'us' from 'them'. In the Netherlands it can be seen that 'Dutchness' has the same role, namely separating 'us white Dutch' from 'them non-white Muslims', which indicates that 'Whiteness' and 'Dutchness' should be seen as being linked in an intersectional manner and be investigated in this manner.

The culture and heritage connected to 'Dutchness' is opposed to the characteristics that are assigned to Islam in the Dutch debate, which is what 'we' are orientated towards. This 'Islam'

[20] This became especially clear when in 2007 Princess Maxima, the princess of the Netherlands who wascrowned queen on the 30th of April in 2013, said that 'The Dutch culture' and 'The Dutch identity' do not exist. The very popular Princess Maxima caused a lot of unrest with this statement and the Prime minister at the time, Jan Peter Balkenende, was forced to defend her in the press and state that her words were misunderstood and taken out of context (Van der Stoep, 2009).

is seen as dangerous, violent and un-Dutch, as was explained in the previous chapter. This thing/object that 'we' are orientated towards is something that binds 'us' together and that can even constitute 'us'. By choosing a specific line, such as being orientated around 'Dutchness', one aligns oneself with others and becomes committed to 'what' this line leads to. In this way, lines also mark boundaries that separate 'us' from 'them'. Following a line is a form of social investment; it "takes time, energy and resources" (Ahmed, 17). What or whom the object is that we are orientated towards does not matter, it can be 'real' or 'imagined'. What matters is that we are all orientated towards the same object, even if people have different associations with this object. While in this process the other side of the world is racialised, the racial other in our country becomes associated with the other side of the world (Ahmed, 2006). ´Dutchness´ is *here*, it is 'us'. Islam is not part of 'us', it is part of *there*, specifically countries portrayed as being far away, barbaric and 'un-Dutch', such as Saudi-Arabia and Iran. 'Dutchness', just like 'Whiteness', is a line that is to be followed and which marks a boundary between people who follow the 'correct' line and people who deviate, either by choice or because they are excluded due to characteristics such as 'race' or religion. These lines in society separate Dutch white woman from Muslim non-white men. The Dutch white woman is part of here, she is part of 'us'. The non-white Muslim man is part of there, he is part of 'them'. By being in a relationship, the partners deviate from the lines they are expected to follow. Because of this, they endanger the reproduction of the correct orientations, namely the reproduction of 'Dutchness', which is done by reinforcing the correct lines and by keeping the categories pure.

Gender and the reproduction of orientations

The reproduction of this 'Dutchness' is the responsibility of the Dutch women in their roles as the nation´s 'mothers'. Nations are often represented by the icon of the family (McClintock,

1993). As explained by Anne McClintock: “we speak of nations as 'motherlands' and 'fatherlands'. Foreigners 'adopt' countries that are not their native homes, and are 'naturalized' into the national family” (63). In this family, the women of a nation are seen as the mothers. They ensure the reproduction of the nation, connected to their ability to bear children and their responsibility to ensure that these children are raised to become ‘proper’ citizens of the nation. While the fathers are expected to go to work to make sure that they can feed their families, the mothers have to ensure that the culture, language, folklore, values and norms are instilled in the children, who are the future of the nation (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989). In other words, the women have to make sure that their children reproduce the shared orientations.

In the role of the ‘mothers’ of the nation, the women in Dutch society embody the honour of the family, and thus the honour of the nation. To uphold this honour, and to be able to perform their job as reproducers of the nation in the ‘proper’ way, the purity of these women must be perfect. This is the responsibility of the men in their lives (fathers, brothers, husbands). This ‘proper’ reproduction entails that the women have children with their fellow (white) countrymen and raise them in accordance with the nation’s culture, reproducing the shared orientations. This, as described by Joane Nagel, explains why men are especially interested in the sexuality of women and their sexual behaviour. The mothers of the nation are connected to certain values and characteristics such as innocence and the sexual availability of these women for the right men (Nagel, 1998). Unruly female sexual behaviour can endanger the ‘proper’ reproduction of the nation and the honour of the nation. Sexual encounters with men who are not part of the nation is especially problematic in this discourse, “both willing and unwilling sexual encounters between national women and ‘alien’ men can create a crisis of honour and can precipitate vengeful violence” (Nagel 1998, 256).

This discourse concerning the women's reproductive role and the men's responsibility concerning the 'proper' reproduction is still used in the Netherlands. As explained by Marleen Kamminga (1993), in the relationships of Dutch women with Muslim men, the Muslim men are described as having power over their Dutch partners, forcing their culture or religion upon their wives and children. This threatens the reproduction of the nation, 'Dutchness' and the right orientations. The 'properness' of the reproduction is also threatened by the sexual relationships of Dutch non-Muslim women with Muslim men. As explained by Jasbir Puar (2007), the Muslim is identified as The Terrorist and is connected to a perverse sexuality.[21] This indicates that the sexual relationships of Dutch women with 'perverse' Muslim men create a crisis of honour. This negative attitude towards the relationships of Dutch women with Muslim men is inherently gendered as the relationships of Dutch men with Muslim women do not pose a problem nor create a crisis of honour. Because the relationships are seen as endangering the proper reproduction of 'Dutchness' by using the stereotypical images of an overpowering Muslim man and his naïve Dutch female partner, the relationships of Dutch women and Muslim men are specifically considered problematic. Due to this, the Dutch women are demanded to return to the correct line.

Demands to return to the correct Line

Thus, although 'Dutchness' is often seen as being 'naturally' inherited, it should, in line with Ahmed's theory, be seen as a set of attributes that are reproduced through shared orientations. The family line is orientated around a racial group, which, according to Ahmed, becomes a boundary. To marry outside your 'race' is to marry 'out'. 'Race' is seen as having a 'shared ancestry', but Ahmed states that "we inherit proximities (and hence orientations) as our point of entry into a familiar space, as 'a part' of a new generation. … Likeness is an effect of

[21] Puar explains that "the Orient, as interpreted from the Occident, is the space of illicit sexuality, unbridled excess, and generalized perversion, dangerous sex and freedom of intercourse, and afflicted with nonnormative corporeal practices" (2007, 75).

proximity or contact, which is then taken up as a sign of inheritance"(123). The family can be seen as a line that is inherited which we are expected to follow. 'Dutchness', in this case, is a gift, a social inheritance. Because of this social inheritance, or rather orientation and the act of following a specific line, some objects are reachable for us that are not reachable for others who did not receive the 'gift of Dutchness'. These objects can for instance be objects of love. Who is reachable and appropriate as a potential lover is the outcome of our inheritance. The prohibition concerning loved-ones is organized by the fantasy that white bodies must be attracted to white bodies to reproduce whiteness (Ahmed, 2006), or in this case, by the fantasy that Dutch bodies must be attracted to Dutch bodies to reproduce Dutchness. "Too much proximity with others … could threaten the reproduction of whiteness as a bodily or social attribute. … We defend that which is at risk" (Ahmed 128). We defend what is at risk by demanding (white) Dutch bodies that are attracted to (non-white) non-Dutch bodies to become attracted (again) to other (white) Dutch bodies. The behaviour that is out of line is corrected and the (white) Dutch body is demanded to return to the right line, namely the line of Dutchness/Whiteness. In this way, Dutchness/Whiteness can be seen as a straightening device, a demand to return to the correct line.

This demand to return to the correct, Dutch, line is specifically made towards Dutch white women in relationships with Muslim men. This demand is not made as often towards Dutch white men in relationships with Muslim women. Linked to the concerns about the reproductive task of the 'mothers' of the nation, this difference in attitude towards 'mixed' relationships is also caused by the fact that the social (and previously legal) status of a family is determined by the position of the man. The position of a woman in society depends upon the position of her husband. Ann Stoler showed that, during the colonial time, 'mixed' marriages in the Dutch Indies between Dutch men and native women meant that the native woman gained Dutch citizenship. However, the native men who married Dutch women were

not given this ‘privilege’. The Dutch women even lost their Dutch citizenship and followed their husbands in their legal status. This was defended by Dutch lawyers with the comment that “women who made such conjugal choices were neither well-bred nor deserving of European standing” (Stoler 2000, 339). What type of woman was a ‘true’ European woman was defined by her choice of spouse, not by the blood that flowed in her veins nor her place of birth (Stoler, 2000). This still holds true in our current society, though not in legal form but in social practice. Marleen Kamminga argued that the position of Dutch women in the ‘in-group’ in the Netherlands was changed after they married someone who was not part of this ‘in-group’. By being in a relationship with someone from the ‘out-group’, the women lost their position in the ‘in-group’. The position of these men in the Dutch society is not improved because of their marriage to a Dutch woman. This is opposed to the new position in the ‘in-group’ for women of the ‘out-group’ who married Dutch men (Kamminga, 1993). This indicates that white women in relationships with Muslim men not only receive demands to return to the right line, but also move from ‘unmarked’ to ‘marked’.

Grensoverschrijders: moving from unmarked to marked

This change in the social position of Dutch women means that their positions change from ‘unmarked’ to ‘marked’ (v. Niewkerk, 2004). They are no longer behaving according to the social norms in the Netherlands and are no longer part of ‘us’, as was discussed in the beginning of this chapter. People who are unmarked behave and look in accordance with ‘the norm’. Due to this, they usually do not experience discrimination and exclusion. When a Dutch woman has a relationship with a Muslim man, she is not behaving in a way that is considered to be ‘normal’ and in accordance with ‘the norm’. Due to this, she becomes ‘marked’. It could be seen in newspaper descriptions of relationships of Dutch women with Muslim men that the women in these relationships were depicted as unknowing, uncritical

and as lacking any power in the relationship, while Dutch women in general were depicted as free and autonomous. The women who married a Muslim man often were referred to as 'girls' and the marriage 'just happened' to them (Kamminga, 1993). The Muslim men are given more power in the representations. They are, for instance, depicted as clearly choosing for the marriage and at times tricking the Dutch woman into marriage to obtain a Dutch passport.

What can be seen is that the relationships between Dutch women and Muslim men are deemed problematic in the Dutch society. These women are transgressing the boundaries that exist between 'us' and 'them'. Marleen Kamminga uses the term 'grensoverschrijders' (border crossers) to refer to the women in these relationships (1993). Willy Jansen was the first to use this term to discuss men and women who behaved in a manner that was not coherent with their expected gender roles (1984).[22] Due to their behaviour, the categorisations of 'man' and 'woman' became unstable and at times unsettled. Jansen explains that these grensoverschrijders have a double role. At the one hand, they confirm the existing boundaries because their behaviour stands out as different, as not normal. Because of this, what is normal is reinstated, namely the behaviour that is opposite to the behaviour of the border crosser at that moment.[23] At the other hand, they have the ability to change the borders they are crossing. Other grensoverschrijders can follow their lead and the borders themselves can be challenged and changed. Kamminga argued that the women who are in relationships with Muslim men can be seen as grensoverschrijders because of two reasons. First, these women marry someone who is not part of their 'in-group' and in that way they cross the borders that exist between the 'in-group' and the 'out-group'. At the same time, they also put their own

[22] Due to the theoretical significance of the term 'grensoverschijder', I will be using the Dutch term throughout this thesis.
[23] There are many ways in which someone's behaviour, or relationship, can be deemed as not 'normal'. The opposite of the behaviour of a border crosser is not always normal behaviour. Someone can be in a homosexual relationship with someone who has the same ethnic background and religious orientation. The fact that the relationship is a homosexual relationship often makes the relationship 'not normal'. However, not all heterosexual relationships are considered 'normal', as can be seen in this thesis.

status in the 'in-group' at risk and possibly, through marriage, move from the 'in-group' to the 'out-group'.[24]

Because grensoverschrijders have the ability to unsettle the existing categories, the presence of them and their lovers makes the familiar public space seem strange. "Whiteness may function as a form of public comfort by allowing bodies to extent into spaces that have already taken their shape" (Ahmed, 'A Phenomenology of Whiteness' 158). When bodies follow the orientations they are supposed to follow, all things are in line. This creates a feeling of comfort, familiarity. The relationships of white Dutch women and their non-white Muslim lovers indicate that their bodies extent into spaces that they are not supposed to do. Because these women, as 'grensoverschrijders', do not follow the line of whiteness, but are in a relationship with a non-white Muslim man, the presence of these couples can disrupt the comfort of whiteness and exactly this can be seen as having a *queer* effect: things no longer seem 'in line'.

Stepping out of Line:

'Mixed' couples and their possibilities of queering the existing categories

As was already explained, the Dutch women and Muslim men in a 'mixed' relationship are crossing the existing boundaries in the Dutch society created between 'us Dutch' and 'them Muslims'. The relationships represent a desire for bodies that historically have not been reachable. Because of the 'grensoverschrijders', the boundaries between the different categories become unstable and things seem 'out of place'. The lines are no longer followed and this shows that these lines are not as natural as they may be experienced. At these moments, the status quo is *queered.* The presence of mixed couples and their boundary-

[24] Which is connected to the statements earlier made concerning the fact that the status of a woman in society is determined by her husband/partner choice.

crossing love disrupt the comfort of a public space where bodies behave according to the expected social behaviour and this has a *queering* effect. Such a queering effect can also be caused by the presence of individuals, as, for instance, the experience of Frantz Fanon shows:

""Look, a Negro!" It was an external stimulus that flicked over me as I passed by. I made a tight smile.
"Look, a Negro!" It was true. It amused me.
"Look, a Negro!" The circle was drawing a bit tighter. I made no secret of my amusement.
"Mama, see the Negro! I'm frightened! Frightened! Frightened!" Now they were beginning to be afraid of me. I made up my mind to laugh myself to tears, but laughter had become impossible" (258).

The presence of Fanon, a black man, in public created an uncomfortable feeling for white people, a moment when things did not seem in place. This caused white people, in this case the child, to feel frightened. The status quo can be disturbed when people invade the spaces where they have been excluded from (Puwar, 2004).

Historically, the term queer was used as a spatial term, indicating something is oblique, or not straight (Ahmed, 2006). This spatial use of the term queer was translated into a term that indicates sexual orientation and is usually used to indicate individuals who do not identify as or are seen as heterosexual, and who want to challenge heteronormativity and the gender binary male-female. However, I want to use the term queering in a different way. By using queering as a verb that indicates a process and not using it as an identity marker, as can be seen in the work of Sara Ahmed (2006), more possibilities are created for the use of the concept *queer* to shed light on social processes.

In this way, queering is a process that indicates that by doing something or being present somewhere, things are no longer in place. Queering becomes an active choice. I argue that not only homosexual individuals, but also heterosexual individuals can be in love with people who are not in the line of normal sexual subjectivity and thus experience *queered* desires. These couples who cross the created lines and betray their inheritance, are, as was argued before, demanded to return to the correct line. By not responding to these demands and by remaining in their position as 'grensoverschrijders', the heterosexual couples can *queer* the boundaries that are separating them. At these moments, the categories 'us' and 'them' are challenged and it is indicated that they are not as 'black and white' as they are often seen.

However, the moments when the boundaries are queered are uncomfortable for the couple and for the people around them. Ahmed argued that often this boundary is quickly reconstructed, "the body "straightens" its view …" (2006: 66). The strange feeling when space is queered, is awkward and people try to straighten space again as quickly as possible. Ahmed explained this by providing the example of how people often want to categorize two partners in a homosexual couple as 'the male' and 'the female' (butch-femme), which is something she herself experienced with her partner. She explained that "it is the ordinary work of perception that straightens the queer effect: *in a blink, the slant of lesbian desire is straightened up*" [italics in original] (Ahmed, 96).

Queering and the straightening of lines when it concerns 'mixed' couples

In this thesis, I want to investigate whether the interviewed 'mixed' couples queer the categories 'us' and 'them' because of their status as 'grensoverschrijdend'. By being in a

boundary-crossing relationship, the boundary and categories themselves can be questioned and in this process queered.

However, the straightening of the queered lines can also be seen with Dutch-Muslim couples. It can be seen, for instance, with couples in which the Dutch woman converts to Islam. The Dutch women who convert to Islam are treated as foreigners, they become part of 'them'. This treatment shows that "by crossing religious boundaries, the 'us-them' boundary is redrawn as well" (Van Nieuwkerk, 2004, 236). The categories 'us' and 'them', which in this case are 'us Dutch' and 'them Muslims', are kept pure in this way. By straightening the space, the relationships between Dutch women who converted to Islam and Muslim men do not challenge the boundaries separating 'us' from 'them' anymore because their relationship is not seen as 'grensoverschrijdend'. The space is also straightened when it concerns the couples in which the Dutch woman is not converted to Islam and the man is Muslim. The environment of these couples do this, for instance, by categorizing the Muslim man as not being a 'real Muslim' (Hondius, 1999) or by categorizing the woman as being part of 'them', whether she is converted or not, as was explained by Marleen Kamminga (1993).

It can also be seen in older research reports that the couples straighten the lines themselves when they are around their families and friends. As Dienke Hondius showed (1999), they did this by minimizing their 'mixedness'. By minimizing their 'mixedness' they no longer defied in such a clear and strong way the boundaries in place that indicated that their relationship was a 'mixed' relationship. This could be done by not talking about Islam or about the influence of the Muslim partner's culture on the life of the couple. By acting 'as Dutch as possible', they minimized the 'foreign', and specifically the 'Muslim' aspects of their relationship. Because of this, their relationship became acceptable for their surroundings.

By straightening the lines, space is no longer queered. The couples that are not easily re-categorized as either being part of 'us' or of 'them', can prevent people from straightening the lines again and could more permanently queer the existing binary between 'us' and 'them'. In this thesis I want to investigate whether the couples, in which the man is Muslim but the woman is not, can *queer* the existing binaries. Their presence as a couple can make the binaries appear unstable and modifiable but I would like to investigate if they *actively* queer these binaries or if they prefer to minimize the 'mixedness' of their relationship.

Conclusion

In this chapter the theoretical framework that will be used in this thesis has been discussed. It was explained what the term 'mixed' means and why the 'mixed' relationships between Dutch white women and Muslim men are seen as especially problematic within the Dutch society. This negative attitude towards these 'mixed' couples is racialised and gendered in an intersectional way and the different factors were described in this way.

The relationships of white Dutch women and Muslim men are seen as 'mixed' because they cross the boundaries that exist between 'us Dutch' and 'them Muslims'. These relationships are seen as especially problematic because they are expected to endanger the reproduction of the correct orientations. Through the reproduction of these orientations, 'Dutchness' is reproduced. However, as men are believed to be more powerful in the relationship than women and because Muslim men are expected to push his culture and religion upon his Dutch partner and their children, the reproduction of 'Dutchness' is endangered.

The problematically ‘mixed’ relationships of Dutch white women and non-white Muslim men are experienced as ‘grensoverschrijdend’. The existence of the couples indicates that the boundaries separating ‘us’ from ‘them’ are not as stable as expected and can be crossed. The presence of the couples queers the binary created between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and things are no longer ‘in line’. This can be experienced as uncomfortable by people around the couple and by the couples themselves and because of this the lines are often quickly straightened. By categorising the couples as ‘normal’ the lines are no longer challenged. This can be done by identifying the Muslim partner as ‘Dutch enough’ to be part of ‘us’ or the Dutch partner as ‘foreign’, who then becomes part of ‘them’. The couples themselves can achieve this by minimizing their ‘mixedness’ through the erasing of the Islamic and non-Dutch background of the Muslim partner. In this thesis it will be investigated if the interviewed couples *actively* queer the binary created between ‘us’ and ‘them’ or if they prefer to avoid confrontation and minimize their ‘mixedness’.

In the fourth and the fifth chapters of this thesis, it will be discussed how the interviewed couples experience the boundaries separating ‘us’ from ‘them’ and how they respond to the existence of these boundaries and the accompanying negative responses to their boundary breaking love. However, firstly, the methodology that has been used in this thesis will be discussed and more information will be provided about the interviewees and the process of data collection and analysis.

Chapter 3

Methodology

In this chapter the methodology will be discussed that has been used in this thesis to research how ‘mixed’ couples experience the boundaries created in Dutch society between ‘The Dutch’ and ‘Muslims’ and how they deal with these boundaries and their own boundary-breaking position. I will discuss the questions that were posed in this thesis, in which way my methodology was influenced by feminist methodologies and how I collected the data and analysed it. Special attention will be given to the practice of intersectionality, research ‘experience’ and locating myself. As was explained in the introduction of this thesis, I have a personal relation to this thesis. The inspiration for the questions asked here came from my own experiences in a relationship with a non-white Muslim man. My position in relation to this thesis and the implications of this relation will be further elaborated upon in this chapter.

In this thesis, six ‘mixed’ couples were interviewed about their experiences. Due to their ‘grensoverschrijdende’ love, these couples have the ability to indicate the artificial quality of the binary created in the Netherlands between ‘us Dutch’ and ‘them Muslims’. By shedding light on the possibility of these couples to actively queer the binary created, it can be seen in which ways ‘mixed’ couples can actively work towards a society in which categories such as ‘us’ and ‘them’ are not as present as they are in the current Dutch society.

To be able to analyse the experiences of these ‘mixed’ couples, it will be investigated how they identify themselves. Do they identify their relationship as ‘mixed’? How did they and their surroundings respond to their relationship and the categories applied? I will also analyse the strategies the couples used to deal with these responses and which influence these

strategies had. Of special interest will be the changes in the position of the Dutch women in their family, community and the society. Do they experience the move from unmarked to marked, that was described earlier? It will also be investigated if the position of the Muslim man changes because of this relationship with a Dutch, non-Muslim woman. Finally, it will be investigated if these couples are *queering* the experienced boundaries.

Feminist methodology

The questions posed in this thesis will be answered with the use of feminist methodology. I used feminist methodology because it provides the opportunity to shed light on the experiences of the people who are often not heard. When I discussed my topic with the people around me, such as friends and family, many people were surprised and said that they did not know that 'mixed' couples experienced negative responses in the Netherlands. This shows that the experiences of these 'mixed' couples with exclusionary structures are unknown to many people. By paying attention to these experiences, light can be shed on exclusionary structures in the Netherlands and on the possibilities of questioning and challenging the binary created between 'us' and 'them' by 'mixed' couples. Feminist methodology creates room to "analyse and understand gender within the context of lived experiences, is committed to social change, and … committed to challenge thinking about researcher subjectivity and the relationship between the researcher and the researched" (Reinharz cited in Pillow and Mayo 2007, 158). Feminists have been developing feminist methodology since the 1970s as a response to the exclusion of female input and the lack of critical discussions concerning exclusionary structures within mainstream science. It became clear that this exclusion was not just 'bad science', but 'science-as-usual' (Harding, 1986). Due to this, a new methodology was needed to ensure that women are not only included in scientific research, but that other

forms of exclusion can also be detected. Sandra Harding's S*tandpoint Theory* is known as the feminist alternative to methodologies of mainstream science.

Harding states that "the starting point of standpoint theory … is that in societies stratified by race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexuality, or some other such politics shaping the very structure of a society, the activities of those at the top both organize and set limits on what persons who perform such *activities* can understand about themselves and the world around them" ([italics in original] 1993: 54). According to Harding, these people at the top should not be seen as the starting point for research. The activities that should provide a starting point for research are the experiences of those at the bottom because their lives provide problems that should be explained through research and that are not visible from the top. The experiences of the people at the bottom can shed light on the exclusionary structures at work in a society. The experiences of oppressed people can provide a powerful lens through which society can be analysed. This lens is especially powerful because of the 'double consciousness' that oppressed people have (Brooks, 2007). This double consciousness entails that members of an oppressed group have "a heightened awareness not only of their own lives but of the lives of the dominant group (men) as well" (Brooks, 63). This does not mean within standpoint theory it is believed that these experience of the people at the bottom of society will necessarily provide a 'true insight'. Harding argues that all scientific knowledge is socially situated and that while no position will automatically provide 'true insights', the experiences of the people at the bottom of society can produce less partial and distorted, and thus 'truer' accounts. This is called 'strong objectivity'. This strong objectivity stems from the oppressed position of the people at the bottom and their double consciousness. Because these people are not only aware of their own lives but also of the lives of the dominant group, the experiences shared by these oppressed people can shed light not only on their lives but also on larger societal processes.

The strong objectivity also stems from their position at the bottom of society because it is believed oppressed people do not wish to retain the status quo, which is something that is assumed of the dominant class. Due to this wish, oppressed people are more likely to "question the prevailing interpretation of reality" (Brooks, 67). Strong objectivity is not bound up with neutrality, as is the case with the mainstream conception of objectivity. Harding argues that knowledge becomes more objective when it is more closely associated with the particular. "The ideal of value-neutral objectivity, so Harding provokingly argues, is actually quite 'weak'" (Prins, 1997: 69). As no knowledge can be produced in a value-neutral manner, the claim that knowledge is value-neutral is misleading and the goal is inherently unreachable.

The preference given to the 'view from below' has later been critically discussed by other feminists. Donna Haraway, for example, argues in favour of *Situated Knowledges*, as a response to Harding's standpoint theory. One of the biggest points of criticism Haraway formulated was the seemingly uncritical preference given to the view from below by Harding. Haraway acknowledges that the view from below should be preferred by feminist researchers because "… in principle they are least likely to allow denial of the critical and interpretive core of all knowledge" (Haraway, 1988: 584). However, she warns that it creates "a serious danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions" (Haraway, 1988: 584). The proposed situated knowledges has many similarities with standpoint theory such as a disconnection from the traditional scientific view of objectivity. Haraway accuses this traditional view of objectivity of the 'god trick'. The god trick is described by Haraway as the trick of acting as if the eye is "seeing everything from nowhere" (1988: 581) and is thus objective. This accusation is directed towards the argument that knowledge is more objective when it is considered 'neutral' and thus not, or at least minimally, influenced by the researcher. Haraway argues that by acknowledging the limits of

the knowledge produced, how it is bound to a particular location and taking responsibility for what we learn, feminist objectivity can be reached. This is also a critique directed towards Harding's standpoint theory. Haraway argues that the assumption that 'we' (feminist researchers) can see from below is a dangerous assumption to make that is too much based on the idea that the identities of 'the oppressed' are stable. She accuses this position also of using the 'god trick'. Who sees from below is often unclear and dependent upon the view and position of the researcher. We should be accountable for what we see. There is no single feminist position to see from and to be able to see from below we, as researchers, need to critically position ourselves (Midden, 2009).

In this research it also became clear it is important to see the identity of the interviewed couples as liquid. I made the choice to interview white Dutch women and non-white Muslim men who are in a relationship. I have categorized these relationships as 'mixed', based on my own experiences and the literature concerning 'mixed' relationships in the Netherlands. However, the position of these couples within Dutch society is more complicated. If the relationship is categorized as 'mixed', and thus as problematic within the discourse analysed, depends on the position of the researcher and the factors that are taken into account. Secondly, in which ways the couples are 'mixed' and how this affects their position within their families, groups of friends and Dutch society in general also differs per couple, their location and many other factors. The experiences of the couples with the identification as 'mixed' and their position within their families, groups of friends and Dutch society in general will be further elaborated upon in the upcoming two chapters in which the outcomes of the interviews will be analysed.

Locating myself

Reflexivity and a critical positioning is needed of the researcher to reach strong objectivity. Researchers should not attempt to eliminate all factors that could influence the research outcomes, such as sex, age and religion, but should acknowledge their influence. The way the researcher views and interprets the data and respondents should be made visible through a reflexive discussion (Prins, 1997). This reflexivity can be achieved through clearly locating yourself as a researcher in your research (Rich, 1984).

As a white female who grew up in an upper-middle class intellectual family in the Dutch society, I have not consciously experienced racism, sexism or have felt held back while I was growing up because of my ethnic background, gender, lack of religious affiliation or the financial situation of my parents. I was not aware of the influence of my gender, race or class on my daily life or how these factors influenced the lives of other people in Dutch society. At the age of 16, I fell in love with my current boyfriend, Zohair, who is a second generation Muslim migrant who was born in the Netherlands to Tunisian parents. His experiences in the Dutch society were very different from my own and opened my eyes to exclusion, racism and Islamophobia. I became aware of the influence of these processes in Dutch society and how factors such as race (my own whiteness), gender (being a woman) and class (my privileged position) had influenced my life. The negative responses we got as a couple were shocking for me and showed a side of Dutch society I had not been aware of so far. My position in Dutch society changed from unmarked to marked. I no longer behaved according to the Dutch norms and stood out for being different. These experiences have been the inspiration for this research project and my relationship to this research is very personal. The influence this relation to the research had on the process of data collection will be discussed later in this chapter.

Data Collection

In this master thesis, the research question posed will be answered by interviewing six 'mixed' couples, which consist of a non-Muslim Dutch woman and a Muslim man, in the Netherlands. In this section, I will explain my choice of interviewees, how I reached them, the diverse factors that intersect in their identity as a couple and which methods I have used to collect my data.

The respondents

The six couples that have been interviewed have been reached through the method of Snowball Sampling. This means that I have used my personal network to identify respondents and these respondents have referred me to more respondents in their social networks (Kumar, 2011). With my educational background (I have studied Islam and Arabic language for two years at the Utrecht University) and social situation (I have been in a relationship with a Tunisian-Dutch Muslim man for nine years), I have some connections within Muslim communities in the Netherlands. I have asked people who have different social networks to make sure I was not in one network that was too small, homogenous and that would not provide enough possible respondents. When I came into contact with mixed couples, I used the method of Snowball Sampling and asked the interviewees if they knew more people who would fulfil the criteria and would be willing to be interviewed. Through this method I found six couples who fulfilled the criteria and who were willing to be interviewed.

As the respondents are part of my own network or the networks of other respondents who were interviewed, a number of characteristics are shared, as can be seen in table 1.

Table 1:

	Name[25]	Sex	Age	Place of birth	Place of birth parents[26]	Ethnicity
Couple 1	Nadine	F	22	Venray, NL[27]	M + F: Venray, NL	Dutch
Couple 1	Azar	M	26	Herat, Afghanistan. In NL since 1998	M + F: Herat, Afghanistan	Afghani
Couple 2	Marieke	F	29	Kootwijkerbroek, NL	M: Wekerom, NL F: Kootwijkerbroek, NL	Dutch
Couple 2	Jamal	M	28	Driouch, Morocco. In the NL since 2008.	F + M: Driouch, Morroco	Moroccan
Couple 3	Eline	F	25	Zuid-Beijerland, NL	M: Amsterdam, NL F: Den Haag, NL	Dutch
Couple 3	Hakeem [28]	M	27	Bagdad, Iraq. In NL since 2005.	F + M: Bagdad, Iraq.	Iraqi
Couple 4	Floortje	F	29	Dronten, NL	M: Kampen, NL F: Groningen, NL	Dutch
Couple 4	Seran	M	38	Bagdad, Iraq. In NL since 2010.	F + M: Bagdad, Iraq.	Iraqi
Couple 5	Dorine	F	25	Breda, NL	F + M: Breda, NL	Dutch
Couple 5	Kaleb	M	31	Conakry, Guinea. In NL since 1996.	F: Egypt, M: Guinea	Guinean
Couple 6	Els	F	24	Nieuwegein, NL	F: Amsterdam, NL M: Leerdam, NL	Dutch
Couple 6	Mahmut	M	25	Izmir, Turkey. In NL since 2011.	F + M: Izmir, Turkey	Turkish

[25] The names used in this thesis are not the actual names of the respondents. To ensure anonymity, fictional names are used.
[26] M: mother, F: father.
[27] NL = the Netherlands
[28] Hakeem and Seran are brothers. This meant that some of the experiences they shared during the interviews were similar, especially concerning the response of their family to their relationship. However, due to the differences between the attitudes of the families of the women they married, they had very different experiences with borders in Dutch society

		Education	Profession	Marital status	Duration relationship	Religion
Couple 1	Nadine	BA Middle Easter Studies	Student	Not married	3 years	Christian
Couple 1	Azar	HBO History	Manager MacDonald's	Not married	3 years	Muslim
Couple 2	Marieke	MA Comparative Women's Studies	Phd-student	Not married	4 years	(Raised) Protestant[29]
Couple 2	Jamal	BA Math	Student	Not married	4 years	Muslim
Couple 3	Eline	RMA Middle Eastern Studies	Student	Married	2 years	No religious beliefs
Couple 3	Hakeem	HBO System engineering	Student	Married	2 years	Muslim (Shia)
Couple 4	Floortje	MA Cultural Heritage	Sales function in tourism	Married[30]	5 years	(Raised) Protestant[31]
Couple 4	Seran	Secondary school in Iran	Educator in a factory	Married	5 years	Muslim (Shia)
Couple 5	Dorine	MA Nutrition and Health	Phd-student	Not married	2 years	(Raised) Catholic[32]
Couple 5	Kaleb	No education	Factory worker	Not married	2 years	Muslim
Couple 6	Els	Secondary school	Immigration specialist	Not married[33]	9 years[34]	Religious[35]
Couple 6	Mahmut	MA Business Administration	ICT consultant	Not married	9 years	Muslim

[29] Marieke feels connected to Protestantism but is not sure if she would call herself a Protestant anymore.
[30] Floortje and Seran had an Islamic marriage and will get married for the Dutch law in the upcoming months
[31] Floortje was raised as a Protestant but at the moment does not feel connected to a specific religion.
[32] Dorine was raised as a Catholic but at the moment she does not consider herself to be religious.
[33] Els and Mahmut are engaged and want to get married in 2014.
[34] During the first seven years of their relationship, Mahmut lived in Turkey while Els lived in the Netherlands and they mostly kept in contact through internet.
[35] Els does consider herself a religious person but that does not affiliate herself with a specific religion.

What can be seen in the table is that the majority of the partners interviewed are in their twenties. The oldest interviewee (Seran) is 38 years old. Of the six couples, only two couples are married. Due to these factors, the couples that were interviewed have not been together for a very long time. This means that while their experiences as a new couple will be more recent and because of this can still influence their lives today, their position as a couple has not developed as much as the position of the relationships of people who have been together for a longer time. This indicates that the interviews will mostly represent how 'mixed' couples experience the boundaries in the Dutch society *today* and not how these experiences have developed over years.[36] Table 1 also shows that the majority of the partners interviewed have received education at university or HBO level.[37] It can also be seen that all the Muslim partners interviewed were not born in the Netherlands but migrated to the Netherlands at a later stage of their lives.[38] Due to this, they have a different position in Dutch society then second-generation migrants whose parents migrated to the Netherlands as guest workers.[39] All the interviewees are also able bodied and heterosexual. I have chosen for heterosexual couples because by adding homosexual couples to the sample of interviewees a third dimension is added, namely sexuality. Since homosexuality has a very complex position in the migration debate[40], this would make the research too large and complex for the time available.

The overview of characteristics shows that while the couples interviewed may experience oppression due to their 'mixed' relationship, their experiences do not represent the experiences of the most oppressed 'mixed' couples.[41] These 'mixed' couples are not only oppressed due to

[36] The work of Dienke Hondius (1999) can be studied for a more elaborate research on the historical development of 'mixed' relationships in the Netherlands.
[37] Seran, Kaleb and Els have not received a high level of education.
[38] Azar and Kaleb moved to the Netherlands while they were still teenagers (Azar was 11 years old and Kaleb 14years old).
[39] What the differences between these positions are is a very complex and large question and one that will not be addressed this thesis.
[40] This has been described by, for instance, Fatima El-Tayeb (2012).
[41] Which is the perspective that would have been privileged in *standpoint theory* and *situated knowledges*.

their 'mixed' relationship but, for instance, also due to their lower class, poverty, unfavourable position on the labour market and sexuality. While the couples interviewed can shed light on processes of exclusion based on race, their status as ‘mixed’ and religion, they are less likely to have experienced exclusion because of their economic status, education, sexuality or physical abilities. Due to this, their experiences may be very different than the experiences of ‘mixed’ couples who have experienced exclusion on these levels. However, due to the limited time available for this master thesis, I have not included more interviewees.

The ethnic background of the Muslim men was not taken into account in the selection process of the interviewees. As was explained in the first chapter of this thesis, in the Netherlands it can be seen that Islam is used to indicate where the lines are that separate ‘us’ from ‘them’. However, the differences caused by ethnicity, nationality or the regional background of the Muslim men or the Dutch women were documented, as could be seen in table 1. To ensure that the identity of the interviewees is not limited to their ‘mixed’ relationship in the interviews and the data analysis, characteristics such as ethnic background, education, the religion (or lack of) of the Dutch partner, the home town of both partners and of their parents were be part of the analysis. As will be described more extensively in the two upcoming chapters, factors such as ethnicity, hometown and education influenced the experiences of the ‘mixed’ couples.

The process of interviewing

I have conducted semi-structured interviews to collect the experiences of the ‘mixed’ couples. An interview guide consisting of a list of topics and possible questions has been used. [42] I was not restricted by pre-determined questions and order in the guide but I did have a list of topics

[42] This interview guide has been added to this thesis as appendix 1

to ensure that all important issues were discussed. I used in-depth interviews because through these interviews, experiences that are often hidden can be shed light on. The goal is not to make (quantitative) generalizations about the experiences of all 'mixed' couples in the Netherlands (Hesse-Biber, 2007), but to show how these couples experience their position within Dutch society. The partners were interviewed together. The advantages of this approach were explained by Yasmin Alibhai-Brown and Anne Montague in their book *The Colour of Love* (1992). They interviewed multiple 'mixed-race' couples in England and noticed that the partners "talked to each other as we talked to them, often for the first time, about their worries and realisations" (Alibhai-Brown and Montague, 20). By interviewing the partners together during my interviews, situations were created in which the partners had a conversation about the discussed topics with each other during the interviews. This shed light on the possibly different way the partners experienced the same situations and how they formulated these experiences. This technique provided to be fruitful as the partners not only enlightened each other's experiences but also asked each other critical questions. The down-side of interviewing the partners together is that the presence of the other partner can censure the answers provided. The partners might be afraid that they would hurt their partner with the answers provided concerning their relationship, the relationship they have with their families and friends and how they act around each other's families and friends. It is unclear if this indeed took place during the interviews. However, some of the respondents were really honest about their partner's family even if their partner responded in an angry manner. An example is Jamal who said he thought Marieke's parents were the 'Dutch Taliban' after which she told him (in a half-joking manner) not to say this anymore.

The interviews took place in the homes of the interviewees, which was in the majority of the cases the first time I met the couples.[43] The participation in the project was voluntary and anonymous. I explained this to the participants before the interviews. Consent was asked to use a tape recorder. It was made clear that if anyone during the interviews became uncomfortable or decided that she/he did not want to participate in the project anymore, they could leave at any moment. None of the couples used this option.

As a feminist researcher, I am concerned with reducing the hierarchy between myself and the interviewees (Hesse-Biber, 2007). At the beginning of the interview I introduced myself, I told the respondents something about my background, my relationship and explained the purpose of the research. This is also named 'strategic disclosure' by Rosalind Edwards (cited in DeVault and Gross, 2007). This means that, as part of reflexive interviewing, the interviewer can reveal her connection to the research, the research interests and in that way create a conversation that is a shared moment of making knowledge. All the interviewees responded positively to this disclosure. Some asked questions to clarify my story or how I would process or publish this research. I tried to answer these questions as thoroughly as I could and indicated that they could always ask me more questions during the interview or later via email.

The interviews were executed in Dutch, as Dutch was either a first or second language for all the respondents and myself. The interviews were transcribed in Dutch. They were not translated before they were analysed. The only sections of the interviews that have been translated by me, are the sections that were used as citations in this thesis. During this

[43] I already knew Marieke personally before this research project was executed. No obvious differences were noticed during the interview and the analysis between my interview with Marieke and Jamal and the other interviews. Marieke and I had not spoken about her relationship with Jamal often and I had never met Jamal before the interview. The answers provided by Marieke did not differ much from the answers provided by the other interviewees. Due to this, I felt confident my prior relationship with Marieke was not problematic.

translation I tried to stay as close as possible to the Dutch version of the statement and the content of the citations. As explained by Bogusia Temple and Alys Young (2004), there is no single correct translation of a text. The translator needs an understanding of the local realities that are tied to the language used and the connected changing identities. I tried to make decisions for certain translation based on the cultural meaning a word has in Dutch language. An example is the word 'allochtoon'. This word was used by Azar when describing his difficult relationship with some of Nadine's family members. As 'allochtoon' is a Dutch word that does not have a precise translation to English, I translated it with the term 'migrant'. There are legal and theoretical differences between these terms, but Azar wanted to express that he was frustrated that Nadine's family members had a negative attitude towards foreigners that live in Dutch society. Due to this, I found the term migrant sufficient to indicate which terminology Azar was using. Alternative terms such as 'foreigner' were not sufficient as they can be used in a much broader sense to indicate people who are in the country for a shorter time, such as tourists. Due to the high number of quotations used, I decided not to insert the Dutch version of the quotation in a footnote. The anonymised transcribed interviews can be provided by me for more background information on request via email.[44]

Besides the interviews, I also contacted part of the respondents via email to ask them follow-up questions. These were questions I had missed during the interview but which turned out to be important for my analysis. All the respondents answered my email quickly and the answers provided were used during the analysis.

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My position towards the research, as described earlier, means that I am in the position of 'outsider/within', which indicates that I am an 'outsider' due to my status as researcher, but that I am an outsider 'within' because I am in a similar relationship as the couples interviewed (Pillow and Mayo, 2007). This similarity is accompanied by several advantages. One is that the couples interviewed can view me as someone who has experienced similar things and who would more easily understand them than someone who has not been in a similar relationship. Another advantage is discussed by Ruth Frankenberg in her book *White Women, Race Matters* (1993). She explains how she, as a white woman, in her interviews with other white women was able to clarify her questions by providing examples of her own experiences with race and racism. By providing these examples she was able to clarify her questions and also make clear which direction she was interested in. I used this technique during the interviews and found it very helpful. The concept ´boundary´, for instance, was often experienced as unclear and I was able to clarify this concept by providing some examples of the times Zohair and me experienced boundaries.

However, my position as 'outsider/within' did not mean that the experiences of the interviewees and my own experiences were similar and that I automatically understood the couples. Other differences can weigh more heavily and create a larger distance between me and the interviewees (such as education, hometown or more positive or negative experiences when it comes to being in a 'mixed' relationship) (Riessman, 1987). The position of a researcher can also change during an interview from outsider to outsider 'within' as a response to the topics discussed. This became clear during my interview with Marieke and Jamal. Marieke and I have followed similar courses in Utrecht, which is also why we already knew each other. At the same time, Marieke is from a small village in the middle of the Netherlands while I am from a large city in the West. Marieke knew where I grew up and during the

interview, she explained me a few times that growing up in a small village was very different from growing up in a large city in the west of the Netherlands. This showed that while we shared a educational history, the different area we grew up in was important for Marieke to indicate how different our upbringing has been and how this influenced our current experiences.

Uncomfortable moments in interviews are not necessarily a bad thing. Uncomfortable situations can shed light on issues that do not correspond and that are important for the interviewees or for me. Avoiding uncomfortable moments should not necessarily be the goal of a researcher (Hesse-Biber, 2007). During the process of interviewing I remained reflexive, wrote down my memos, revisited my topic list after each interview and stayed open-minded to changing the topic list, questions posed or direction taken in the interviews. This led me to change some aspects of the topic list, such the order in which I asked the first questions concerning their age, profession, etc. The concept 'nationality' turned out to be open for multiple interpretations, such as legal, emotional or cultural, and I noticed that the answer provided often corresponded with the interviewees' ethnicity and not legal nationality. Due to this, I asked the place of birth of the interviewees and asked the interviewees what their official (legal) nationality was. This showed that while the majority of the interviewees had a Dutch nationality, all the interviewed men had a non-Dutch ethnicity.

Memos

During the research, I wrote down memos to make sure all observations were recorded. According to Boeije (2010), there are three types of memos, observational memos, theoretical memos and methodological memos. Observational memos are also known as field notes and describe observations made in the field. Theoretical memos reflect findings that are derived

from the data during analysis. Methodological memos concern thoughts relevant to the methods used. These memos are not as clearly divided in practice, but may overlap. During the research project I have recorded these systematically by always carrying a writing pad with me and writing down my thoughts every time after working on the research. I mostly used these notes to remember my observations during the interviews, to remember methodological questions that should be discussed in the thesis and to write down my personal experiences. An example is the follow memo:

> "Theoretically I understand that by wanting to be 'normal', nothing new is created and nothing is changed. However, personally, I understand that couples want to be regarded as normal and do not try to *queer* the existing categories. So what is my goal with this thesis? Destabilizing categories? Yes, theoretically. On an emotional level? Showing that the experiences of these couples matter. What if no *queering* can be seen? This is also data! It shows that people want to be regarded as 'normal', which could also be something that I might want." [translated from Dutch by A.R.] (memo, recorded on 25-04-2013).

The recording of these memos were used to help in the reflexive discussion concerning my views and interpretation the data, the respondents and the research project in general.

Data analysis

Coding

Data analysis is described by Boeije as a process of segmenting and reassembling and should be alternated with data collection (2010). Segmenting data entails that the data are broken up and separated in categories. In this way it becomes clear which topics appear in the raw data.

Data are reassembled by recombining the categories that appeared during the segmentation process. A very important tool during the analysis of data is coding. Through coding order is created and the necessary categories for the process of segmentation become clear. Three steps of coding can be used during the analysis: open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Boeije 2010). During all three phases data are still collected and the analysis outcomes will be used to further focus, or broaden if needed, the interviews. 'Open coding is the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing and categorizing data' (Boeije, 2010:96). It starts during the first round of data collection and can be ended when no new codes are necessary. This means that the code scheme created when analysing the first round of data will be used when analysing a second and maybe third round of data. When no new codes are necessary, the code scheme is finished. After this phase, I had created 45 codes based on the topic list used during the interviews and the topics that the interviewees brought up themselves.[45] In the second phase, axial coding, I made connections between categories. In this process, categories are related to subcategories which indicated which elements of the research are the dominant ones and which elements are less important. This could be finalized when there was a clear distinction between the more important and less important codes and the contents of the categories are known. During this phase, the codes that seemed to be connected in the text were linked together. It was then analysed if indeed these codes were often used together or were used on parts of the interview that concerned the same topic. The codes that were of less interest were identified. Two examples of such codes are 'personal experience as an example' and 'prior relationships'. The final step in coding is selective coding. In this step core categories were created that explained the observations described. In this final step the data was reassembled to answer the research question posed. I used ´code families´ to reassemble the coding accordingly. The following families were used: Borders

[45] The list of the used codes can be found in appendix 2.

experienced, Change in position, Identification of couple, Influence of strategies and responses used by the couples, Responses to relationship, and Strategies and responses used by the couples. These families were used to structure the data and the analysis chapters. During these steps the computer programme Atlas.ti has been used to code the interviews, create the families and structure the analysed data. Because I used Atlas.ti, I could see which larger themes came up in the interviews and quickly see where in which interviews the codes were present. The down-side of using a programme like Atlas.ti can be that the pieces of text that were not coded are excluded from further analysis. However, during the creation of the families, I re-read all the interviews completely to ensure I did not exclude parts of the interviews too quickly in earlier phases. Because of this, I included some of the parts of the interviews in the analysis that I had excluded in an earlier phase because at that time in the analysis I did not think they would be of interest..

During the analysis and the coding of the responses provided during the interviews, I kept in mind that certain advantages, disadvantages and cautions are connected within feminist methodology to the use of 'experience' as a source of data. These will be briefly described here.

Researching 'Experience'

I made the choice in this research project to focus on the experiences of 'mixed' couples in the Dutch society. What is described as personal experience by Foss&Foss is "the consciousness that emerges from personal participation in events" (39). This experience provides insights in the lives of the women and men involved and how they experience oppression. These insights are created by using interviewing as a method for data collection. In line with standpoint theory and situated knowledges this method of data collection was

used to see from below and to make institutional power differences visible through the experiences of the interviewed 'mixed' couples. Foss&Foss (1994) state that the use of experience as a source of data provides multiple truths and values diversity. This made it possible for me to represent situated data outside of the theoretically created categories. This was especially interesting in this research project as the categorisation of the couples as 'mixed' is one of the aspects that was analysed, rather than used as a starting point. The use of personal experience can be seen as showing alternative values and practices. The lived realities that the interviewees shared with me shed light on experiences outside of the hegemonic constructions of social reality and the theoretically created categories and could challenge these categories at the same time. By shedding light on the boundary-crossing couples, it can be seen that there are indeed alternative values and practices. The hegemonic constructions of social reality are, though dominant, not represented anymore as the only possible reality experienced. These experiences challenge the hegemony of these constructions and in this process create room for marginalized people and their experienced social reality (Scott, 1993). Elizabeth Grosz even argues that 'without some acknowledgment of the formative role of experience in the establishment of knowledges, feminism has no grounds from which to dispute patriarchal norm' (94). A better, more situated and more objective knowledge can be produced through the use of experience.

While using experience as a source of data, I will keep in mind that although experience is constructed through the lens of the interviewee, the perspective of the interviewee (namely the described experience) is not the only lens through which social circumstances and structures can be understood. When seeing experience as providing the uncontested truthful insight into social structures, this will weaken the research (Scott, 1993). Experience cannot unproblematically be seen as outside social, political, historical and cultural forces and should

not be seen as 'the truth' (Grosz, 1994). By claiming experience should be seen as 'the truth' it is easily debunked, while the experiences themselves are important and should not be ignored. It also makes it easier to mask problems associated with the research and the argument made. What the experiences of the couples interviewed will show is how they identify, how people respond to their relationship and how they deal with these responses. The ideas and interpretations analysed have been provided by the couples and show their perspective on the issues discussed in the interviews. More importantly, their strategies can indicate how people can respond to negative attitudes towards their life choices and possibly how individual couples can influence the categories used in Dutch society.

The couples interviewed should not be seen as unequivocally representing 'their group', (i.e. 'mixed' relationships in the Netherlands of Dutch women and Muslim men), and the internal discontinuities and differences in such a group should be kept in mind (such as ethnicity, place of birth, religion etc., as was explained under the heading 'the respondents'). Representation cannot be claimed as the sample used was too small to be representative of all the 'mixed' couples, in which a Dutch woman is in a relationship with a Muslim man, in the Netherlands. However, even if the sample would have been bigger this would still have been problematic. When treating the experience described by the couples as *the* insight into the social realities and structures of the people researched, the identity of the interviewees is taken as self-evident. As stated by Joan Scott, "when experience is taken as the origin of knowledge, the vision of the individual subject (the person who had the experience or the historian who recounts it) becomes the bedrock of evidence on which explanation is built" (399). The categories used to indicate the group researched, such as 'mixed', are often not questioned or criticized but reproduced. The differences between different groups of people are in this way naturalized and the categories reinstated. In this research, the category 'mixed'

will not be naturalized because the identification of the couples is one of the dimensions that will be researched. The couples will be asked if they, as a couple, identify as ‘mixed’, if they think others do this and if they feel comfortable with the way they are categorized by other people in their surroundings.

While analysing the experiences of the interviewees in this research, the practice of intersectionality will be used. Intersectionality was already briefly discussed in the second chapter of this thesis, but will be elaborated upon here.

Intersectionality

The concept intersectionality is best summarized as “the interaction of multiple identities and experiences of exclusion and subordination” (Davis 2008, 67). It is seen as a very important addition to the feminist toolbox. The term intersectionality was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) in her discussion of the experiences and struggles of women of colour in the US. Crenshaw stated that inquiry into the experiences of marginalized people is limited to the most privileged individuals of this group of marginalized people. This means that while taking the experiences of black people into account, the most privileged black people are focused on. Because of this, black women, who are multiply-burdened, are erased. Crenshaw argued that theorists need to take not only gender and race into account but that they should also show how these categorisations interact in shaping the experiences of black women.

Intersectionality is about the interactions of different identities. However, these different identities are not identities with fixed boundaries that are unchanged because of these interactions. The different identities are best seen as fluid. They influence each other and in this way influence the interaction that takes place and the outcome of this interaction. Within

intersectionality theory it is seen as more productive to use the term 'intra-action' compared to interactions (Barad, 2003). As explained by Nina Lykke, within intersectionality "intra-action refers to the interplay between non-bounded phenomena, which interpenetrate and mutually transform each other while interplaying" (208). This shows that for a research to be intersectional, the different identities, such as race, gender and sexuality are not seen as separate and bounded identities but as mutually influencing and related. The identity of an interviewee, for instance, is not only determined by race or gender, but also influenced by other factors such as class and religion. This should be acknowledged by the researcher and be part of the analysis. In this research project, it is claimed that dimensions such as 'race' and religion are irreconcilably connected. As was explained in the first chapter, the 'race' of the Muslim population of the Netherlands influences the societal processes in which 'us Dutch' and 'them Muslims' are created and should not be ignored. However, in the negative attitude often portrayed towards 'mixed' relationships, gender is also an intra-acting factor. The discussed 'mixed' relationships in this thesis are problematic because they are relationships between white, Dutch women and non-white, Muslim men. All these factors, race, religion and gender, intersect and will be analysed as such. Intersectionality is also used in the discussion of what a 'mixed' relationship is and which dimensions are deemed as problematic for the surroundings of the couple. Besides a difference in religion (Islam) and ethnicity (the Muslim men are non-white), in most couples a third dimension of difference can be seen, namely class (almost all women have received a higher education than their partners[46]).[47] These differences have been documented (as could be seen in Table 1) and these will be part of the analysis. The dimensions will be taken into account when looking at the differences and similarities between the experiences shared by the interviewees.

[46] Mahmut and Els are the exception.

[47] This is a very interesting aspect of the couples that were interviewed in this research. Due to the small scope of the interview (six couples), I am not able to conclude whether or not this is a larger societal development but it could be interesting for further research.

Conclusion

In this chapter I described the methodology I have used in this thesis to research how ‘mixed’ couples experience the boundaries created in Dutch society between ‘Dutch’ and ‘Muslims’ and how they deal with these boundaries and their own boundary-breaking position. The described methodology is inspired by and developed from feminist methodology. Because of this relation to feminist methodology, several points have been important in this research, as was explained in this chapter. I wanted to represent from a reflexive and situated position the experiences of less privileged people in the Dutch society through the use of interviews. This was, amongst other things, done through clearly locating myself in relation to this research. In the interviews, I wanted to make sure I was aware of the hierarchy between myself and my interviewees and create a conversation that was a shared moment of making knowledge. Furthermore, I described who my interviewees are, how I reached them, how I interviewed them and why I made the choice to interview these people. The outcomes of the interviews and the analysis will be presented in the next chapters.

Chapter 4

Categorization of the 'mixed' couples

In the next two chapters of this thesis, the experiences of the interviewed couples with boundaries in Dutch society will be discussed and analysed. In this chapter, it will be discussed how the couples identify themselves and how other people do this. Do they consider themselves to be 'mixed'? Do others do this?

Identification – 'Mixed'?

In this thesis the experiences of *'mixed*' couples discussed. As was explained in the second chapter, the categorisation of a relationship as 'mixed' indicates that the relationship is not deemed to be 'normal'. In this thesis, I identified the relationships of Dutch white women with Muslim men to be 'mixed' based on my own experiences and the analysis of prior research. In the next section of this chapter, it will be discussed how these couples identify their own relationship and how the people around them do this. It will be addressed whether or not they identify their relationship as 'mixed' and which axes of difference are important for them in this identification. Their thoughts on the ways that other people identify their relationship and which axes of difference are of importance in this identification will also be described.

Self-identification of the couples

When asked if the couples identified themselves as 'mixed' couples, four of the couples stated that they did not do this. As explained by Marieke, "when we are together, we are just Marieke and Jamal. We think of each other as individuals and when you do that, there can never really be a notion of a 'mixed' relationship, I think. When you think in these terms, you

see your partner as representing a specific culture that you can than mix with your own culture." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (19 April 2013). Most couples stated that when they were alone, they were just two individuals who were in a relationship and categories such as 'us' and 'them' did not matter.

Els did use the categories 'us' and 'them' to indicate that her relationship was not 'mixed'. She explained that she and Mahmut did not really feel like a 'mixed' couple because Mahmut was, in her opinion, not a 'real Muslim': "Mahmut is an exception. I have known many Muslim people and Mahmut is really different, he is 'sort of Dutch'." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (7 May 2013). Els connects the fact that Mahmut is not 'a real Muslim' to him being 'sort of Dutch'. This shows that in the eyes of Els being ´a real Muslim´ and being Dutch do not go together. Being Muslim is connected to being a foreigner, not to being a Dutch person. Mahmut was seen by Els as part of 'us Dutch' because he was not identified as being part of 'them Muslims', which illustrates the importance of these categories to Els. Mahmut did object to this statement by asking what a real Muslim was according to her and by stating that he did identify as a Muslim. He later explained that the moments of 'us' and 'them' that they experienced as a couple did not indicate that they were 'mixed' by definition. When Els said that they did experience frustrations in which they used terms such as 'us' and 'them', Mahmut responded by saying that "say that I am from T.H. and you are from L. and our families are really different, then we would also have discussions in which we would say 'your family' and 'my family'. These discussions are not because I am a Muslim but because our parents raised us differently." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (7 May 2013). This shows that while Mahmut identified differences between himself and Els, he considered other axes of difference besides religion and ethnicity also to be important, such as place of birth or class (linked to upbringing) to consider when discussing the categorisations 'us' and 'them'.

Later in the interview, Mahmut said that he did not necessarily identify his relationship with Els as ‘mixed’, but that part of the differences between them could be explained because of the difference in their ethnic background. He felt that religion did not influence their relationship as he did not consider himself to be a ‘practicing Muslim’. However, Mahmut emphasized again that he could also experience these differences if he had been in a relationship with a Turkish girl who had a completely different upbringing. Els did not consider these factors to be important when describing their relationship as either ‘mixed’ or not. She did not identify their relationship to be ‘mixed’ because Mahmut was part of ‘us’ and not of ‘them’. This categorisation is mostly determined by the fact that Mahmut does not ‘act like a real Muslim’, which indicates that Els considered religious differences to be a major influence on the categorisation of a relationship as ‘mixed’.

Nadine and Dorine were the only interviewees who indicated that they did identify as a ‘mixed’ couple when they were with together. Dorine explained that she and Kaleb “have so many differences that we could not say that we are from the same village.” [translated from Dutch by A.R] (1 May 2013). Dorine seems to imply with this statement that people who are from the same village are often from the same ethnic background, share a religious orientation and share other characteristics such as class. By stating that she and Kaleb are not ‘from the same village’ it can be seen that Dorine thinks that she and Kaleb have differences on multiple levels. The difference in ethnic background seemed to be the most important difference for Dorine. She provided the following example to clarify why she considered their relationship to be ‘mixed’: “I have also noticed that when Kaleb and I walk around in public, people look at us. I think they watch us because of our difference in skin colour. When I see a dark person walking with a white person, I also look at them. It is nice, but different.”

[translated from Dutch by A.R] (1 May 2013). What can be seen it that Dorine also experiences her relationship with Kaleb to be 'mixed' because she feels people look at them because of the difference in skin colour, and she thinks they do not think her relationship is 'normal'.

None of the men interviewed indicated that they considered their relationship to be 'mixed'. Identifying a relationship as 'mixed' was deemed to be specifically 'Dutch' by the interviewed men. As explained by Kaleb: "we have seen this a hundred times already, a Muslim with a non-Muslim. We Africans are used to this, we see it so often. I do not see my girlfriend in these terms, I see her as a person, not as a culture or as a religion." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (1 May 2013). The interviewed men do not think that relationships between people of different ethnic or religious backgrounds are ´mixed´ or strange. This could be explained by the fact that these men travelled from their home country to the Netherlands and live in the Netherlands as a minority. Because they have already transgressed other boundaries, they may not consider the differences between themselves and their girlfriends/wives to represent a boundary.[48] Another explanation could be that the interviewed men are in a relationship with a Dutch white woman because they do not experience a boundary between themselves and their girlfriend/wife. [49] They may feel part of 'us Dutch', even though they are Muslim. The binary created between 'Dutch' and 'Muslim' is not an opposition that the men experienced as natural. This opposition was kept in place within

[48] However, migrant communities are often accused (rightfully or not) of being 'closed off' and wanting to retain their culture and religion (which is also a statement made by Els, as will be discussed later in this chapter). This closeness would make it more difficult for migrants to cross the boundary between themselves and white Dutch people and fall in love. In this thesis, the relationships of the 'mixed' couples are placed in the larger Dutch debate that mostly takes place within white Dutch communities. Further research would be needed to say how these relationships are seen in the migrant communities in the Netherlands in relation to the discourse of wanting to keep the culture and religion alive in a hostile environment. The men interviewed in this research project did not experience this discourse in their families and groups of friends, as will be discussed more extensively later in this chapter. Due to this, this discourse is not addressed further in this thesis.

[49] The motivation for choosing a boundary-crossing relationship is not discussed in this thesis. Speelman (2001) and Hondius (1999) discuss this (though briefly) in their work. Further research would be needed to discuss this more extensively.

Dutch society and was, in their opinion, part of Dutch culture. This was connected to the way in which, during the last ten years, 'us Dutch' and 'them Muslims' has been articulated in the Dutch debate. As explained by Azar, "this is very clear in the Netherlands, you see it on the TV, you see it everywhere" [translated from Dutch by A.R] (3 April 2013).

Four of the six couples challenged the existence of the categories 'us' and 'them' by arguing that they did not see their relationship as 'mixed' because they did not use categories such as 'us' and 'them' to categorize themselves and their relationship. Because the couples did not identify a boundary separating them, they also did not consider their relationship to be 'grensoverschrijdend'. Els did transgress the boundaries separating 'us' from 'them' by arguing that the Turkish and Muslim Mahmut was part of 'us', but she did not challenge the categories themselves as this move from ´them´ to ´us´ was motivated by his 'Dutchness'. The interviewed men indicated that they thought categorizing people as either 'us' or 'them' was part of Dutch culture. In the next section it will be discussed how the couples think the people around them identify their relationship.

Identification by others

All the couples indicated that they thought that other people identified them as 'mixed'. As explained by Kaleb: "people do see us as mixed. They ask me, you have a Dutch girlfriend? That is normal in the Netherlands, that the term 'mixed' is used when people talk about the relationships between white people and dark people." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (1 May 2013). It can be seen here that, just like his girlfriend Dorine, Kaleb seems to consider the difference in ethnicity between them as the most important axe of difference that indicates their 'mixedness' by pointing out the colour difference between him and Dorine. The difference in religious orientation is not identified by Kaleb as influencing their status as

´mixed´. This shows that ‘mixedness’ is a complex categorisation that is used to identify relationships that transgress various boundaries and axes of differences.

Because the couples are identified as ‘mixed’ by the people around them, it can be seen that the relationship is seen as ‘grensoverschrijdend’. The two partners are members of different groups in Dutch society and their relationship is not ‘normal’. The existence of the ‘mixed’ relationship and the identification of the partners as being members of two different groups indicates that the relationship of the interviewed ‘mixed’ couples can be seen as queering the categories ‘us ’and ‘them’ by the people around them. If and in which ways the couples actively queer the boundaries and categories will be discussed in the upcoming sections.

It could be said that although all couples were seen as ‘mixed’, this did not mean that they were all seen as ‘mixed’ in the same way. Nadine and Azar, Marieke and Jamal, and Eline and Hakeem indicated that they thought people saw them as ‘mixed’ because they were a Dutch white woman in a relationship with a North African or Middle Eastern Muslim man. These two axes of difference, ethnicity and religion, were not easily distinguished for the couples but were connected in an intersectional manner. As explained by Marieke when asked how people identified Jamal: “being Moroccan, Muslim and a Berber are not identifications that can be separated, they are all very connected” [translated from Dutch by A.R] (19 April 2013). This shows that the Muslim identity of Jamal and his ethnic identity are closely interconnected, or, in line with intersectional theory, intra-acting. People coming from predominantly Muslim countries are often automatically identified as Muslim in the Dutch debate concerning Islam and categorized accordingly as ‘them’. In this way, it can be said that Jamal is identified as Muslim due to his Moroccan/Berber background and that these two identifications, namely Muslim and Moroccan/Berber, cannot be separated.

Dorine and Kaleb indicated that they were seen as ‘mixed’ on multiple levels: they have different ethnic backgrounds, they were born in different countries, they have different levels of education, they have an age difference of 6 years and Kaleb has a child from a former relationship. The difference in ethnicity seemed to weigh heaviest for Dorine and Kaleb. When they spoke of their experiences, they often spoke of themselves as a white woman and a black man. This appears to be influenced by the fact that both Dorine and Kaleb said that the people around them identified them as a white woman and a black man in a relationship. The difference in religion did not weigh heavily because Dorine did not tell everyone that Kaleb was Muslim. As she explained: “Kaleb has recently become more religious and it is just another little thing that is part of being a foreigner.” [translated from Dutch by A.R] (1 May 2013). This shows that Dorine herself sees being Muslim as automatically part of being a foreigner, but that she also thinks that the people around her will see this, interconnecting the factors ‘race’ and religion.

Els and Mahmut indicated that the religious difference between them did not weigh very heavily when discussing whether or not people identified them as ‘mixed’. They thought this was mostly because neither Els nor Mahmut were practicing a specific religion, although Mahmut did identify himself as a Muslim. When I asked on what level they thought people identified them as ‘mixed’, Mahmut answered that he thought they were seen as ethnically ‘mixed’ because he was mostly seen as Turkish by Els’ friends and family and not as a Muslim. While at first Mahmut thought Els’ friends and family did see him as a Muslim, he explained that this changed over time. Because he showed who he was, for instance through the practice of drinking alcohol, going out and eating non-halal food, he thought they did see he was not a religious person. Because of this, he thought that they mostly identified him as

Turkish and not as Muslim anymore. Interestingly, this shows that here the factors 'race' and religion can be separated. While in the experiences of the other couples these two factors, together with gender, intra-acted in an intersectional manner, Mahmut and Els clearly separated the fact that Mahmut was Turkish from the fact that Mahmut was not a 'practicing Muslim and thus not a real Muslim'. This implies that when one factor is experienced as being absent, in this case religion, the factors can more easily be separated than when all the factors, namely religion, 'race' and gender, are experienced as being present. This identification, as Turkish, made it easier for Els' family and friends to accept Mahmut, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

Two of the couples, Nadine and Azar and Els and Mahmut, explained that they felt that some of the people around them did not see them as 'mixed' because these people thought Azar and Mahmut were 'Dutch enough' to be part of 'us'. It was already discussed that Els did not see Mahmut as part of 'them' and indicated that he was "an exception" [translated from Dutch by A.R] (7 May 2013). She explained that this was also done by most of her family and friends:

> Els: "A Muslim becomes identified as a Muslim in the Dutch society when, for instance, at a party he is asked if he would like a beer and he declines by saying that he does not drink. This immediately creates a distance. This is not the case with Mahmut, who would say 'yes, I would like a beer.' This changes everything."
> Me: "Do you think people identify you as Muslim?"
> Mahmut: "No, not really." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (7 May 2013).

Mahmut indicated that he thought that he was also seen as part of 'us' because he was highly educated (MSc) and had come to the Netherlands as a student, not as a guest worker. He

explained that he expected that it would have been very different if he was someone who was working in a Döner shop. Els also used his high level of education to indicate that he was "more like us" and that he should not be seen as a local Turk. This shows that Mahmut identifies and is identified as someone who is different from the 'local Turk' in the Netherlands. These 'local Turks' are identified as the people who came to the Netherlands as guest workers in the 1960s and 1970s. Mahmut and Els categorize these Turks as opposite to Mahmut's position, indicating that since Mahmut is highly educated, the 'local Turks' are not and work at, for instance, Döner shops, which is valued as less positive. The 'local' Turks are also seen as being 'real Muslims', while Mahmut was not seen as 'a real Muslim' by Els. This again indicates how Mahmut is portrayed as being part of 'us Dutch' and not of 'them Muslims', specifically in this case, 'them Turkish Muslims'. This opposition is based on multiple factors such as 'race', religion and the level of education, which are all connected in an intersectional manner.

Azar also said during the interview that the family members who had problems with the 'mixedness' of the relationship of Nadine and him, often told him that "he was not a real Muslim." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (3 April 2013). The grandparents and brother-in-law of Nadine indicated that he was part of 'us' because he did not go to the mosque and because he drank alcohol. Nadine explained that due to this categorisation, they could accept Azar. Compared to Mahmut, Azar really disliked this and often told these family members that he disagreed with this: "I would tell them, 'I am Muslim!'. Then they would say, 'you are not like those Muslims' and I would answer 'what is the difference between this Muslim and those Muslims?' I am Muslim and I love the fact that I am Muslim and that I have a different culture and that is all part of me. I am not a different kind of Muslim, I am simply Muslim." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (3 April 2013). Compared to Mahmut, Azar does not want to

be seen as ‘us’ and is proud of his religion and culture. What can be seen here is that Nadine’s family is trying to straighten the lines which the relationship of Azar and Nadine is transgressing and queering by not recognizing their relationship as ‘mixed’.

The couples interviewed in this thesis are all identified by some or by all of the people around them as ‘mixed’. This indicates that the categories ‘us’ and ‘them’ are used when people surrounding the couple categorize them (not) as ‘mixed’. Which axes of difference are used to indicate that the couple is ‘not normal’ may vary between religion, ethnicity, education, age and nationality and they are often connected in an intersectional manner. Because of the categorisation of the couple as ‘mixed’, their relationship can be experienced as ‘grensoverschrijdend’ by the people around them. This provides them with the ability to show the artificial quality of the existing boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ and queer these categories. However, as could be seen, not all couples wanted this status as ´mixed´. Although Els and Mahmut think some people identify their relationship as ‘mixed’, Els does not think so because she and Mahmut are both part of ´us´. In this manner, it can be seen that she does not want to challenge and queer the existing boundary between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Responses to relationship

Family

The responses of the families of the Muslim men to their relationships with Dutch non-Muslim women were all positive. Two of the men interviewed even indicated that their parents found a Dutch partner a better choice than a partner of the same ethnic background. As explained by Azar: “They are pro-western and they believe that I would take a step back [when choosing a Afghani girl]. Being with a Dutch girl is a sign of progress and integration.” [translated from Dutch by A.R] (3 April 2013). The families of these men also identified a

difference between the Muslim men and their Dutch partners. This difference was seen as a hierarchical binary between Dutch women and Muslim non-Dutch women. Being with a Dutch woman was a positive step made by the Muslim man. The categories ‘us’ and ‘them’ are used in these responses but the boundaries separating ‘us’ and ‘them’ are not identified as static. The Muslim men who are part of ´them’ can and should transgress the boundary and become part of ‘us’. The categories ‘us’ and ‘them’ are not queered in these moments but the boundaries separating the two categories are identified as less static and permeable.

The positive position towards the relationship of the men can also be explained by the fact that men generally have more room for movement than women when it concerns boundary-crossing behaviour. As described by Mahmut: “It was no problem that I had a relationship with a Dutch girl. I think this is also because I am a boy, my parents were always more relaxed towards me because I am a boy.” [translated from Dutch by A.R] (7 May 2013). Women are more quickly identified as unacceptable ‘grensoverschrijders’ when they behave in a way not according to their expected gender roles. Dutch white women are expected to be attracted to Dutch white men and, in this way, reproduce the Dutch, white culture. This is not demanded from Dutch white men as it is thought that if they have non-Dutch and non-white (female) partners, these non-Dutch and non-white female partners will still reproduce the Dutch, white culture due to the believed power difference between men and women in their relationships. This shows in which way gender is also important in this analysis. Although the factors ‘race’ and religion may be more easily identified due to the stereotypical notions that exist of Muslims in Dutch society, gender is connected in an intersectional manner to these factors and to the existing stereotypical notions when it concerns the negative attitude towards ‘mixed’ relationships in the Netherlands.

The families of the women interviewed often responded in a less positive way to their relationships. Marieke explained: "My parents were quite scared. They did not really respond very openly at first, they apparently needed some time to digest it. Later they told me that they were not very happy with my choice and they did not consider it a wise choice." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (19 April 2013). Marieke's parents´ biggest problem was the fact that Jamal is Muslim. Marieke said that they really believe in the old saying that a proverbial devil sleeps between two people with different religions who share a bed. Marieke believed that the fact that a negative stereotypical image is connected to Muslims and Islam in the Netherlands increased their disapproval of the Muslim Jamal and her relationship with him.

The family of Nadine, specifically her grandparents and brother-in-law, was openly negative towards her relationship with Azar. Azar described these family members as "PVV-supporters"[50], and explained that they would often start discussions in which they described the difference between 'us' and 'them'. During these discussions, Azar felt that he was part of 'them' and he wanted to defend this group. Nadine also explained that her grandmother would often make comments such as "all Muslims are terrorists" while Azar was present. These responses seemed to be motivated by a fear of the family members to loose Nadine:

> Me: "Do you think that they are also afraid that you will not really be part of the Dutch culture anymore?"
>
> Azar: "Yes."
>
> Nadine: "That is what they are afraid of."
>
> Azar: "Once, as a joke, we told Nadine's family on a birthday that Nadine had converted to Islam and her grandfather really looked at me like he was going to kill

[50] The racist, anti-Islam right-winged political party of Geert Wilders

me."

Me: "Is that a fear they have, that they will lose you to the unknown?"

Nadine: "Yes." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (3 April 2013).

When asked what caused the problems for the families of these women, the answer that was most often provided was the religious or ethnic background of the men whom they had fallen in love with. Stereotypes of Islam or people of a North African or Middle Eastern background were used to explain the difficulties the families experienced. The stereotypes described indicated that the ideas about the religious beliefs and ethnic background of the Muslim partner were connected in an intersectional manner with gender. The already discussed attitude of Nadine's grandparents and brother-in-law is an example of the use of the stereotypical image of a Dutch woman who disappears when she is in a relationship with a Muslim foreign man. Nadine said that her parents were also a bit scared at the beginning of her relationship with Azar, "especially my mother was afraid that if I had children I would be abducted, like in the movie 'Not without my daughter', that I would disappear to Afghanistan." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (3 April 2013). The image of the powerless Dutch woman who is overwhelmed and taken advantage of by the overpowering foreign Muslim partner was also used by the family of Els. Els, who met her Turkish boyfriend while on a holiday in Turkey at the age of 15, explained that her parents were worried because of the stories about Turkish men who use Western women to obtain a Western passport. Els said that these stories were very well known: Turkish men coming here [to Holland] for a passport and then, when they have this passport, that these men leave the Dutch women who are in love with them.

Marieke's parents also used the stereotypical image of a powerless Dutch woman in a relationship with an overpowering Muslim man. Marieke explained that she thought that her parents were afraid that she would convert to Islam because of Jamal's influence. She suspected that this was based on the stereotype that Dutch women convert more quickly because of their Muslim husbands or boyfriends than Dutch men would because of for their Muslim wives or girlfriends. This stereotype is connected to the belief that men have power over women in the relationship. This is especially the case with Muslim men in relationships with Dutch women, as was explained by Marleen Kamminga (1993). Due to this power, the reproductive role of Dutch women is threatened by their partners. As women are responsible for the reproduction of the proper culture, or orientations, the relationship between Marieke and Jamal represents a threat to this and is deemed problematic.

What could be seen in this section was that the families of the couples often used the categories 'us' and 'them' to explain their position towards the relationship. While the families of some of the men deemed it more positive to be in a relationship with a Dutch woman than with a non-Dutch Muslim woman, the families of the women were less positive towards the relationship. This unsupportive, troubled or scared attitude towards the Muslim partner and the relationship was often based on a stereotypical image of a violent, overpowering and very 'un-Dutch' Muslim man who would push his religious beliefs and cultural background unto the powerless and naïve Dutch woman, endangering her responsibility of reproducing the proper Dutch orientations.

Friends and Acquaintances

The friends of the majority of the interviewed men were very positive about their relationship. Seran explained that his friends "are similar to myself. Maybe if I had more religious friends

they would have some difficulties with the relationship but I do not have these. For my friends it was normal, they were all positive." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (25 April 2013). Kaleb explained a difference between his Dutch friends and his African Muslim friends. He said that while his African Muslim friends found it completely normal that he had a relationship with a Dutch non-Muslim woman, his Dutch friends often asked questions concerning the difference in age (Kaleb is 6 years older than Dorine) or the fact that Kaleb has a child from a previous relationship. This was used by Kaleb as an example of the differences between the Dutch culture and other cultures, which was discussed earlier. Kaleb argued that it was typical Dutch to think in terms of 'us' and 'them' and to expect a partner to be of the same age. Kaleb said that he believed that in Islam, these things did not matter. As long as you loved each other and were happy together, other factors such as age, education, money and ethnicity did not matter.

The friends of most of the women did not have a negative attitude towards their relationships. The women explained that their friends either had a 'neutral' attitude towards their relationship or a supportive attitude. At some point, these friends did ask the women questions concerning their relationship and their future with a Muslim man, but as explained by Marieke, this was not experienced as negative but as supportive and interested. Els was the only respondent who described a negative attitude of her friends in the beginning of her relationship with Mahmut. She was often criticized and given unwanted advice, such as "be careful" and "do you know what you are getting into?" She also heard jokes like "how many wives does he have in Turkey" and was asked questions such as "do you have to wear a headscarf now?" and "do his parents accept you?" [translated from Dutch by A.R] (7 May 2013). She explained that a negative image of Muslims had been created in the media and that when her friends heard that Mahmut was Turkish and Muslim, they did not see him as an

individual anymore. “He is Muslim, bam, label!” [translated from Dutch by A.R.] (7 May 2013). This shows how Els’ friends constructed an image of Mahmut based on a negative stereotypical image they had of Turkish Muslims. This constructed image was mostly based on his Muslim identity, as became clear in the quote. Because he was Muslim, he immediately received a label which was based on a negative image. When Els’ friends got to know Mahmut (and saw he was not a ‘practicing Muslim’[51]), he became an individual and was not seen as ‘a Muslim’ anymore. The fact that Mahmut was Turkish was not considered to be a problem. Being Turkish was acceptable, being Muslim was the problem. As Mahmut was seen as being ‘sort of Dutch’ it can be seen that Mahmut and Els believed that the fact that he was Turkish did not prevent him from behaving ‘sort of Dutch’. Els and her family and friends consider being (a real) Muslim would have prevented him from this as Muslim was categorized as opposed to Dutch. The stereotypical image of Muslims that was used when Mahmut was labelled in the beginning of the relationship did not change, as will be discussed later. He was just not linked to this label anymore.

Most of the interviewed couples experienced a negative attitude towards their relationship coming from acquaintances, such as colleagues or people they saw regularly like people at the gym. The comments the women received often concerned the question whether or not they would be forced to start wearing a headscarf now that they were in a relationship with a Muslim man. Eline said that she received that “stupid question”, for instance, at the gym. Floortje’s colleagues would also make jokes such as “do you have to wear a headscarf now?” Dorine and Els also mentioned the same question coming from people such as colleagues. This again indicates the belief that a man has more power in a relationship than a woman and hence will push his religious beliefs and cultural background on her. However, this

[51] A term Mahmut himself used during the interview to indicate his religiosity. He explained that he did identify as Muslim and believed in God, but that he did not pray or fast and that he did drink alcohol and ate non-halal food.

stereotypical image is gendered in a more complex way. It also shows that the question of the headscarf is important for the people around the couples. Since it is often believed that the man's religious beliefs will be pushed on his partner, the wearing of the headscarf would ultimately be proof of her conversion to Islam. Linked to this, the headscarf is believed to represent the oppression of women in Islam. If a Dutch woman in a relationship with a Muslim man would start wearing a headscarf, this would be evidence that he is oppressing her. The comments concerning the wearing of the headscarf clearly point towards the fear of a Muslim man oppressing his Dutch wife and due to this oppression, endangering the reproduction of the correct lines.

It could be said that the majority of the friends of the couples accepted their relationship. The friends of most of the women did think that the relationship was not 'normal' and crossed boundaries, but they did not have a negative attitude towards the relationship because of this. When friends did have a critical position towards the relationship, as was the case with Kaleb and Els, the differences between the partners were identified as causing this attitude. Friends and acquaintances who responded negatively to the relationship used the stereotypical image of an overpowering Muslim man and a powerless Dutch woman. The question whether or not the women would start wearing the headscarf turned out to be important when this stereotypical image was constructed, which indicates how the negative attitude towards the couple is not only racialised, but also gendered.

Strangers

Looking at negative experiences with strangers in the public space, some of the couples said that they received these responses from people of a North African or Middle Easter

background. This was the case with Marieke and Jamal, Floortje and Seran, and Els and Mahmut. Jamal explained that he felt scrutinized by his Moroccan neighbours.

> Jamal: "That is one of the reasons I am not comfortable in this neighbourhood. I really hate it that the neighbours look at me, look at me like 'you are married to a Dutch woman', or 'you hang out with Dutch people'. It feels like.."
> Me: "Like they do not agree with this?"
> Jamal: "Yes. I am sure of that, they do not like it." [translated from Dutch by A.R.] (19 April 2013).

Marieke explained that she felt that their Dutch neighbours kept a distance and that they thought that her choice of partner was her own business. Floortje also stated that the only moments that they felt scrutinized in public was when Middle Eastern men looked a bit too long at them. Els and Mahmut said that they had not experienced direct negative responses but that they did feel that they were often looked at by Turkish women. Mahmut explained that "they do not know me but they see that I am Turkish. That is one aspect of it. Secondly, I am with a Dutch girl." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (7 May 2013). This indicates that three of the couples experienced that their relationship was deemed 'mixed' and problematic by people from a North African or Middle Eastern background. In this thesis the position of the couples within the Dutch society is discussed. Their position and their experiences are located within a discourse used by white Dutch people as they are the majority of the Dutch society and thus have a larger influence on the national attitude and debates concerning 'mixed' couples. Due to this, it is difficult to explain in this thesis and with the use of this discourse why the couples thought that North African and Middle Eastern people looked at them. However, the fact that the couples felt that specifically North African and Middle Eastern

people scrutinized their relationship is interesting and more research is needed to adequately address this issue.

The couples indicated that they thought that their location influenced the responses they received. Nadine and Azar explained that they did feel accepted in their hometown, Venray, but that they did not experience this in the hometown of Nadine's parents, which is a very small village. After visiting this town with Azar or Muslim friends, Nadine would hear through some old friends still living there, that the people were unhappy that she brought 'them' (Muslims) to the village. Nadine said that "these experiences were also influenced by their location. In this area of the Netherlands many people supported the PVV and there are many small villages where most of the people are over 65 years old and predominantly Dutch." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (3 April 2013). Nadine felt that these factors influenced the negative attitude towards Azar from the people living in small towns such as the hometown of her parents. The location of the couple could also positively influence the experiences in the public space, as was the case with Eline and Hakeem. When I asked if they ever experienced negative responses coming from strangers on the street, Eline responded: "No, the funny thing is that I did expect that. I have heard of these stories but maybe we do not visit the countryside enough, or the areas of the large cities were more Muslim people live. Maybe if we did, we would receive more negative responses." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (25 April 2013). Eline associates a negative position towards 'mixed' couples with specific locations in the Netherlands, namely the areas of large cities were a majority of Muslims lives and the countryside. She does not associate this attitude with the area where she lives with Hakeem (a predominantly white neighbourhood in a small city). Villages in the countryside and Muslim neighbourhoods in large cities are expected to be less tolerant

towards ‘mixed’ couples. To be able to elaborate on the factors that influence this constructed image of these specific areas in the Netherlands, more research would be needed.

Two of the couples experienced a second influence on the responses they received, which is the level of education of the people around them. As explained by Marieke:

> “We do not experience many negative responses to our relationship outside our neighbourhood. I think this is because when we go out, we go to places where the majority of the people are highly educated, such as the theatre. I do not know, but I think that people with a higher education are more trained to behave politically correct. It is not like they do not have the same thoughts, but they do not let the people around them know about these thoughts. In our neighbourhood on the other hand, most people did not receive a higher education. Just like my parents.” [translated from Dutch by A.R] (19 April 2013).

Mahmut also explained that he does not feel that he is judged because of his religion or ethnic background because he mostly surrounds himself with people who have received a high degree of education. In these settings, he feels that he is judged on his abilities and talents and not on his religion or ethnicity. Here it can be seen that a negative attitude towards ‘mixed’ couples is associated with a specific class in Dutch society, namely with people who have not received a higher education.[52] Although Marieke does acknowledge that this does not mean that people who did receive a higher education do not have negative feelings towards ‘mixed’ couples, but she does not that think they often translate this into a negative attitude. This shows that factors such as class are expected to influence the attitude of people towards the

[52] Which was identified as HBO or higher.

‘mixed’ couples. What this influence is and which other factors influence this attitude should be investigated in further research.

In this section it could be seen that all couples felt that at times their relationships were scrutinized by strangers because they were seen as ‘mixed’ and ‘grensoverschrijdend’. The couples indicated that they thought that the attitude towards ‘mixed’ couples in public seemed to be influenced by multiple factors. The first is the ethnic background of the stranger scrutinizing. Some of the couples indicated that they often thought North African and Middle Eastern people looked at them in a more negative manner than white Dutch people did. This is very interesting, especially since the families and friends of the couple who are the most negative towards the relationship are the white, Dutch families and friends of the women. The second is the location the couple was in. Some locations in the Netherlands, particularly small towns in the countryside and Muslim neighbourhoods in large cities, were associated with a negative attitude towards ‘mixed’ couples. This association was at times created due to experiences, but was also based on the preconception that people in these areas would be less tolerant towards the couples. Thirdly, the level of education of the people surrounding the couples was also expected to influence the attitude towards their relationship. The higher people are educated, the less it is expected of them to express a negative attitude towards ‘mixed’ couples. More research is needed to indicate which influence these factors have on the attitude of people towards ‘mixed’ and boundary-breaking couples.

Changes in position

Another response to the relationship I discussed with the couples during the interviews was whether or not they thought that their position, for instance in their family or group of friends, had changed because of their relationship. Of the six men interviewed, three, namely Hakeem,

Seran and Kaleb, indicated that they did not think that their positions had changed because of their relationships. The three other men explained that they thought that their positions had not changed a lot, but that if it had changed, it had changed in a positive direction. It was already discussed that the family of Azar thought that being with a Dutch girl represented a sign of progress and integration. The family of Jamal, specifically his father, was also happy that Jamal was in a relationship with a Dutch girl, rather than a Moroccan girl. Mahmut explained that many factors had positively influenced his position in his family and group of friends. He was not only in a relationship with a Dutch girl, he had also moved to the Netherlands, bought a house, recently obtained a master's degree and received a job offer. All these factors positively influenced his position.

There are various possible reasons why the interviewed men thought their relationships with Dutch women were positively valued by their friends and families. As was already discussed in this chapter, the men who were interviewed could be in this relationship because their families and friends already had a positive attitude towards 'mixed' relationships. Men who live in a more closed off community in the Netherlands might not be in a 'mixed' relationship with a Dutch girl. Secondly, the families and friends could seem more positive towards the relationship because they did not want to or felt that they had a right to criticize the relationship. Some of the men did receive openly positive responses from their families and friends, but the families and friends of others were less direct. The absence of a negative attitude does not automatically mean a positive attitude. Thirdly, the fact that the Dutch women are demanded to return to the correct line more often than the Muslim men shows the gendered dimensions of the attitudes towards the 'mixed' relationships. It can be seen that men are less quickly categorized as 'grensoverschrijdend' than women and their behaviour that does cross boundaries is often deemed less problematic. This is mostly based on the

outcomes of this research and other research projects done amongst the white Dutch people. The attitude of the Muslim communities was not clearly present and thus not analysed in these research projects and in this investigation. More research is needed to be able to shed more light on the attitude of Muslim communities in the Netherlands towards 'mixed' relationships and which differences can be seen between the attitude towards the boundary-crossing behaviour of (Muslim) men and of (Muslim) women.

All of the interviewed women indicated that they did not think their positions had changed because of their relationships. However, four of the six women explained that they already had 'different' positions within their families or groups of friends before they met their current partner. As explained by Marieke:

> "I have always had a rather strange position within the family. My parents have always considered me a rebellious child, a child that did everything just a bit differently than they had expected or wanted. This relationship is just another way in which I am different, again I did something they did not really want. I am a deviation, just a large deviation." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (19 April 2013).

Nadine and Eline also indicated that they had always been a bit different, especially because of the subject they chose to study, namely the Middle East. Nadine explained that ever since she started her Middle Eastern studies, she thought that her family has expected her to leave the Netherlands. Her relationship with Azar only strengthened these expectations. Dorine explained that her position within the family had always been a bit different when she compared herself to her sister: "I am the youngest at home and my sister has been in a steady relationship for ten years already. I am a lot less steady in my life. I have always followed my

own path and I have not necessarily done everything in the expected order." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (1 May 2013). Dorine also explained that she did not think that her life or relationship was necessarily deemed less stable because she was in a 'mixed' relationship, but that this was because she had made unexpected choices in the past. Dorine thought that her parents saw her relationship with Kaleb as another unexpected choice.

This indicates that the majority of the women thought that they were identified by their families and friends as 'grensoverschijders'. However, this was not only because of their relationship. They were already seen as 'grensoverschrijders' before they entered into their 'mixed' relationships. Within their families and groups of friends they had already broken certain boundaries in the past and had acted in a way that was not coherent with their gender roles. Whether or not this means that women who are in boundary-crossing 'mixed' relationships have always already broken other boundaries in their lives, requires more research.

Conclusion

All the interviewed couples experienced boundaries in Dutch society and demands to return to the right line. All the couples explained that at some point in time, people responded negatively to their relationship because their relationship was considered not 'normal' but 'mixed'. This shows that the partners were not identified as belonging to the same 'societal' group. The couples were not considered 'mixed' according to the same axes of difference. Besides religion and ethnicity, education, nationality and age were also axes of difference that were used to categorize the couples as 'mixed'. It could be seen that these axes of difference were not easily separated and intra-acted in an intersectional manner. Due to this categorization, the couples experienced that the categories 'us' and 'them' were used to

identify them as ‘different’ and thus their relationship as ‘mixed’. This categorization indicates that the relationship can be experienced as ‘grensoverschrijdend’ by the people around the couples.

The negative responses that the couples received indicated that they created uncomfortable moments because of their presence. These responses were often based on stereotypical notions of Islam, the Middle East, North Africa and the expected gender roles of men and women in the Netherlands. The people who most often responded negatively to the ‘mixed’ relationship were the Dutch white families of the women. The fear was expressed that the Dutch women would be ‘lost’, through conversion to Islam (especially by wearing a headscarf), by moving to the country in which the partner was born (voluntarily or not), and/or by losing their connection to the Dutch culture. This indicates how the factors ‘race’, religion and gender are intra-acting in the image of an overpowering Muslim man and a powerless Dutch woman. The ‘mixed’ relationship endangered the execution of the women’s responsibility, namely the reproduction of the proper Dutch lines. The relationships were not seen as ‘normal’ or acceptable. The angry responses and uncomfortable moments show that the couples were experienced as ‘grensoverschrijdend’ and their presence challenged the existing categories separating ‘us’ and ‘them’. Because the relationship and the behaviour of the women is experienced as ‘grensoverschrijdend’, it can be argued that the comfort of the public space in which everyone behaves in the expected and proper way by following the correct lines is queered by the presence of the couples. The angry responses are demands to return to the right line.

Some family members and friends, such as the family of Nadine and the friends of Els, and Els herself, straightened the lines that the couples queered by categorizing the Muslim partner

as ‘Dutch’ and thus as part of ‘us’. Due to this straightening of the lines, the relationship is not experienced as ‘grensoverschrijdend’ anymore and the public space becomes comfortable again. Whether or not the identification of the couple as ‘grensoverschrijdend’ is translated into the act of actively queering the existing boundaries and categories by the couples will be further discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

Strategies and Influence

In this chapter, it will be analysed which strategies were used by the couples to influence the responses to their relationship. As was already discussed, the women were more often identified as 'grensoverschrijders' and were demanded to return to the correct line by their the families. How the couples dealt with these demands will be discussed in this chapter. It will also be discussed what influence the used strategies had on the level of acceptance of the relationship. Finally, it will be investigated whether the couples queer the categories people apply when they respond to their relationship.

Strategies

Being there

The couples used various strategies to respond to the negative reactions that they received from the white Dutch families of the women. The strategies that the couples used most often were non-confrontational. The women tried to enhance the acceptance by their families and friends by introducing their new partners and by being present together at family events such as birthdays and Christmas. Marieke realized that she would not be able to change the stereotypical images that her parents had of Muslims, "so I thought it would be a lot more productive to just take Jamal home and let them get used to him. In this way they could see that, as a person, he is fine." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (19 April 2013). Getting to know the new Muslim partner was an important strategy for the women and the men to indicate that the Muslim man was a person and not a stereotype. As explained by Mahmut:

> "I would be the Turk who would come with Els when we went to parties with her friends. They would see me as the Turkish boyfriend, maybe even the Muslim boyfriend. For me it was important to be able to speak Dutch so I could express myself and they could get to know me. By doing this I hoped I would be seen as Mahmut at some point, and not as the Turk or the Muslim." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (7 May 2013).

Letting the family slowly get used to the Muslim boyfriend was also a strategy that Floortje and Dorine used. As explained by Dorine, "we [she and her parents] would have talked about it and then I would let them digest it. Later we would talk about it again and again I would give them time to digest it. This is how you handle it, slowly and carefully." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (1 May 2013). The differences between the Dutch women and their Muslim partners would become less important when the families and friends got to know the Muslim partner. The stereotypical images that were connected to certain identity markers, such as Muslim and, for instance, Turkish, were disconnected from the individual.

Not-responding

Most of the couples also decided, at specific moments, not to respond to negative reactions that they received, either coming from their family, friends or from strangers in public. The location of the confrontation was very important at these moments. As explained by Azar, at moments he decided not to respond to the negative comments coming from Nadine's grandparents and brother-in-law because they were at a family gathering and he did not want to ruin the party. He also did not feel that it would be polite of him to attack these people in their own homes, "if it would have been in my house, I would have expected them to behave, because they were visiting us in our own home. If they respond to me in such a manner in a

more neutral area, such as a bar, I would definitely give them a piece of my mind." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (3 April 2013). This was also said by Jamal, who explained that while Marieke's parents did not ask critical questions or start a discussion, if they did while Marieke and Jamal were visiting, he would be very uncomfortable.

What can be seen here is that the couples experience some locations as specifically uncomfortable to be in as a 'mixed' couple. Not being considered 'normal' and being asked critical questions were deemed especially uncomfortable in the homes of the critical family members. This shows that not all spaces are experienced as equally tolerant and in some places the couples felt more 'mixed' than in others. This coincides with the earlier statements made when the couples explained they thought the location they were in influenced their status as a couple. In those specifically uncomfortable spaces the couples were experienced as more 'grensoverschrijdend' and problematic.

Minimizing their 'mixedness'

As was described earlier, the families and friends of Nadine and Azar and Els and Mahmut indicated that Azar and Mahmut were part of 'us' and not of 'them'. By doing this, the 'mixedness' of the relationship was minimized. Because the Muslim partner (who was firstly identified as 'them') became part of 'us', the relationship was not considered 'grensoverschrijdend' anymore. To enhance the acceptance, the couples also minimized their 'mixedness' themselves in front of their family and friends who did not accept their relationship. By minimizing the aspects that made them 'mixed', such as the religious beliefs of the man, the relationship is not necessarily identified as 'grensoverschrijdend' anymore. Due to this, the relationship becomes (more) 'normal' for the family members and friends who had problems with the 'mixedness' of the couple. The boundaries separating 'us' from

'them' are no longer queered since the Muslim partner becomes less clearly part of 'them' and can be seen as part of 'us'. Due to this, the lines are more easily straightened and the space becomes comfortable again.

As was already discussed, Dorine did not openly discuss with her parents the fact that Kaleb was Muslim. She felt that as they probably knew this, it was unnecessary to discuss it openly with them. By drawing attention to his religious beliefs, Kaleb would become more strange and different than he already was. Dorine did not feel it was necessary to put extra attention on Kaleb's otherness. Jamal explained that he would never pray when they were at Marieke's parents. He did not want to attract attention to his religious beliefs or Moroccan background, because he did not want to be seen as different. Marieke added that "I think that we both try to act as 'normal' as possible when we are around my parents." [translated from Dutch by A.R.] (19 April 2013). Trying to act as 'normal' as possible was achieved by Marieke and Jamal by not drawing attention to what made them different, namely Jamal's Moroccan background and Islamic beliefs. By minimizing their 'mixedness', Marieke and Jamal tried to enhance the level of acceptance of Marieke's parents towards their relationship. Marieke also explained that she minimized Jamal's influence on her life and personality when she was with her parents: "I feel like I need to prove that I am still their daughter and that I did not really change because of my relationship with Jamal. I need to portray myself as a more autonomous person than I really am since of course Jamal's cultural background and Islamic believes influence me. I just can't show that to my parents." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (19 April 2013). This shows that minimizing the 'mixedness' of the relationship is also influenced by gender. While Marieke tried to counter the fears of her parents that Jamal will behave like the stereotypical notion of an overpowering Muslim partner by minimizing any influence Jamal had on her life in front of her parents, Jamal minimized his own beliefs and background to ensure that he was not connected to this stereotypical image of a Muslim man. By minimizing

the ‘mixedness’ of their relationship, Marieke and Jamal tried to enhance the level of acceptance of Marieke’s parents. Their relationship became less ‘grensoverschrijdend’ because they minimized the aspects of their relationship that queered the boundaries that exist in Dutch society between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Els and Mahmut also minimized their ‘mixedness’. Although Els herself did not consider her relationship with Mahmut ‘mixed’ because he was ‘sort of Dutch’, she still felt that at times people did see her relationship as ‘mixed’. At these moments, she tried to indicate how ‘normal’ their relationship was. She explained, for instance, that when she was asked by family, friends or colleagues if Mahmut’s family accepted her, that she always responded by saying that “they [his family] are very modern! Nobody wears a headscarf! They are so modern that I am allowed to sunbath in my bikini on the balcony and in the evening we walk around on the boulevard with the family, as if we are in Spain.” [translated from Dutch by A.R] (7 May 2013).When asked what she wanted to show by providing this answer, Els explained that she wanted to show that his family is similar to her family, that they are not different from a Dutch family. What can be seen here is that Els again opposes Mahmut, and his family, to what she considers ‘normal Turks’ or ‘normal/real Muslims’. These ‘real Muslims’ are not modern, while Mahmut and his family are modern. This modernity is connected to ‘us, Dutch’ and is used to indicate that he and his family are part of ‘us’ and not of ‘them’. Because the women do not wear headscarves and Els is allowed to sunbath in her bikini on the balcony, Mahmut and his family are modern and like ‘us’. Again, the different dimensions such as ‘race’, religion, class and gender can be seen as intra-acting in an intersectional manner when Mahmut is described as part of ‘us’. This shows that while the other couples who minimized their ‘mixedness’ did this to improve the level of acceptance, Els did not consider her relationship with Mahmut to be ‘mixed’ and did not act differently to improve the level of acceptance. She is not breaking the boundaries and queering the

categories ‘us’ and ‘them’ because she reinstates the opposing categories. ‘Us’ is identified as Dutch, not Muslim and modern and ‘them’ as un-Dutch, Muslim and not modern.

Confronting the people who respond in a negative way

Confronting the family members or friends who responded negatively to the couple has been done at some point in the relationship by most of the couples. At the first negative reaction from family or friends, the women often responded angry. Marieke, when asked how she responded to the negative attitude of her parents towards her relationship with Jamal, said: “I am afraid I did not respond very intelligently.” [translated from Dutch by A.R] (19 April 2013). Eline explained that when her worrying mother asked her questions about her relationship with Hakeem, she would respond “in a juvenile manner. I would say ‘Mom! Of course not! Where does this come from, it is nonsense!” [translated from Dutch by A.R] (25 April 2013). Els would respond in an angry manner to her friends who would ask her if she would be forced to wear a headscarf: “I often responded in a rather intense manner. That is such a stupid question, of course not! What type of person did they think I was that I would let him control me like that! They would say that that is the case with all Muslim men. No, of course not!” [translated from Dutch by A.R] (7 May 2013). The response provided by Els indicates that she wants to counter the image of an overpowering Muslim man and a powerless Dutch woman by showing her family and friends that Mahmut would not force her to wear a headscarf, the symbol that is most often associated with female oppression within Islam.

Nadine and Azar were the only couple who directly discussed the negative attitude of Nadine’s grandparents and brother-in-law at a later stage of their relationship. Nadine talked to her grandmother who made very insensitive comments in the presence of Azar, “I told her

to be more careful around Azar and that she was insulting him. I had a feeling she was not aware of this which is why I wanted to address it." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (3 April 2013). Nadine said that the number of hurtful comments did decrease because of this conversation with her grandmother. As was already discussed in the previous chapter, Azar told Nadine's family members that he did not agree with their statements that he was 'not a real Muslim'. He also confronted some of Nadine's family members when they made negative comments concerning migrants in the Netherlands: "I would ask them, 'Do you know any migrants?' They would say, 'No, you are the only one'. I would then ask them, 'Why do you have so many prejudices? Do you not like me?'. They would say, 'No, we think you are great'. So how can you know then that other migrants are not great too if you do not know them?'" [translated from Dutch by A.R] (3 April 2013). What can be seen here is that Azar is challenging the stereotypical categories concerning migrants in the Netherlands used by Nadine's family. He is seen as an exception but he does not accept this position. By emphasizing his Muslim identity and not accepting the boundary created between himself and other Muslims, Azar is challenging the categories 'us' and 'them'. However, as Nadine's family members minimize the 'mixedness' of the relationship of Azar and Nadine by categorizing Azar as part of 'us', the categories seem no longer queered.

What could be seen is that most of the couples used non-confrontational strategies when dealing with negative responses to their relationship. Often the Dutch women expressed at first an angry response to the lack of acceptance of their families, but later decided to positively influence the response to their relationship by simply 'being there'. The existence of their relationship queered the categories and boundaries and this created strange moments. The relationship was not deemed 'normal' and, due to this, it created uncomfortable feelings. This indicates that the relationship was indeed experienced by people around the couples as

‘grensoverschrijdend’. To enhance the level of acceptance and make the moments shared with family and friends more comfortable, the couples minimized the aspects of their relationship that made them ‘mixed’, namely the religious beliefs and cultural background of the man. It was shown that although their relationship was experienced as ‘grensoverschrijdend’, the majority of the couples did not try to actively queer the binary created between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

The opposite could be seen as most of the couples actively tried *not* to queer the binary created between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Nadine and Azar were the exception since Azar clearly identified himself as a Muslim man and Nadine and Azar both openly confronted the family members who had a negative attitude towards their relationship. However, Azar and Nadine were not able to stop these family members from minimizing their ‘mixedness’ and identifying Azar as ‘us’. Due to this minimization of the ‘mixedness’ of the relationship and the categorisation of Azar as ‘us’, the lines separating ‘us’ from ‘them’ were no longer queered by the presence of Azar and Nadine. Nadine and Azar could only actively queer the existing categories that are used by Nadine’s family members when their relationship was identified as ‘grensoverschrijdend’. The lines were straightened again when the relationship was identified as ‘normal’, which made the moments shared with the couple more comfortable for the family of Nadine. This shows that even if a couple actively tries to challenge the existing categories and boundaries, the people surrounding the couple can prevent them from doing this.

The influence of the strategies used by the couples

Being there

The couples explained that the most successful strategy to enhance the acceptance of their relationships by their family members or friends was by 'being there'. By introducing the partner, taking their time and by giving the family and friends some time to get to know the partner, the couples explained that most of the people in their environment accepted their relationships. Nadine explained that while her parents were worried when she first told them about her Afghani Muslim boyfriend, they were not worried anymore after they met Azar. By meeting Azar they could see it was not "as scary" as they had thought it would be and Azar explained that he had always felt completely accepted by Nadine's parents. Floortje said: "When Seran met my parents, everything was immediately alright. They just clicked." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (25 April 2013).

Marieke and Dorine were a bit more careful with their parents and slowly introduced their new partners to them. They first let their parents get used to the idea and then introduced Jamal and Kaleb. After the first meeting, the parents of Dorine were reassured that their daughter had made the right decision and that Kaleb was a nice man. The parents of Marieke needed more time to get used to a Moroccan Muslim son-in-law. After Marieke introduced Jamal to her parents, they told her that they thought she had made an unwise decision. For the next 1,5 years, her parents mostly ignored the existence of Jamal, although Marieke kept telling positive stories about their relationship.

> Marieke: "For 1,5 years, they completely ignored him and then it was my mother's birthday and out of nowhere, she invited Jamal. I was really surprised. I asked her, 'why did you invite Jamal?'. She told me that 'he was part of the family'. I was

completely shocked. It was so strange for me, that my mother told me that he was part of the family." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (19 April 2013).

Marieke expected that her parents probably accepted that Jamal was not 'a fling' but that this was a serious relationship. Because of this, Marieke thought that they made more of an effort to accept him as a person and not to see him anymore as a stereotype that frightened them. Jamal said that while in the beginning he was shocked by the unwelcoming behaviour of Marieke's parents (he called them 'the Dutch Taliban'), the attitude of Marieke's parents had completely turned around: "They are happy, they welcome me, they smile, they changed so much, wow!" [translated from Dutch by A.R] (19 April 2013). However, Marieke offered a more critical note when she explained that she thought that her parents had not really changed their ideas about her relationship with Jamal, but that her parents had come to accept that they should change their attitude towards Jamal to ensure that they did not lose their daughter.

The parents and friends of Els were not happy with her relationship with Mahmut in the beginning, but they did not take it very serious during the first four years, because Els and Mahmut only had contact with each other through internet. However, after four years, Mahmut came to Germany for six months to study and Els and Mahmut were able to see each other again in person. When, two years ago, Mahmut moved to the Netherlands to study and to be with Els, Els' family and friends had the chance to get to know him better. As was explained earlier, it was very important for Mahmut to be able to show them what type of person he was. Mahmut explained that "I see that the way they see me has changed now that they know what type of person I am. They see us together and the life we have created for ourselves and they have grown to respect me. Our relationship [with Els' family and friends] is great now." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (7 May 2013).

What can be seen is that it is important for the families and friends of the women to meet the new Muslim partner. By meeting him, part of the discomfort was taken away. To disconnect an individual from a stereotypical image, a personal relationship with this person seems necessary. However, as was shown by Marieke's remarks concerning her parents' attitude, a more positive and welcoming attitude does not necessarily mean that families and friends really accept the relationship.

Minimizing their 'mixedness'

All the couples who explained that they minimized their 'mixedness', indicated that this indeed worked in a positive way. Marieke explained that because they acted 'as normal as possible' while around her parents, she felt that her parents were able to accept her relationship, although this acceptance was to a certain level and mostly inspired by a will to "keep the peace" [translated from Dutch by A.R] (19 April 2013). Els and Mahmut also indicated that they did not want people to identify their relationship as 'mixed' and that they hoped that Mahmut would be seen as Mahmut and not as a Muslim or as a Turk. Mahmut explained that after Els' family and friends got to know him and saw that he was 'almost Dutch', he thought that they started to see him as Mahmut, without the prejudices.

Because these couples minimized their 'mixedness', the people around them seemed capable of accepting their relationships. As they no longer queered the boundaries separating 'us' from 'them' in such a clear and blunt way with their boundary-crossing love, the presence of the couples was experienced as less uncomfortable. The relationship could be seen as 'normal' and was no longer experienced as 'grensoverschrijdend'. Due to this, the categories and boundaries were no longer queered in a clear and confronting manner.

Confronting the people who respond negatively

Nadine and Azar were the only couple who directly confronted Nadine's family members who responded negatively towards their relationship. Nadine explained that after she confronted her grandmother, the negative comments towards Azar did not happen as often anymore and were less insulting. However, she was not sure if this was because she confronted her grandmother or if this was because, after they got to know Azar, these family members had decided that he "was not a real Muslim", which made him part of 'us' and not of 'them'. Although Azar confronted these family members on many occasions and told them that he indeed was 'a real Muslim', their views did not change. Nadine said that she did not expect this to change.

By seeing Azar as one of 'us', the uncomfortable feeling that was created because Azar and Nadine challenged the categories 'us' and 'them', was taken away. The relationship of Azar and Nadine was no longer seen as 'mixed' and 'grensoverschrijdend'. Nadine and Azar both made clear that Nadine's family did not seem to want to change their ideas about Muslims, migrants or the differences between 'us' and 'them'. The relationship of Azar and Nadine became acceptable because it was no longer categorised as 'mixed' and did not queer the categories and boundaries separating them anymore.

External influences

Besides the strategies that the couples used, external factors also influenced whether or not their friends and families accepted their relationship. Els and Mahmut explained that their relationship was seen as less problematic by her parents when Mahmut moved to Germany. This was because Els was 19 years old then, compared to her age of 15 when they first had

met. Mahmut indicated that Els was a lot more independent at this stage of her life and that her parents had more confidence in her. Secondly, their relationship was also more accepted because Els' parents had divorced. Els' father was always the parent who had more difficulties with her relationship with Mahmut and after the divorce Els moved in with her mother. This meant that she felt that her father's opinion was less important when compared to her mother's opinion, who did not object so strongly to their relationship.

External influences could also negatively influence the acceptance of the couple, as was the case with Nadine and Azar.

> Nadine: "I do notice it when it is that time again, especially with my grandparents, when it is election time and they are going to vote for Geert Wilders again. They seem to be more.."
> Me: "They are more preoccupied with it?"
> Nadine: "Yes, they think about it more. And then the comments become worse again." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (3 April 2013).

What can be seen here is that while Nadine's family members seemed to accept Azar's presence due to their categorisation of him as 'one of us', this categorisation became less stable during election time. When in the media the differences between 'us Dutch' and 'them Muslims' were enhanced again by political parties such as the PVV to gain votes, the differences between Azar and Nadine became enhanced too. Azar's membership of 'us' became less stable and the relationship was seen as more 'mixed'. Due to this status as 'mixed', the relationship was experienced as 'grensoverschrijdend' again. When the relationship is identified as crossing boundaries, Nadine and Azar are able to actively queer

the categories ‘us’ and ‘them’. This was experienced as uncomfortable by Nadine’s family members, especially during election time when parties like the PVV emphasized the importance of nationalism and the fear of Islam. Due to this, more demands were made towards Nadine to return to the correct line. This shows that the status of the relationship as ‘grensoverschrijdend’ is influenced by external factors which can create the opportunity for the couples to actively queer the binary created between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

Boyfriend versus Stereotype

Most of the families and friends of the couples eventually accepted the relationship. However, the couples indicated that this did not mean that their families and friends did not believe in the stereotypes concerning Muslims anymore. Four of the women indicated that they thought that their families or friends had not changed their ideas about Islam, North Africa and the Middle East because of the positive experiences they had with their Muslim partner. This was the case with Eline’s mother, who had feared the Middle East and Islam from the moment Eline started to study *Middle Eastern Studies* at the Leiden University. She had often said that she loved Hakeem and thought that the relationship of Eline and Hakeem was great. However, at times, Eline thought that, although her mother had positive experiences with Hakeem, she still had difficulty in adjusting her image of a scary Middle Eastern Muslim man.

> Eline: “For my birthday my mother gave me a coat, which was a fitted model. (…). Later she called me and asked if I was still happy with the coat. I said of course. She said that she realized later that because the coat was fitted all my curves would be visible and she was afraid that Hakeem would not approve of this. I responded by saying that she knows that I still wear fitted clothing and short skirts since I have been in a relationship with Hakeem. Somehow she is not able to combine these two stories.

> She has a specific image of a Middle Eastern man as someone who makes his wife obey. She cannot see that we are very different and adjust her image accordingly." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (25 April 2013).

Marieke also explained that she did not think that her parents had adjusted their image of Muslims and Moroccans. Marieke did not think that her parents had really accepted Jamal as her partner but that they wanted to 'keep the peace'. Because of this attitude, she did not expect her parents to have positively adjusted their image of Muslims or Moroccans. However, this was not really discussed in the family and Marieke indicated that this was her interpretation of their attitudes.

The other two couples, Nadine and Azar, and Els and Mahmut, explained that the Dutch families and friends who disagreed with their relationships in the beginning, were eventually able to accept their relationships because they saw the Muslim partner as 'an exception'. As was already discussed earlier, the grandparents and brother-in-law of Nadine often said that Azar was 'not a real Muslim'. Azar explained that although he would confront these family members, they still saw him as different from a 'real Muslim'. The image they had of Muslims, which is a negative image they got from TV-shows such as "Hart van Nederland"[53], did not change. "They do not even know any Muslims besides me, that is the stupid thing, but they hold on to this fictional image they have." [translated from Dutch by A.R] (3 April 2013).

What can be seen here is that the Muslim partner could only be accepted by the family and friends of the Dutch woman if they disconnected him from the existing stereotypical image of

[53] A Dutch news show which focuses on local news and the opinions of 'real Dutch people'.

Muslims. In this way, the Muslim partner was not part anymore of the opposition that has been created between 'us' and 'them' because he was not linked to 'them'. When the partner is categorized as 'us', the relationship is not deemed as problematic because it is not experienced as 'grensoverschrijdend' anymore. Because of this, the existing stereotypical image of Muslims was not influenced by the positive experiences with the Muslim partner. However, as could be seen with Eline's example and the earlier described experiences of Nadine and Azar, this disconnection is not stable. Although it is said that the partner is accepted, the stereotypical notion of an overpowering Muslim man does resurface after a while and is again connected to the Muslim partner. When the stereotypical image and the Muslim partner are again brought together by the family or friends, the relationship was experienced again as boundary-crossing and as queering the categories 'us' and 'them'.

The other couple, Els and Mahmut, explained during the interview that Mahmut was seen as an exception by Els' family and friends. Els herself also saw Mahmut as an exception and indicated that he was part of 'us'. In this way, she did not consider her relationship 'mixed' and did not queer the existing categories and boundaries. During the interview, Els explained that while her family and friends did not have a negative image anymore of Mahmut, they did still think negatively about Muslims in general. This had not changed because of their experiences with Mahmut. Els herself also had a negative image of Turkish Muslims in the Netherlands, which became clear when she opposed Mahmut to the 'local' Turkish Muslims in the Netherlands. She saw Mahmut as an exception because he was not 'a real Muslim'. In this way, she opposed 'us', of which Mahmut is a member, and 'them' and prevented her relationship from queering these categories. Interestingly, Mahmut explained during the interview that he did think the image Els' mother had of Turkish people had positively changed because of her experience with him:

> "When her mother talks about the Turkish people in L. and is frustrated, I can tell that she does not want to say 'all Turkish people'. She stops herself and says 'those people'. She does this because she realized that not all Turkish people are the same. I am a real Turkish person, born and raised in Turkey, and I am not like that."
> Me: "Her image of Turkish people has been positively influenced by you?"
> Mahmut: "Yes, very positively!" [translated from Dutch by A.R] (7 May 2013).

This section indicated that the majority of the families and friends of the women who initially had a negative attitude towards the relationship, eventually did accept it. The strategies used were successful because the Muslim partner was accepted in most cases. However, the Muslim partner could only be accepted by disconnecting him from stereotypical notions concerning Islam, the Middle East and North Africa. These stereotypical notions of the majority of the families and friends did not change. Because the Muslim partner was seen as an exception or disconnected from 'them', the relationship was not deemed 'grensoverschrijdend' and thus not problematic anymore. By minimizing the 'mixedness' of the relationship, the uncomfortable feelings of the family and friends were taken away and the lines that the couples queered were straightened again. This shows that while most of the couples are identified as 'grensoverschrijdend', which makes it possible for them to actively queer the existing categories and boundaries in the Dutch society that separate 'us Dutch' from 'them Muslims', this choice to actively queer the categories is often not made. The opposite can be seen, since most couples actively tried *not* to queer the binary between 'us' and 'them' by minimizing the 'mixedness' of the relationship. Because of this, the couples make it possible for the families and friends to straighten the lines again and in this way keep the categories and boundaries intact.

Conclusion

The couples used various responses to deal with the negative attitudes towards their relationship from the white Dutch families of the women. The most important responses were non-confrontational. By simply being there the couples let the family and friends get used to their relationship. This was also the most successful response. Almost all couples indicated that their relationships were eventually accepted by their friends and families. It was expressed by most couples that they thought that this acceptance was possible because the families and friends of the women started to see the Muslim partners as persons, and not as a stereotype.

One of the strategies that was used to positively influence this was the minimization of 'mixedness'. The couples behaved as 'normal' as possible by minimizing the side of the partner that was deemed problematic, namely his religious beliefs and cultural background. This minimizing of 'mixedness' was different for the men and the women in the 'mixed' relationship. The men expressed that they tried to behave as 'Dutch' as possible, which meant not attracting any attention to their Islamic and North African or Middle Eastern background. For the women, as was explained by Marieke, this meant that they tried to counter the image of the overpowering Muslim man by behaving as 'independent' as possible. This meant that they did not want to let their families and friends see that their Muslim partner had influenced their life and the choices they had made.

The families and friends of the women also minimized the 'mixedness' of the relationship. They often categorized the Muslim partner as 'the exception' and in some cases as 'not a real Muslim'. This made it possible for these family members or friends to disconnect the Muslim partner from the problematic 'them'. Due to this, they could categorize the 'mixed'

relationship as (more) ‘normal’, and thus not as problematic anymore. This also meant in the majority of the cases that the negative stereotypes concerning Islam, the Middle East and North Africa remained intact. What can be said is that while all the couples were experienced as ‘grensoverschrijdend’ by the people around them, which entailed that they had the ability to queer the categories used, the majority of the couples did not *actively* try to queer the opposition between ‘us’ and ‘them’. They were actively trying *not* to queer this binary by minimizing their ‘mixedness’. They wanted to be experienced by the people around them as ‘normal’, which made it possible for their family members and friends to straighten the lines that were queered by their presence.

Concluding, it was shown that there is a difference between being experienced *as* ‘grensoverschrijdend’, which makes it possible for a couple to queer the categories used, and *actively* queering the existing categories that oppose ‘us’ and ‘them’. By analysing the experiences of the couples it was shown that the first is necessary to achieve the second. When you want to be accepted as being different, and thus challenge and change the categories used, you need to be recognized as different. The couples were all experienced as ‘grensoverschrijdend’ at some point. However, the majority of the couples wanted to be seen as ‘normal’ and due to this, minimized their ‘mixedness’. This made it possible for the lines to be straightened again by the couples themselves. The families and friends also straightened the lines by categorising the Muslim partner as ‘Dutch enough’ to be part of ‘us’ and by disconnecting him from the category ‘them’ and from the associated stereotypes. In the end, all the couples indicated that their relationships were experienced as ‘normal’ enough to be accepted.

Conclusion

In this thesis, it was investigated how ‘mixed’ couples experienced the boundaries created in Dutch society between the ‘Dutch’ and ‘Muslims’ and how they deal with these boundaries and their own boundary-breaking position. Special attention was given to the sub question whether the couples actively *queered* the boundaries separating ‘us’ and ‘them’. In this research, the categories ‘Dutch’ and ‘Muslim’ are used to locate the experiences of the couples. By critically discussing the development of these categories in the first chapter, explaining the theoretical framework behind them in the second chapter and by shedding light on the experiences of the couples which break the boundaries separating ‘Dutch’ from ‘Muslim’, I wanted to show these categories to be artificial and unstable. By showing this, room may be created for a society in which these boundaries are no longer in place.

The debate discussed

The relationship between the Muslim migrant population and the native Dutch has become tense in the last two decades. Politicians and intellectuals began pointing out the cultural differences between the migrants and the native Dutch and how migrants should change to successfully become part of Dutch society. One of the most important points that was used to indicate how Islam and the Dutch culture are opposed is the constructed image of the oppressed Muslim woman. Female genital mutilation, honour killings and forced marriages are examples that are used to prove that Islam and male Muslims are bad for women. In the resulting debate, two opposing groups have been created: ‘us’ (Dutch) versus ‘them’ (Muslims). Islam became the marker that determined membership of ‘us’ or ‘them’ and was used to identify the proper line to follow in Dutch society. These proper lines can only be kept in place through reproduction of ‘Dutchness’ and the correct orientations connected to this ‘Dutchness’.

The theory used

The reproduction of these orientations is mainly done through correct relationships and the upbringing of children. The existing boundaries created between ‘us Dutch’ and ‘them Muslims’ did not prevent people from crossing these boundaries and falling in love. The relationships between Dutch white women and Muslim men were deemed to be especially problematic within Dutch society. By using the theory of Sara Ahmed concerning orientations and queering in combination with the works of Marleen Kamminga, Dienke Hondius and Joan Nagel, it became visible that this negative attitude towards these ‘mixed’ relationships is highly racialised and gendered in an intersectional manner. These attitudes were analysed in this manner.

Within relationships, the main role of Dutch white women as ‘mothers of the nation’ is the reproduction of the correct line through the proper raising of Dutch white children. This indicates that to ensure the reproduction of ‘Dutchness’, white Dutch women have to be attracted to white Dutch men and raise their white Dutch children according to white Dutch norms and values. By falling in love with a non-white Muslim man and marrying ‘outside of their race’, this reproduction of white ‘Dutchness’ is endangered. This reproduction is seen as endangered because men have historically always been seen as having more power within the family and within society when compared to their wives. Within the relationship, it is expected that a man has more power than a woman when it comes to determining the dominant culture and religion within the family. The women may be responsible for the upbringing of the children, the Muslim men have a larger influence on the norms and values taught. When it concerns the ‘mixed’ relationships described here, the men are expected to have even more power over the women due to the stereotypical image that has been created of

overpowering Muslim men and their naïve and powerless Dutch wives. This indicates that it is feared that the overpowering Muslim man not only forces his culture and religion upon his wife, but that his culture and religion will also be forced upon their children. These children will then become Muslims instead of proper Dutch citizens, which indicates a failed reproduction of the correct orientations. The man is also expected to have more power within society when compared to his wife. The social (and previously legal) status of a family is determined by the position of the man. If a Dutch woman marries a non-Dutch man who is part of the 'out-group', she herself becomes part of this 'out-group' and loses her position in the 'in-group'. This is opposed to Dutch men who are in a relationship with a non-Dutch woman. These men not only keep their position within the 'in-group', their partners' position changes from 'out' to 'in' due to their relationship.

These white Dutch women change from 'unmarked' to 'marked' because of this negative attitude towards their border crossing relationships. They are seen as 'grensoverschrijders' (border crossers) and they are demanded to return to the correct, Dutch line. Their behaviour is not only seen as 'not normal', it is also unacceptable. Due to this status as 'grensoverschijders', these women have the ability, together with their partners, to challenge the existing borders separating 'us' from 'them'. By combining the concept of 'grensoverschijders' with the theory of Ahmed, I could show that due to the presence of the 'mixed' heterosexual couples, things are no longer in line: they are *queered.* The term queer is historically used to indicate sexual orientation and is mostly used to indicate individuals who do not identify or who are not seen as heterosexual, and who want to challenge heteronormativity and the gender binary male-female. However, in this thesis I used the term to indicate the effect that heterosexual 'mixed' relationships can have on the categories 'us' and 'them'. Their desires and love is not in accordance with the lines in Dutch society.

Because of this, their relationship can be identified as queer: as not ‘normal’ or straight (in a spatial manner). Because of their presence, the boundaries that separate ‘us’ from ‘them’ are challenged and it is shown that these boundaries and categories are artificial and unstable.

The methodology used

In this thesis, I wanted to show how the couples experienced the boundaries within Dutch society and how they have been dealing with this. The experiences of six ‘mixed’ couples with these boundaries and their boundary-breaking positions were collected through semi-structured interviews. I used in-depth interviews because by using this method of data collection, light can be shed on experiences that are often hidden. During the process of data collection and data analysis that followed, a methodology has been used that was developed from and inspired by feminist methodology. By focusing on experiences, the opportunity was created to hear the voices of people who are often not heard. Exclusionary processes, discrimination and the workings of prejudice in Dutch society has become visible by giving a voice to the ‘mixed’ couples in this thesis. Secondly, the power of these couples also became visible in their dealing with these structures at work.

The six couples selected in this research project were chosen because they are in a ‘mixed’ relationship. I selected couples in which a Dutch, non-Muslim woman was in a relationship with a Muslim man. This choice was made because former research projects showed that these relationships were deemed specifically problematic from the perspective of the Dutch white majority. The literature and interviews indicated that the boundary-crossing behaviour of women is experienced as more problematic than boundary-crossing behaviour of men because it endangers the reproduction of the correct societal lines. I termed these relationships ‘mixed’. This categorization was based on former research projects that focused on ‘mixed’

relationships in the Netherlands and on my own experiences in a 'mixed' relationship. The categorization of a relationship as 'mixed' and the way the couples dealt with this position is complex, personal and subject to change, as became clear during the analysis of the interviews.

The outcomes of the interviews

The six couples indicated during the interviews that they indeed experienced boundaries in Dutch society separating 'us' from 'them'. Their relationship was experienced by people around them as 'mixed', and thus as not 'normal'. Because they were categorized as 'mixed', the couples experienced that the categories 'us' and 'them' were used to identify them as 'different' and thus their relationship as boundary-crossing.

The couples were considered to be 'mixed' according to multiple axes of difference. Besides the often named axes of difference in religion and ethnicity, the couples were also categorized as 'mixed' because of their differences in education, nationality and age. How these different axes of difference interact, or more correctly intra-act, is difficult to say due to the small number of interviews executed. However, it became clear with Dorine and Kaleb that they thought that the fact that Kaleb is a black man strongly influenced their status as 'mixed'. This was not experienced in this way by the other couples in which the Muslim partner's complexion was more quickly identified as 'Oriental' due to their lighter skin colour when compared to Kaleb's darker complexion.[54] The interviewees indicated that two other factors could also have influenced their status as 'mixed'. These were the level of education of the people around the couples (people with a higher education are expected to have a less negative attitude towards the couples) and the location of the couples (small countryside

[54] This linking of a specific skin colour to a region in the world is highly problematic and is based on false assumptions, as is the use of terms such as 'race'. However, invented or not, this still affects bodies and what they can do and its influence should be acknowledged.

towns and Muslim neighbourhoods in large cities were identified as locations in which less acceptance was expected). Research on a larger scale would be necessary to provide insight into the influences of these factors on the experiences of 'mixed' couples and the attitude of people towards 'mixed' couples in the Netherlands.

The couples experienced angry responses to their relationship and demands to return to the right line. The negative attitude towards the relationship was especially experienced as coming from the Dutch, white people around the couple. The families and friends of the female Dutch partner were far more critical towards the relationship than the families and friends of the male Muslim partner. This negative attitude is clearly gendered and racialised in an intersectional manner. The responses were often based on stereotypical notions of Islam, the Middle East or North Africa and, intra-acting with this, on stereotypical images of the power differences between (Muslim) men and (Dutch) women. It was feared that the women would be 'lost', through conversion to Islam, by moving to the country the partner was from (voluntarily or not) and by losing their connection to the Dutch culture. This shows in which way the images of the overpowering Muslim man and the powerless naïve Dutch woman were used.

The relationship endangered the execution of the women's responsibility, namely the reproduction of the proper Dutch lines. The relationship of the couple is not in agreement with the expected behaviour and the correct lines that are to be followed. The analysis of these attitudes showed that not only race and religion were important but that gender was also important when analysing and discussing the negative attitudes towards the 'mixed' relationships of Dutch white women and Muslim non-white men. These factors, race, religion and gender, are interconnected in an intersectional manner and were analysed in this way.

The most important strategies that the couples used to deal with these negative attitudes were non-confrontational. Giving the families and friends time to get to know the new Muslim partner was the most important strategy used. By being present at birthdays and holidays, the couples wanted to show their families and friends that their partner was a person and not a stereotype. During these birthdays and holidays, the couples wanted to act as 'normal' as possible. This was achieved by minimizing their 'mixedness'. By downplaying the factors of their relationship that were seen as problematic, namely the cultural background and religious beliefs of the male partner, the couples tried to make their presence as comfortable as possible for the people around them and for themselves. Most of the couples indicated that this made it possible for their families and friends to disconnect the stereotypical image of 'them' from the image they had of the Muslim partner and the 'mixed' relationship. The families often indicated that the Muslim partner was 'the exception' and 'not a real Muslim'. Due to this, they could categorize the 'mixed' relationship as (more) 'normal', and thus not as problematic anymore. However, this also meant in the majority of the cases that the negative stereotypes concerning Islam, the Middle East and North Africa remained intact.

Queering?

The goal of this thesis was to investigate whether 'mixed' couples experienced boundaries in Dutch society and how they dealt with these boundaries. Special attention was paid to the question if these couples could queer the binary created between 'us' and 'them'. It became clear during the interviews that the couples indeed experienced boundaries in Dutch society. However, if the couples were queering these boundaries turned out to be a more complex question. I realized that there is a difference between being identified as 'mixed' and

‘grensoverschrijded’ and actively queering the boundaries and that these two acts are inherently connected.

All the couples were experienced, at times, by people around them as ‘grensoverschrijdend’. Their relationships were seen as ‘mixed’ and as boundary-crossing. Since they were ‘grensoverschrijders’, their existence showed that the boundary separating the two groups ‘Dutch’ from ‘Islam’ are artificial and unstable. Because the partners followed their queer desires and are in a ‘mixed’ relationship, they have the ability to question the categories used in Dutch society and to make the familiar feel strange. This strangeness is uncomfortable for people around the couple who value the categories ‘us’ and ‘them’ and the boundaries separating them. Because this is uncomfortable, the couples received negative responses to their relationships. People became angry with them or made ‘funny jokes’ and comments which indicated that their relationships were not accepted. When the Dutch women, who were most often demanded by their families to return to the correct line, decided to stay in this ‘mixed’ relationship, the families and friends tried a different strategy to deal with this unacceptable relationship: they straightened the lines and made the relationship itself acceptable. This was done most often through categorising the Muslim partner as part of ‘us’. He was seen as ‘not a real Muslim’ and as ‘Dutch enough’ to be Dutch. Due to this categorisation, the relationship is not seen as ‘mixed’ anymore and does not challenge the boundaries separating ‘us’ from ‘them’. This indicates that even if a ‘mixed’ couple wants to *actively* queer the categories ‘us’ and ‘them’, they can only do this if they are identified *as* ‘mixed’ and ‘not normal’ by the people who value these categories. Without being identified as ‘grensoverschrijdend’, the borders that are being crossed cannot be challenged anymore. Becoming part of what is deemed to be ‘normal’, as opposed to ‘not-normal’, does not challenge the binary created between ‘normal’ and ‘not-normal’. To become truly accepted as

an exception, which entails changing the use of excluding categories, you first have to be identified as an exception. By classifying the ‘mixed’ couples as ‘normal’, they could no longer queer the categories separating ‘us’ from ‘them’.

However, it turned out that the majority of the couples did not want to *actively* queer the binary created between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The negative responses to the relationship also made it uncomfortable for the couples to be regarded as ‘grensoverschrijders’ and to be experienced as queering the binary created between ‘us’ and ‘them’ by people around them. Due to this, they tried to straighten the lines they queered. The majority of the couples wanted to be regarded as ‘normal’ and to avoid conflict. They actively tried *not* to queer the binary created between ‘us’ and ‘them’ by minimizing their ‘mixedness’. By downplaying the cultural background and religious beliefs of the Muslim partner, the relationship of the couples was not as bluntly and openly queering the binary created between ‘us’ and ‘them’. Because of this, it became easier for the families and friends to categorize the relationship as ‘normal’ and experience the presence of the couple as comfortable.

Because the couples did not try to *actively* queer the binary created between ‘us’ and ‘them’, it seems that no permanent queering took place in the environment of the interviewed couples. However, the temporary queering of the categories by being identified as ‘grensoverschrijdend’ does create room to question the binary created between ‘us’ and ‘them’. By simply being present in the public space, the couples are an example of the artificial character of this binary and the possibility of moving through and beyond it.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide

- Age
- Nationality
- Profession
- Marital status
- Education
- Place of birth
- Nationality parents and place of birth
- Religion

- First meeting
    - How did you first meet?
    - Where?
    - How did your relationship develop?

- First responses environment
    - How did the people in your environment respond?
        - Did they consider the difference in religion as problematic?
    - How did you experience this?
    - How did you respond?
    - Did the responses influence your relationship?

- Development responses

- Did the responses change over time?
- Did your strategies in dealing with the responses change over time?
- Did the responses influence the relationships you had with the people in your environment?
- Did you use certain strategies to positively influence the attitude towards your relationship?

- Identification as couple
  - How do you identify as a couple?
    - As mixed?
    - Did this change over time?
  - How do you think the people around you identify you?
    - Does this coincide with your own identification?
    - Were you comfortable with this identification?
    - Did this change over time?
    - How did you deal with this?

- Boundaries in Dutch society
  - Did you experience boundaries in Dutch society, separating Dutch people from Muslim people?
  - In which way did you experience this?
  - Who indicated this boundary?
  - Have you identified your relationship as boundary-crossing?
  - Did other do this?
  - Did this change over time?

- Position within own family/group of friends/community
    - Have you experienced that your position within your family/group of friends/community changed because of your relationship?
    - In which way?
    - How did you deal with this?
    - Did this change over time?

Appendix 2

Coding scheme

Name
Acceptance grew {20-0}
Age {16-0}
Border crossers {3-0}
Borders in Dutch society {59-0}
Borders in other countries {6-0}
Boyfriend exception - Muslim same {17-0}
Change position due to relationship {36-0}
Changes in acceptance by family {21-0}
Changes in relationship status as mixed {4-0}
Education {27-0}
First met + dealing difference {3-0}
He is one of 'us' - exception - accepted {18-0}
Image boyfriend {12-0}
Image Dutch woman {16-0}
Important: location! {2-0}
Marital status {7-0}
Mixed {33-0}
Nationality {6-0}
Not wanting to be different {11-0}
Occupation {13-0}
Parents position towards Islamic wedding {10-0}
Personal experience as example {7-0}
Place of birth {13-0}
Place of birth parents {13-0}
Prior relationships {10-0}
Religion {30-0}
Response family to relationship {42-0}

- Response friends to relationship {24-0}
- Response parents to relationship {68-0}
- Response strangers/far away to relationship {33-0}
- Response to 'you are one of us' {3-0}
- Response to lack of acceptance family {23-0}
- Response to lack of acceptance strangers {11-0}
- She becomes 'Them' {2-0}
- Stereotypes Islam - Middle East - North Africa {36-0}
- Strategy to improve acceptance now or in future {10-0}
- Strategy to lack of acceptance in beginning {14-0}
- Time together {6-0}
- Us - Them {27-0}
- View Islam - Middle East - North Africa unchanged {8-0}
- View Muslims changed because of boyfriend {1-0}
- View of relationship by others {7-0}
- Why accepted {14-0}
- Why lack of acceptance {21-0}
- Why not responding to lack of acceptance {2-0}

{#-} = number of times the code has been used in the interviews
{-#} = number of times the code has been used as a family